



# *Luther's Hymn Melodies*

*Style and form for a Royal Priesthood*

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**Ein Christenlichs Lied Doctoris**  
Martini Luthers



Jesaja den Propheten das geschah.



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## Preface

This study began in 1983 as an illustrated lecture for the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth and was presented four times (in Bronxville and Yonkers, New York and in Northhampton and Springfield, Massachusetts). In 1987 further research was done on the question of tune authorship and musical style; the material was revised several times in the years that followed. As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation approached, it was brought into its present form.

An unexpected insight came from examining the tunes associated with the Luther's hymn texts: Luther employed several types (styles) of melody. Viewed from later centuries it is easy to lump all his hymn tunes in one category and label them "medieval" hymns. Over the centuries scholars have studied many questions about each melody, especially its origin: did it derive from an existing Gregorian melody or from a preexisting hymn tune or folk song? In studying Luther's tunes it became clear that he chose melody structures and styles associated with different music-making occasions and groups in society. Apparently, he did not find tunes in a tavern, as some have asserted, but he searched primarily where there had been melodies with religious texts. He wanted well-crafted melodies that would serve the word of Christ and prayer and praise of him.

A second, small discovery was "stylistic analysis," which helps establish whether a tune might have come from Luther's pen. Recall that if a hymn was to be made available for singing, a poet needed to have a tune for the text. He could employ an existing tune or, if able, he could create a new one. In an era when copyright didn't exist to identify and protect an author's rights, research has to look for a draft in the author's own hand, find a clear statement by the author, or have some testimony by one of his coworkers. Are there perhaps other ways to establish authorship? When melodic phrases in two melodies reveal "strongly similar patterns," it can be said that they are stylistically similar and that they could be by the same person. This kind of internal musical evidence can help confirm who wrote a tune.

This study of Luther's musical choices builds on the work of many others. In addition to the material found in English language resources it has gathered information and insight from select German sources. Often this material is not readily available or is closed to those who lack proficiency in the language. The goal is to reflect on Luther's musical choices and what they reveal about possible musical models in his society. To do this one must discuss the materials of music. That's no different than reflecting on creative choices in houses, cars or paintings. It requires a few technical terms and a focus on options. Some

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readers may find this too technical; those with training in music may wish for more than the basic features mentioned here.

As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation is celebrated and Luther's work is remembered once again may this small study help foster deeper appreciation for what he did with hymns to promote faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Exploring his tunes might provide helpful insights for creating Christian songs for new times and places.

## Luther and Hymnody



Though Luther's influence on Western Christianity is well known, it is sometimes forgotten that it extends also to hymnody. As a reformer he wrote, translated, and edited hymn-texts to meet the new needs of vernacular congregational singing, which he ardently encouraged.

Indeed, Luther helped define the theological and literary qualities of evangelical hymnody for subsequent generations. His hymns have remained in Lutheran hymn-collections and have stood as models for later generations. While his texts are often recognized as significant, his work as a composer (or arranger or editor) of hymn tunes can easily be overlooked. Could his musical decisions give clues to solving current questions about musical style(s) for hymns?

Luther was in search of texts and tunes that would serve a special class of people who had particular duties before God. The songs were to be sung by the "royal priesthood," a group established by the Lord. For Luther, all Christians are priests, born of the Holy Spirit in Baptism.

Their prayers are the "burning incense" that rises to heaven (Phil. 4:6). No human appoints or ordains these priests. Those who preach, teach and administer the sacraments are more properly called "ministers" (1 Cor. 4:1), or pastors, or shepherds (1 Peter 5:2) than called priests.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament describes those who believe in Jesus as "living stones," a "spiritual house," "a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

They are "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession;" they are to proclaim "the excellencies" of the one who called them "out of darkness into his marvelous light." By the mercy of God they are made priests to serve him in faith that trusts only in him and good works that glorify their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9-12). With the right melodies their prayers, praise, and telling of God's word can take the form of song. The word of Christ dwells in them, teaching and admonishing one another with thankfulness in their hearts to God —"singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). So Luther encouraged

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Christian people to create songs for the royal priesthood and he led the way with his own efforts at finding good texts and good tunes for them.

This study seeks to explore his musical choices. Understanding Luther's work as a creative musician will expand our recognition of the breadth and depth of his influence. The best evidence shows that he invented only a few hymn-tunes and wrote one short motet. The first section will provide a survey of his hymn texts and tunes and review his experience and training in music. The second section will examine individual melodies and evaluate his contribution as a composer/editor.

## Luther's Compositions



It is important to realize that two-thirds of Luther's hymns were prepared in a burst of activity following his return to Wittenberg from the safety of his Wartburg hideaway after the Diet at Worms (1521). Because the Emperor's edict declared Luther to be a convicted heretic, he was kept in a safe place for a more than a year. In early 1523 Luther's concern about the radicalism of others in revising worship led him to forsake his protected existence in the Wartburg castle and to return home and show his beloved Wittenbergers what the right path might be. The singing of hymns in the vernacular was an important part of his revising of worship.

His own hymns, not surprisingly, built on tradition and demonstrated how to use music in "the service of the Gospel." He translated some Latin hymns (see TABLE 1: Nos. 7, 8, 13, and 17); he edited some German hymns and supplied new stanzas for them (TABLE 1: Nos. 9, 14, 18, 21, and 22).<sup>2</sup> This adapting extended also to the music. It was necessary to have a melody for the hymn. A poet could borrow a tune as is, adapt an existing melody, or create a new melody. "Finding a tune" then included tune selection, tune creation, tune editing, tune adaptation – whatever was needed. Preparing the text and the tune could be a single creative task, if one had the skills. The focus, no doubt, was more on the craft of finding musical solutions than on inspiration and genius.

TABLE 1 presents a list of the hymns attributed to Luther. It is an overview of his work and identifies those hymns for which he prepared a melody. Admittedly, it is difficult to know exactly how many tunes might be his musical handiwork. In the early Lutheran hymn collections the matter of who "composed" the tune was not handled like it is now; *copyright* did not come into existence until the early eighteenth century to help identify and protect authorship. Before that there was less necessity for publications to identify the origin of a tune so it is much more difficult to sort out musical authorship in the sixteenth century than it is today.

In the 1500s the poet and the composer were often the same person. Because it was somewhat common for one person to invent both text and tune, contemporaries of Luther may have felt it unnecessary to comment on Luther's compositional work

when referring to his hymn writing. This dual task was typical for an author who had skills.

That is why a great number of the melodies associated with his texts can be considered Luther's work (see notations in TABLE 1). Sometimes it is clear that he arranged or edited it from a pre-existing melody. Sometimes a new text shows up with a melody that is new. Indeed, one manuscript from Luther has a melody alongside his own text but the tune is crossed out, presumably because it did not please him.<sup>3</sup> It is primary evidence that he wanted to and could construct a melody. If he created a possible melody for this text, why should we not believe he would create or arrange melodies for other texts?

Over time perhaps too many melodies were credited to Luther and this led some to question his authorship of any tune. Whereas seventeenth century writers generously credited Luther with as many as a hundred tunes, eighteenth century writers tended to refute Luther's authorship. It is not surprising then that a few nineteenth century scholars, asserting that the claims for Luther's tune writing were unfounded, tried to discredit the Luther attributions.<sup>4</sup> For example, in 1880 Wilhelm Bäumker tried to show that Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" was a mere patching together of musical phrases from several Gregorian chants.<sup>5</sup> Such attacks on Luther's authorship led to twentieth century studies by Hans Joachim Moser and others who established that some tunes were, indeed, Luther's own work.<sup>6</sup> This latter viewpoint is reflected in modern hymnals and publications about hymnody. Obviously, differences of opinion will continue about which items are actually Luther's musical work.

**TABLE 1** shows that as many as twenty-five of Luther's hymns may result from his musical workmanship. Based on this summary, these melodies are grouped into five categories in TABLE 2, from positive-authorship to perhaps some editing. Because opinions can differ about where each melody might fit within these categories, the placement of a melody in TABLE 2 is offered as one way of interpreting history's slim evidence. This evidence for crediting Luther with "compositional work" can be divided into three types: clear attributions, comments of others about his musical authorship, and internal musical evidence.

Fortunately, there is some testimony from several of Luther's associates about his composing. Paul Eber, a pastor in Wittenberg where Luther worked, wrote that Luther

created both text and tune for many of his hymns. Likewise, Panenberg, a student who was at the Luther house from 1542-46, reported that if there was no previous tune for his hymn text, Luther usually invented a tune for it.<sup>7</sup> Sleidanus, writing nearly ten years after the great reformer's death, states that Luther wrote the text and melody for "A Mighty Fortress."<sup>8</sup> In the early seventeenth century, Michael Praetorius quoted from a 1566 document in which Johann Walter, a musician who had worked with Luther, gave witness that Luther created tunes for several of his hymn texts.<sup>9</sup> Walter identifies specifically the German *Sanctus* (see TABLE 1, No. 25), which Luther included in his *German Mass and Order of Service* (1526), as one such tune. Thus, Luther's composition of at least two tunes is clearly corroborated by those who knew him personally and his work methods.

We may add to this evidence yet, another way of examining these melodies, "style analysis." It is a comparative study of details in form, rhythm, and pitch choice in various melodies. This is somewhat speculative and lends support where attribution has already designated the composer. From the viewpoint of style analysis Rudolf Gerber<sup>10</sup> has demonstrated that two melodies (*Vater unser* and *Jesaia, dem Propheten*) are stylistically very close to three others (*Ein neues Lied, Ein feste Burg*, and *Vom Himmel hoch*) which are attributed to Luther.

Among other observations, Gerber points out that these three start on a high tone then descend an octave and *Ein feste Burg* and *Vom Himmel hoch* both have a descending melodic gesture. Based on psychological and stylistic factors, Gerber assigns four more melodies (*Wär Gott nicht mit uns, Es wollt uns Gott gnädig sein, Ach Gott vom Himmel sieh darein* and *Nun freut euch*) to Luther. He suggests that two pre-existing tunes (*Mitten wir im Leben sind* and *Gott der Vater wohn uns bei*) may have been edited, that is, adapted by Luther. Significantly, this "internal" evidence from the melodies themselves agrees, by and large, with the "external" information (attributions by third parties) and thus adds evidence that it is Luther's work.

His skill apparently went beyond writing melodies. Scholars have accepted at least one motet, *Non moriar sed vivam*, as Luther's.<sup>11</sup> Though the Weimar edition of *Luther's Works* chose to include three motets, only this one motet, with more contrapuntal features than the other two, has made it into the American edition.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1** LUTHER'S HYMNS: A LIST

NO.	HYMN	COMMENT	TLH	SBH	EKG	LBW	LW	CW	EG	LSB	ELW
			1941	1958	1960	1978	1982	1994	1994	2006	2006
<b>1523</b>											
1	<i>Ein neues Lied wir heben an</i> A New Song Here Shall be Begun	ML text, tune?									
2	<i>Nun freut euch</i> Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice		387		239	299	353	377	341	556	594
3	<i>Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir</i> From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee	ML text, tune	329	372	195	295	230	305	299	607	600
4	<i>Ach Gott vom Himmel, sieh darein</i> O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold	ML text, tune	260		177			205	273		
5	<i>Es spricht der Unweisen Mund wohl</i> Although the Fools Say with Their Mouth	ML text, tune?									
6	<i>Es wolle Gott uns gnädig sein</i> May God Bestow on Us His Grace	ML text	500		182	335	288	574	280	823-4	
7	<i>Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland</i> <i>Veni, Redemptor gentium</i> Savior of the Nations, Come	ML trans, arr	95		1	28	13	2	4	332	263
8	<i>Christum wir sollen loben schon</i> <i>A solis ortus cardine</i> Jesus We Now Must Laud and Sing	ML trans, arr	104					39			
9	<i>Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ</i> We Praise You, Jesus, at Your Birth	ML+6 stanzas	80	21	15	48	35	33	23	382	
<b>1524</b>											
10	<i>Wohl dem, der in Gottes Furcht steht</i> Happy Who in God's Fear Doth Stay	ML text									
11	<i>Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit</i> If God Had Not Been on Our Side	ML text, tune?	267		192			202			
12	<i>Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin</i> In Peace and Joy I Now Depart	ML text, tune	137		310	349	185	269	519	938	440
13	<i>Jesus Christus, unser Heiland, der</i> <i>Jesus Christus, nostra salus</i> Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior	ML trans/rev	311		154		236-7	313	215	627	
14	<i>Gott sei gelobet und gebenedeiet</i> O Lord, We Praise Thee	ML+2 stanzas	313		163	215	238	317	214	617	499
15	<i>Christ lag in Todesbanden</i> Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands	ML text, arr	195	98	76	134	123	161	101	458	370
16	<i>Jesus Christus unser Heiland</i> Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior	ML text				77				627	
17	<i>Komm, Gott Schöpfer</i> <i>Veni, Creator Spiritus</i> Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest	ML trans/rev, arr	233	122	97	473	157		126	(498)*	(578)*
18	<i>Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist</i> We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost	ML+3 stanzas	231		99	317	155	190	124	768	743
19	<i>Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott</i> Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord	ML +2	224		98	163	154	176	125	497	395
20	<i>Gott der Vater wohn uns bei</i> God the Father, Be Our Stay	ML revised, arr?	247		109	308	170		138	505	

**Table 1** LUTHER'S HYMNS: A LIST (continued)

NO.	HYMN	COMMENT	TLH	SBH	EKG	LBW	LW	CW	EG	LSB	ELW
			1941	1958	1960	1978	1982	1994	1994	2006	2006
21	<i>Wir glauben all an einen Gott</i> We All Believe in One True God	ML, arr?	251		132	374	213	271	183	954	411
22	<i>Mitten wir im Leben sind</i> In the Very Midst of Life	ML rev, +2 stanzas, arr?	590		309	350	265	534	518	755	
23.	<i>Dies sind die heiligen Zehn Gebot</i> These Are the Holy Ten Commands	ML text	287		240		331	285	231	581	
24.	<i>Mensch willst du leben seliglich</i> Man, Wouldst Thou Live All Blissfully	ML text, tune?									
<b>Afer 1525</b>											
25.	<i>Jesaia, dem Propheten (1526)</i> Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old	ML text, tune!	249		135	528	214	267		960	868
26.	<i>Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (1529)</i> A Mighty Fortress is Our God	ML text, tune!	262	150	201	228-9	297-8	200-1	362	656-7	503-5
27.	<i>Verleih uns Frieden (1529)</i> Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord	ML text, arr			139	471	219	522	421	777-8	784
28.	<i>Herr Gott dich loben wir (Te deum) (1529)</i> Lord God, Thy Praise We Sing	ML trans, arr			137				191		
29.	<i>Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her (1535, 39)</i> From Heaven Above to Earth I Come	ML text, tune	85	22	15	51	37-8	38	24	358	268
30.	<i>Sie ist mir lieb, die werthe Magd (1535/45)</i> To Me She's Dear, the Worthy Maid	ML text, tune									
31.	<i>All Ehr und lob soll Gottes sein (1537)</i> Gloria in excelsis All Glory Be to God Alone	ML trans/rev text?	238				210	262		948	
32.	<i>Vater unser im Himmelreich (1539)</i> Our Father, Who from Heaven Above	ML text, arr	458		241		431	410	344	766	746-7
33.	<i>Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam (1541)</i> To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord	ML text, tune?			146	79	223	88	202	406-7	
34.	<i>Was fürchtest du Feind Herodes (1541)</i> Hostis Herodes, from <i>A solis ortus cardine</i> Herod, Why Dreadest Thou a Foe	ML trans/rev	(131)			(85)	(81)				
35.	<i>Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort (1543)</i> Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word	ML text, tune	261	155	142	230	334	203	193	655	517
36.	<i>Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schaar (1543)</i> To Shepherds as They Watched by Night	ML text	103		16		52	53	25		
37.	<i>Der du bist drei in Einigkeit (1543)</i> <i>O lux beata Trinitas</i> Thou Who Art Three in Unity	ML trans	(564)		352	(275)	(487)		470		

The hymns of Martin Luther are listed in approximate chronological order. Comments, based on attributions in these hymnals, indicate whether Luther translated a text, authored a text, or in some cases, added stanzas. "Tune" indicates that Luther created it (! = "certainly his composition," no mark = "likely his," ? = "perhaps his," arr = "arranged the tune." Each hymn has an English translation of the first line. Where a hymn has been included in nine recent Lutheran hymnals its number in that collection is supplied: TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal (1941), SBH = Service Book and Hymnal (1958), EKG = Evangelisches Kirchen-gesangbuch (1960), LBW = Lutheran Book of Worship (1978), LW = Lutheran Worship (1982), CW = Christian Worship (1994), EG = Evangelisches Gesangbuch (1994), LSB = Lutheran Service Book (2006), Evangelical Lutheran Worship (2006). A hymn number in parentheses indicates, that an English translation is based on the original Latin text, rather than on Luther's German version of it.

## Musical Training



Before we examine Luther's hymn tunes, it will be helpful to review his training and experience with music. Would his training, first as a lawyer and then as a theologian, have developed any knowledge that would be useful in musical creativity? How would he have come to know various types of music and have had personal experience in performing music?

Martin Luther was born in the northern part of the Holy Roman Empire in the Saxon town of Eisleben on the 10th of November in 1483. He was the son of Margaretha and Hans Luther, a fairly prosperous Thuringian miner. In the following year the family moved to the mining area of Mansfeld, where Hans established his own copper mining business, prospered, and was a respected citizen. At age seven, Martin attended the small Latin school in Mansfeld.<sup>13</sup> His parents hoped that Martin would become a lawyer.

At age fourteen Luther was sent to the cathedral school in Magdeburg. It was run by the "Brethren of the Common Life" who put great emphasis on a personal faith in God and a sound knowledge of the Bible. Undoubtedly, this institution provided choirboys for the cathedral's music. Here Luther would have participated in the hymnody and liturgical chants at the cathedral. In fact, Magdeburg's Archbishop, Ernst of Saxony, actively promoted both unison Gregorian chant (including Latin hymns) and part-music for the liturgy,<sup>14</sup> as would be done at other important cathedrals and churches of the time. And, if young Luther had not already become acquainted with them, he would have sung various German hymns used in the Mass and on other occasions.

The next year he attended St. George's School in Eisenach, an important Thuringian musical center (later, the birthplace of Johann Sebastian Bach). Young Martin attended church and sang with the school choir in the services at St. George's. Also, from 1498 to 1501 he sang with other Eisenach *Kurrendaner*,<sup>15</sup> student singers who went from house to house with the hope of earning a little money (not unlike street musicians in New York, Paris or Munich today). The story is told that his singing so impressed Frau Ursula Cotta that she offered him lodgings in her own house. In this way he came to live with her family and to

**Table 2** TUNES BY LUTHER

NO.	HYMN
Certainly by Luther	
25	<i>Jesaia, dem Propheten (Example 2 and 3)</i> Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old
26	<i>Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (1529)</i> A Mighty Fortress is Our God
Likely by Luther	
2	<i>Nun freut euch</i> Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice
3	<i>Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir</i> From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee
4	<i>Ach Gott vom Himmel, sieh darein</i> O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold
12	<i>Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin</i> In Peace and Joy I Now Depart
29	<i>Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her (1535, 39)</i> From Heaven Above to Earth I Come
30	<i>Sie ist mir lieb, die werthe Magd (1535/45)</i> To Me She's Dear, the Worthy Maid
Perhaps by Luther	
1	<i>Ein neues Lied wir heben an</i> A New Song Here Shall be Begun
5	<i>Es spricht der Unweisen Mund wohl</i> Although the Fools Say with Their Mouth
11	<i>Wär Gott nicht mit uns diese Zeit</i> If God Had Not Been on Our Side
24	<i>Mensch willst du leben seliglich</i> Man, Wouldst Thou Live All Blissfully
33	<i>Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam (1541)</i> To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord
35	<i>Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort (1543)</i> Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word
36	<i>Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schaar (1543)</i> To Shepherds as They Watched by Night
Arranged (e.g., adapted, edited) by Luther	
7	<i>Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland Veni, Redemptor gentium</i> Savior of the Nations, Come
8	<i>Christum wir sollen loben schon A solis ortus cardine</i> Jesus We Now Must Laud and Sing
17	<i>Komm, Gott Schöpfer Veni, Creator Spiritus</i> Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest
27	<i>Verleih uns Frieden (1529)</i> Grant Peace, We Pray, in Mercy, Lord
28	<i>Herr Gott dich loben wir (Te deum) (1529)</i> Lord God, Thy Praise We Sing
32	<i>Vater unser im Himmelreich (1539)</i> Our Father, Who from Heaven Above
Perhaps Arranged by Luther	
9	<i>Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ</i> We Praise You, Jesus, at Your Birth
20	<i>Gott der Vater wohn uns bei</i> God the Father, Be Our Stay
21	<i>Wir glauben all an einen Gott</i> We All Believe in One True God
22	<i>Mitten wir im Leben sind</i> In the Very Midst of Life

escort Frau Cotta's little nephew to and from school. In Eisenach Luther's love of music was nurtured and developed as he sang in a church choir and with the *Kurrendeknaben*.

In 1501, at age seventeen, Martin Luther entered the university in Erfurt. At the center of this town stood two important churches, St. Mary's and St. Severi. The cathedral, St. Mary's, was an impressive structure with a large chancel and elaborately carved choir stalls. At the university Luther studied the usual liberal arts. For his bachelor's degree, received in 1502, the curriculum required mastery of the *Trivium*: Latin literature (grammar), logic (dialectic), and rhetoric (the study of prose and verse). At the master's level the curriculum was made up of the *Quadrivium*: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.<sup>16</sup>

It is likely that the university at Erfurt still used a curriculum outline from 1412 with lectures on the writings of the music theorists Jean de Muris (c.1290-c1350), whose *Ars novae musice* argued for consistent rules in matters of rhythmic subdivision of notes,<sup>17</sup> and the more contemporary writings of Johannes Tinctoris (d. 1511) on technical practices and procedures.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, university study of music focused, not on performance itself (as in a conservatory or academy of music), but on interval, scales, harmony, rhythm and the proper rhythmic interpretation of the various neumes (groupings of note-heads). Harmonic aspects included melodic composition and rules for counterpoint.<sup>19</sup> The curriculum on music was thought of as a study of the mathematical arts.

Luther's experience also included music-making. He participated in school choirs and as a monk would have sung daily liturgies. We know that for relaxation he played the lute, a popular instrument of the educated class. Like the modern guitar it is a plucked instrument with a body that is not flat but is shaped like a half a melon. Lute performers of his time played two or more voices at once in order to imitate vocal polyphony. One may assume that Luther also became acquainted with the Meistersinger tradition where a single poet-composer "improvised" a song according to prescribed rules. From this we can assume Luther would have been able to sing and accompany himself on the lute in a typical secular song of his day. And, furthermore, we can surmise that he was able to transcribe polyphonic vocal compositions for the lute.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after he had earned his Master's degree in 1505, Luther entered the monastery of the Augustinian friars at Erfurt. This decision came one day when he was nearly struck by lightning and Luther vowed, if his life was spared, to enter a monastery. Thus, in Erfurt's Augustinian cloister, not far from the cathedral, Luther came to live the religious life, spending long hours in prayer each day. The discipline of prayer and praise within the monastery required that the monks sing through the Psalter regularly. In his theological training Luther would have become acquainted with musical viewpoints of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Durandus the Elder, and Gabriel Biel.<sup>21</sup> When he had completed his studies in 1507, he was ordained a priest.

In 1509 Luther moved to the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg. Though in 1510, he went back to Erfurt for a while and to Rome to deal with business arising from a dispute within his monastic order. Though his impressions of "holy Rome" were disappointing, we can assume that during his travels he experienced music at churches and monasteries along the way. In places with well-appointed musical establishments this exposure may have included sacred works of contemporary masters like Josquin Desprez and Ludwig Senfl. From his later comments, we know that he was acquainted with works of Adam von Fulda (a German theorist and composer of great renown) and Adam Rener aus Lüttich as performed by the *Hofkappel* in Erfurt and that he once had opportunity to hear Emperor Maximilian's famous organist, Paul Hofhaimer. We note that later when he praised specific works of music he tended to single out works distinguished by elaborate and artistic polyphony.<sup>22</sup>

Upon his return from Rome he was transferred once more to Wittenberg, where in 1512, he completed the Doctor of Theology degree and was soon installed as professor of theology at the university. In his early years of teaching, Luther lectured on Psalms, Romans, and Galatians. In studying Romans 1:17 (the just shall live by faith) he came to the realization that if one trusts in Christ's death on the cross as atonement for sin, God regards that person as "righteous" in spite of his sins. This passage helped him resolve his dilemma over how he, a sinner, could have peace with God and it raised questions in his mind about the pastoral care of the people who attended Wittenberg's churches. His theological and pastoral concerns eventually led to worship reforms and the publication of hymns in German, including his own.

Luther found it necessary to question various practices, including the business of selling indulgences, certificates authorized by the pope attesting that the person named would have reduced time in purgatory. The sales helped Pope Leo X raise money for building St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In 1517 Luther posted ninety-five theses (points to be debated) on Wittenberg's castle church door on All Saints' Day. Eventually, this act drew him into epochmaking events we call the Reformation. In 1521 he was summoned to Worms to defend his theological position before the Holy Roman Emperor and others. After his public statements Luther's friends secretly hurried him out of town and brought him to Wartburg Castle. Here Luther remained in hiding for more than a year and filled his time with translating the New Testament into German. Hearing of radical reforms in worship by coworkers in Wittenberg, he chose to leave the safety of Wartburg. Back in Wittenberg, he sought to retain of tradition whatever was useful in worship, discarding that which was contrary to Scripture. To this end he prepared his two important tracts, *Formula missae* (Order of [Latin] Mass, 1523) and *Deutsche Messe* (German Mass, 1526). In this same period the greatest number of his hymns were prepared (see TABLE 1) as part of his effort to provide good examples for his parishioners, coworkers and followers.

Music also had an important role in Luther's family life. At age forty, Luther had married Katherina von Borgia and set up a household in the former Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg while he continued to teach at the university. Here Luther's study, sometimes used as a dining room, was the place where he performed music with students, with colleagues, and with family members. According to contemporaries, Luther possessed a good, clear tenor voice, which was not especially powerful. From his personal physician, Ratzeberger, we have a description of music making in Luther's home: "[Luther] took the music parts from his desk and distributed them, and then sang the Gregorian responsories of the Seasons with his sons, Martin and Paul, and polyphonic compositions with his older friends."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Luther's experiences as a young chorister, his university training in the theory of music, his personal recreation with music, his participation in the music of worship as a monk, professor, and pastor, his travels, and his own music making at home had developed his knowledge of music. He knew the rudiments of music theory, could sing, could play an instrument, and had heard works of great composers of his age. He developed both skills and taste in music which he could apply to compositional activity.

## A Motet



Though many amateur musicians are capable of writing a melody, only those with training in music theory can tackle polyphony's multiple melodies. In a single string of pitches one can rely on patterns heard in existing pieces and use one's ear to judge rhythm and pitch selection. Musical form unfolds somewhat naturally when the melody is tied to a poetic structure with a set number of syllables to each line. In a four-voice motet, however, the pitches and rhythms must coincide to create harmony while each voice part makes a melody of its own. Polyphony requires more complex decisions to handle matters of form and impression. Because we can more easily observe theoretical knowledge at work in a piece with several voices than one which has a single line, Luther's motet *Non moriar, sed vivam*<sup>24</sup> assists us in evaluating his knowledge of the craft of music.

The text of this motet was one of Luther's favorite verses from Scripture. In Latin it reads *Non moriar, sed vivam, et narrabo opera Domini* ("I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord," Psalm 118:17). For a time it was a kind of motto for Luther. He had written the text and its Gregorian melody, on the wall of his study at the Coburg fortress in 1530 when he was observing from a distance the negotiations in Augsburg.

Later, he created a short motet of it. Luther's tenor part quotes a Gregorian melody, a florid version of the eighth Psalm tone. For centuries the usual practice in polyphonic compositions was to put a borrowed melody into the tenor part. The other three voices are Luther's invention.

A few general observations can be made. Each voice in Luther's motet proceeds with smooth independence and each has little sense of direction, that is, a rise and fall, generally an arch shape to the phrase. These would be normal procedures for polyphonic lines in compositions of Renaissance masters. In Luther's work the length of the *cantus firmus* (quoted melody) dictates the length of the work since all voices begin and end at the same time. We do find a few interesting moments: some suspensions and some parallel tenths. The motet does achieve a certain sophistication and elegance of sound. One might think of it as the composition of a gifted student, a worthy effort. When compared, however, with a work by a master

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like Josquin Desprez,<sup>25</sup> it seems too short, too confined in melodic motion and too plain a shape. One could say that Luther was sufficiently informed about music to try his hand at polyphony but also that he knew he was not experienced enough to handle it like a skilled professional. As an amateur, he put his best efforts into writing and editing melodies.

## Hymn Tunes



Luther strongly encouraged others to create hymns for use in evangelical worship and, over a period of twenty years, he himself created more than thirty hymns most of which found their way into early Lutheran hymnals. We now examine eight tunes attributed to Luther as a significant sampling of the range and patterns in his work with melodies.<sup>26</sup>

In order to observe in particular what Luther did to reshape an existing melody or to craft a new melody, we need to focus on details of scale, rhythm, form, vocal range, and the relationship between text and tune. All these details contribute to its style. Analysis helps us identify what Luther considered appropriate style and form in hymn melodies for people in his Christian community. Discussing the musical elements unveils a variety in the “style” of his tunes,<sup>27</sup> what makes each work different in pitch, duration and design. For each tune example there is a box to summarize key elements so that tunes can easily be compared.

**Range** identifies how many pitches are in the tune. Basically, the greater the range, the more challenging the tune. A typical range is eight pitches (one octave). Those who are comfortable singing higher pitches may find low pitches harder to produce and those who are comfortable with lower pitches will find the high ones more challenging. Keep in mind that the notation presents the pitches of a scale that one is to sing, not necessarily the range that will actually be heard. How high or how low one sings a melody is adjustable. In other words, a keyboard player

**Table 3** TUNE SAMPLES FROM LUTHER

NO.	Fist Line	Table 1	Activity
1	Verleih uns Frieden	No. 27	adapted/composed
2&3	Jesaia dem Propheten	No. 25	adapted/composed
4	Mit Fried und Freud	No. 12	composed
5	Vater unser	No. 32	adapted/edited
6	Aus tiefer Not	No. 3	composed
7	Erhalt uns, Herr	No. 35	adapted/composed
8	Vom Himmel hoch	No. 29	composed
9	Ein feste Burg	No. 26	composed

might have to transpose it to match the pitches that the singers are producing. Whoever leads the song must find that comfortable vocal pitch level.

**Rhythm** describes, in a word or two, how easy or hard a tune might be — or it identifies what may be difficult for singers when they first meet the melody.

**Scale** names the mode or scale used by the melody.

**Text/tune** identifies the relationship between the text and tune, that is, whether it is syllabic (one syllable per note), *neumatic* (one syllable sung to a few pitches) or *melismatic* (numerous pitches for one syllable). Monastic chanting of psalm texts employed primarily syllabic style. Plainsong melodies for choirs often used more expressive neumatic and melismatic styles. Most modern hymns are entirely syllabic or mostly syllabic.

**Form** identifies how many different musical phrases there are and where, if any, any repetition of a musical phrase occurs. For example a complicated melody like Mendelssohn (“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”) has ten phrases. A different letter is assigned to each melodic phrase; a letter is repeated when the music is repeated and a superscript is added to the letter when the repeated material has a slight change. Since the last two phrases are nearly the same as the two that precede them, we can identify the pattern as **abacddefe<sup>1</sup>f<sup>1</sup>**. Obviously, strophes with more lines of poetry need melodies with more musical phrases, a bigger design. The minimum number of notes in the melody is one for each syllable in the poetry. Although larger designs are usually more difficult to remember when they are first encountered, once the melody is committed to memory the chain of pitches can usually be sung without much effort. The human memory can be very precise with melodic design.

Finally, **difficulty level** will have a range of 1 to 5, with the least difficult a “1” and the most difficult being a “5.” This rating is intended to imagine how difficult it might have been for Luther’s Wittenberg congregation to sing his hymn tune. It is acknowledged that today’s congregation might struggle more, or less, with some aspects of the scale, rhythm or other aspects of the melody than the Wittenbergers did. Difficult things are generally only difficult before they are learned; when a tune is completely familiar, people tend to think of it as “not hard to sing.” This assigned scale number is meant to aid comparisons between the melodies. We begin by examining melodies that are related to medieval chant repertoire.

## EXAMPLE 1.

The first hymn, *Verleih uns Frieden*,<sup>28</sup> dates from 1528/29 — well after Luther's first two dozen hymns were published. The text may be patterned after a thirteenth century antiphon, *Da pacem, Domine*, used at Mass before the *Agnus Dei*.<sup>29</sup> The melody in EXAMPLE 1 is a duple-meter version of the tune; it appeared in 1531. Several scholars perceive it as an adaptation of the melody for Ambrose's *Veni, Redemptor gentium*, which Luther had translated from Latin into German, see TABLE 1, number 7. It seems likely that when Luther created his text he also searched for some melody from which he could fashion a suitable new one with suitable rhythms and melodic shapes.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the rhythm in *Verleih uns Frieden* remains close to plainsong because it uses only two note-values but it is made to fit a duplemeter scheme where the half-note plus quarter-note patterns in the third and fifth phrases are syncopations (accents at unexpected places). It is interesting

### EXAMPLE 1

Range: 6 pitches  
Rhythm: 2 syncopations  
Scale: mode i (Dorian)  
Text/tune: syllabic  
Form: abcde  
Difficulty level: 2

EXAMPLE 1 *Verleih uns Frieden*

Grant peace we pray, in mer-cy, Lord; Peace in our time, O send  
us! For there is none on earth but You, None oth - er  
to de - fend us. You on - ly, Lord, can fight for us.

that recent Lutheran hymnals would choose to have a variant of the melody which more clearly resembles ancient Gregorian rhythms than does this 1531 version.<sup>31</sup>

The melodic range is small, only six pitches. It employs the Dorian mode (D to D with no accidentals), one of the four primary medieval scales.<sup>32</sup> However, this hymn melody can be “heard” today as (natural) minor since there is no sixth tone of the scale (either B or B-flat) to clearly distinguish between modern minor

(with a B-natural to C-sharp ascending and a C-natural to B-flat descending) and ancient Dorian (no accidentals).

The form has five phrases with no melodic repetition (**abcde**). Since the opening line closely follows the pitches of a Gregorian *Da pacem, Domine*,<sup>33</sup> it does seem possible that Luther may have borrowed from this melody<sup>34</sup> and then created a few more phrases, continuing in the same vein. From this we observe that Luther considered a “simplified” Gregorian style (only two note values, syllabic) as suitable for congregations; it shows that he appreciated traditional liturgical music enough to arrange the rhythm of his melody so that it was more within the grasp of common people. This is true whether one considers it as derived from the melody of Ambrose’s hymn or from a Gregorian antiphon.

## EXAMPLE 2.

### EXAMPLE 2

Range: 10 pitches

Rhythm: simple

Scale: mode v (Lydian)

Text/tune: completely syllabic

Form: abcdefghijkkklmn

Difficulty level: 3

We turn now to Luther's longest tune, perhaps also fashioned after a Gregorian melody. In 1526 Luther prepared *Jesaia dem Propheten* as the *Sanctus* of his *Deutsche Messe* apparently with the help of the musician Johann Walter and others. This melody gets a detailed examination to see what resulted in the collaboration.

In this case Luther perhaps drew on a Gregorian *Sanctus*, choosing to create a long, "through-composed" tune (**abcdefghijklmn**) to suit the

narrative quality of his text, a paraphrase of Isaiah 6. Luther was certainly aware that a form with almost no musical repetition makes greater demands on memory than a hymn-like form with a shorter melody with several stanzas. Yet, we can understand that if it were used at each Mass as Luther envisioned, it would soon become familiar. Another challenging element is its range: a tenth, two pitches greater than an octave. Few hymns dare to use a wider range than this and most hymn tunes confine themselves to an octave. To relieve the continuous flow of new melodic material Luther employed repetition at the words "Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth." Here the repetition suggests the calling back and forth of the seraphim. Furthermore, Luther heightens the impact of this repetition by putting the melodic climax (highest pitch) just before the most important words, "Holy is God." It is obvious that he, along with any musical advisors, considered carefully matters of shape, such as melodic peak and range, in crafting this melodic design. In length and melodic rise and fall, none of his melodies resembles chant as much as this one.

Like EXAMPLE 1, Luther employs only two note values, but there is even further rhythmic simplification in *Jesaia dem Propheten*. It has long notes only at the beginning and end of each phrase, never anywhere else. The rhythmic pattern of the words is transferred to the rhythm of the music and the pattern is ten notes in every phrase. This leaves no doubt that Luther wanted to have a simple rhythm for the rural and village folk who would be singing his *Deutsche Messe*. In order to reach his goal of having a pastor and congregation sing the service he needed something that could fit their skill levels and avoid any necessity of having to be read from printed sources.

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Could there be more than just a simple rhythmic pattern here? The syllabic style (one note per syllable) creates an interesting rhythmic phenomenon when longer values are confined to the beginning and ending pitches of each phrase. It sets up an accent pattern based on groupings of two quarter-notes. The accents of the text nearly always emphasize the two-note grouping in a way that creates six stresses per phrase.

Could the six stresses be symbolic of the six-winged seraphim? Or, might the resulting triple pattern (three groups of two quarter-notes) be somehow related to the triple *Sanctus* of the text? We can't know. In any case, the rhythmic result is a recurring pattern that gives an easy and joyful forward-motion. The simplicity of design suits the singers Luther had in mind.

EXAMPLE 2 *Jesaia dem Propheten*

I - sa - iah, might-y seer in days of old, The Lord of all in  
spir-it did be-hold High on a loft-y throne, in splen-dor bright, With  
robes that filled the tem-ple courts with light. A-bove the throne were flam-ing  
ser-a-phim; Six wings had they, these mes-sen-gers of Him. With two they  
veiled their fac-es as was right, With two they hum-bly hid their feet from sight,  
And with the oth-er two a-loft they soared; One to the oth-er called and praised the  
Lord: "Ho - ly is God, the Lord of Sab - a - oth! Ho -  
ly is God, the Lord of Sab-a - oth! Ho - ly is God, the Lord of Sab-a-oth!  
His glo-ry fills the heav-ens and the earth!" The beams and lin-tels trem-bled  
at the cry, And clouds of smoke en - wrapped the throne on high.

### EXAMPLE 3.

The opening portion of a Gregorian *Sanctus* may be the basis for Luther's melody.<sup>35</sup> We can imagine him at work here and it is much more than assigning syllables to pitches of a pre-existing melody. First, the opening phrase combines the two opening phrases of the Gregorian into one phrase in his melody. In doing so, its triadic quality is emphasized through the new duple rhythm and the elimination of a passing tone (G), the third pitch of the Gregorian tune. Mainly, the neumatic qualities (a grouping of five or six notes to one syllable) are removed (see "1" in EXAMPLE 3). In his second phrase (see "2" in EXAMPLE 3), Luther lengthens the phrase, revealing the first five pitches of the scale he is using instead of repeating the melodic material like the Gregorian melody does. At "3" the Gregorian melody filled in the fourth (C to F) with stepwise motion but Luther's melody leaps from C to F and exploits an opportunity for "word painting" by the jump upward to "high throne" (*hohen Thron*). Again, he avoids the neumatic material in the Gregorian melody. The central triad (F-A-C) is further emphasized by ending the phrase on an A, not on C. This connects well with his next phrase although it has no precedence

EXAMPLE 3 Comparison: Gregorian *Sanctus* & *Jesaia dem Propheten*

Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus, Sanc - tus Do-mi-  
 Je - sai - a dem pro - phe-ten das ge-schach, das er ym geyst den her-ren si-tzen sach

nus De - us Sa - ba - oth. Ple-ni sunt  
 auff ey - nem hoh - en thron ym hel - lem glantz; sein - es klei -

cae - li et ter - ra glo-ri - a tu - a.  
 des saum den kor ful - let gantz. Es stund - en zween ser - aph bey yhm dar - an...

in the Gregorian model. At “4” Luther reshapes the phrase while retaining the ending. Once more he eliminates the neumatic material and makes it syllabic.

Clearly, this is more than simple melodic adaptation to a new text. It is a complete recrafting of a melodic line; it is bold and creative. If there was conscious drawing from a Gregorian model, the selective process depended on an inner vision, taste acquired through firsthand knowledge, and self-confidence in organizing pitches. It is not copy work, as some nineteenth century scholars suggested.<sup>36</sup>

Modern publications present this melody as major, when, in fact, its original is Lydian (a scale from F to F with no B-flat – except where the B is lowered to B-flat according to practices of *musica ficta*).<sup>37</sup> In Luther’s day performers were expected to raise and lower some pitches to produce more pleasing intervals; the practice was so universal that those who notated pitches did not provide the expected accidentals in the score. Thus, where Luther employed the ambivalence of a “performer-altered Lydian scale,” modern editors have brought the melody entirely into the major scale.

## EXAMPLE 4.

*Mit Fried und Freud* dates from 1524, early in Luther's creative work. Its text, a paraphrase of the *Nunc dimittis*, reflects the thoughts of old Simeon after he had seen his Savior, the Christ child. Apparently, Luther wanted to present the image of a joy-filled singer by choosing musical elements that might be used by a courtly solo-singer, perhaps accompanied by a lute. The placing of syllables on unaccented melody notes ("so wills it") is more suited to a professional singer than to a group of amateur singers. This would be true also of the syncopations that occur at the words "the Lord has promised me." These soloistic choices fit the joy idea but tend to complicate performance by a large group of singers until pitches and rhythms are thoroughly locked in their memory through repetition.

### EXAMPLE 4

Range: 9 pitches

Rhythm: syncopations, tricky syllable placements

Scale: mode i (Dorian)

Text/tune: syllabic & neumatic

Form: abcdef

Difficulty level: 5

The melody has six separate phrases with no repetitions of melodic material (abcdef). It gains strength and dignity from the Dorian scale. The inner joy of the text is expressed through active rhythms and frequent skips (several fifths and a fourth). The range is one pitch beyond an octave. All these aspects of the melody admirably fit the ideas in the text.

EXAMPLE 4 *Mit Fried und Freud*

In peace and joy I now de - part Since  
God so wills it. Se - rene and con - fi - dent my  
heart; Still - ness fills it. For the Lord has pro - mised  
me That death is but a slum - ber.

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The rhythm is a challenge for non-musicians. First, there are five note-values in the melody: half-note, quarter-note, dotted quarter-note, eighth-note and sixteenth note. Though the rhythm employs duple patterns, the first phrase is the only simple one. Later phrases have as many as three pitches to one syllable, include syncopations (displaced accents), or involve difficult syllable placements. Surely, at first hearing these rhythmic demands are beyond the capabilities of many non-musicians. While recognized composers of Luther's day did use such variety of rhythms in their songs,<sup>38</sup> it is easy to understand why editors of this hymn soon simplified the rhythms by substituting eighth-notes for sixteenth-notes and by eliminating the dotted values. Although these original elements, the skips and the rhythmic patterns, had enlivened the tune, making it express the joyful text, they had to be removed for the sake of singing by a congregation.

## EXAMPLE 5.

In Luther's *Vater unser* we have a hymn-paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. A draft of this text exists in Luther's own hand and, in the lower right hand corner of it, he drafted a tune.<sup>39</sup> But apparently this melody did not suit him and he crossed it out. When Luther's hymn was published, it carried the melody in EXAMPLE 5. It too exhibits Luther's handiwork as he adapted it from a version of the published melody in a 1531 hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren.<sup>40</sup>

It uses the medieval Dorian scale. In the seventeenth century two accidentals were inserted, a C-sharp in the third phrase and a G-sharp in the fourth. Both are "leading tones" to strengthen the motion to a new key center and adjust the melody toward the modern "minor" scale. While these sharps are later adjustments, the B-flat in the last phrase is original to the Luther hymn.<sup>41</sup> This altered note (the B-flat) again reflects the medieval practice of *musica ficta*, accidentals added by performers — in this case actually put in the score. For several centuries it had been common practice, in both Gregorian melodies and in polyphonic pieces, to flat a B that occurred between two As. We observe, then, that this flatted upper-neighbor follows common medieval practice without compromising the basic Dorian quality of the scale or calling it into question. The original tune then does not employ a mixed or ambiguous scale; it simply uses one that seems unfamiliar to modern ears.

Again Luther uses only two rhythmic values: a quarter-note and a half-note. Furthermore, the long notes are at the beginning and end of each phrase, never

EXAMPLE 5 *Vater unser*

Our Fa - ther who from heav'n a - bove Bids all of us to live in  
love As mem-bers of one fam - i - ly And pray to You in un - i - ty, Teach  
us no thought-less words to say But from our in-most hearts to pray.

**EXAMPLE 5**

Range: 9 pitches  
Rhythm: simple  
Scale: mode i (Dorian)  
Text/tune: syllabic  
Form: abcdef  
Difficulty level: 2

anywhere else. This simple rhythmic scheme is like EXAMPLE 2 and its simplicity permits a gentle unfolding of melody that has no complexities, a helpful feature to aid concentration on the prayer text.

In other ways the melodic structure of *Vater unser* also resembles ancient chant. There are six phrases; no phrase is repeated (**abcdef**). It uses mostly stepwise motion with a minor third as the largest skip. Like plainchant music the melodic contours are artfully designed. The tune rises to a climax in the third phrase

and it floats elegantly downward in the last three phrases through successive hexachords (six-tone scale groups) to the tonic, home pitch. Perhaps, one forward-looking feature is this: three phrases end on D, two end on A, and one ends on F. Together they outline the main triad of the scale: D, F, A. There is clarity of scale and an emphasis on the tonic chord. In this melody we have a combination of rhythmic simplicity and melodic strength admirably fitted to a prayer text.

## EXAMPLE 6.

*Aus tiefer Not* is a paraphrase of Psalm 130. Luther's tune employs the medieval Phrygian mode (from E to E with no accidentals), a scale that has a unique feature, namely, a half-step between the first and second steps of the scale. The scale suits a plaintive and sober thought and was obviously chosen because it suited the mood of the text. Notice that three of the phrases end with this half-step, F descending to E. In this tune we meet a new form (**ababcde**): the bar form (AAB), typical in Meistersinger melodies.

The opening phrases (section A: **ab**) are repeated (**ab**), then a group of phrases make the closing section (B: **cde**). Sometimes Meistersinger melodies unified these two sections by restating all or part of the final phrase of the A section at the conclusion of the B section.<sup>42</sup> It is probably intentional then that *Aus tiefer Not* has the G-F-E melodic motion both at the end of the second phrase and at the end of the final phrase.

### EXAMPLE 6

Range: 7 pitches

Rhythm: 1 syncopation

Scale: mode iii (Phrygian)

Text/tune: mostly syllabic

Form: ababcde

Difficulty level: 3

In this melody Luther avoids dotted rhythms. The text is not about joy but about pleading for help. Where eighth-notes do occur, they are in pairs or serve as a pickup note. In later editions, the syncopation in the third line (eighth note A,

EXAMPLE 6 *Aus tiefer Not*

From depths of woe I cry to Thee, In trial and trib-u - la - tion;  
 Bend down Thy gra-cious ear to me, Lord hear my sup-pli - ca - tion.  
 If Thou re - mem-b'rest ev - ry sin, Who then could heav -  
 en ev - er win Or stand be - fore Thy pres - ence?

quarter note D, and eighth-note C)<sup>43</sup> was often changed to a quarter-note followed by two eighth-notes, destroying some of the energetic melodic style of the Meistersinger tradition. The descending skip of a fifth at the beginning may be significant as a bit of word painting (“from depths”); sacred and secular works of the sixteenth century liked this kind of text-music association. The text and tune are a good marriage: the choice of scale and rhythm fit the sober mood of the psalm yet reflect the ruggedness and the melodic design of the Meistersinger tradition.

**EXAMPLE 7.**

**EXAMPLE 7**  
 Range: 7 pitches  
 Rhythm: very easy  
 Scale: minor (i, Dorian)  
 Text/tune: syllabic  
 From: abcd  
 Difficulty level: 1

In *Erhalt uns, Herr* we meet a modern scale, minor, and this time no steps of the scale are missing. Later editors raised the C at the final cadence<sup>44</sup> to a C-sharp to suit the harmonic theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the seventh note of the minor scale was raised for the sake of making the penultimate chord a “major” chord. As in *Vater unser*, there are only two note-values and once again the long notes appear only at the beginning and end of phrases in order to better carry a prayer text.

EXAMPLE 7 *Erhalt uns, Herr*

Lord, keep us stead - fast in Your Word; Curb  
 those who by de - ceit or sword Would wrest the king - dom  
 from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done.

There is a great deal to admire about the design of this simple melody (**abcd**). Like Gregorian chant the four phrases show no melodic repetition, though the little three-note figure (D-C-D) in the first phrase occurs also in the concluding phrase. The first phrase outlines a minor third with its lower neighbor. The second phrase twice ascends a major third. Together the two phrases prolong the tonic triad (D-F-A) outlined in the first two phrases. The concluding D-C-D confirms the central pitch, D. Again, we find simple, but elegant, melodic elements for a prayer text not unlike the patterns in *Veni, Redemptor gentium* (Savior of the Nations, Come, see TABLE 1, No. 7).<sup>45</sup>

## EXAMPLE 8.

*Vom Himmel hoch*, written for Luther's children to sing as a Christmas pageant, was intended as a song for the home. At first an existing folk song melody from a secular garland song was used with Luther's parodied text, "From Heaven Above";<sup>46</sup> some time later he created the melody in EXAMPLE 8. Here we find the "brightness" of the major scale to fit the joy expressed in the text; it avoids medieval modes and rhythms associated with Gregorian music.

The eighth-note pickup notes at the beginning of each phrase give a forward drive to the rhythm. And, with but two exceptions, all the other notes are quarter-notes; a half-note is reserved for the final pitch. The repeated patterns in the rhythm and the four-phrase structure make it easy to learn.

That three of four phrases have downward motion may be a kind of text-painting for the incarnation of the Lord Jesus (who came down from heaven to be the Savior of the world). The first and last phrases are similar. In this case it is the initial pitches of the phrases that are the same. In summary, the simple elements of this melody have been artfully balanced to suit the Christmas text and, not surprisingly, have become a part of a repertoire we call Christmas carols.

### EXAMPLE 8

Range: 8 pitches  
Rhythm: simple  
Scale: major (Ionian)  
Text/tune: syllabic  
Form: abcd  
Difficulty level: 1

EXAMPLE 8 *Vom Himmel hoch*

From heav'n a - bove to earth I come To  
bear good news to ev - 'ry home; Glad tid - ings of great  
joy I bring, Where - of I now will say and sing:

## EXAMPLE 9.

*Ein feste Burg* is Luther's greatest hymn tune and has gained the epithet "battle hymn of the Reformation." Written in 1527 or 1528, its text is meant to "interpret and apply the 46th Psalm to the church of his own time and its struggles."<sup>47</sup> In no uncertain terms the hymn celebrates the power of God in the midst of threatening foes. Its melody combines elements of scale, rhythm, and form which project a rugged, buoyant attitude that Scriptures associate with a strong faith in the Lord.

Again, Luther chooses the major scale; in fact, all the notes of the scale occur in the descending line of both the second phrase and the final phrase. The tonic triad (F, A, C) is outlined by the final notes of various phrases, the A appearing in the next to last phrase. Though this choice of tones at the end of phrases may have been unintentional, it clearly supports the most important tones of the scale. The B-flat in the cadence of the third phrase (c of **ababcdefb**) is original; in later publications this was changed to B-natural to create motion to the "dominant" (C) to suit more modern melodic and harmonic theory. Luther's choice of the "modern" major scale fits well his buoyant text.

### EXAMPLE 9 *Ein feste Burg*



A might-y for-tress is our God A trust-y shield  
and weap-on; He helps us free from ev-'ry need That hath  
us now o'er-tak-en. The old e-vil foe Now means  
dead-ly woe; Deep guile and great might Are his  
dread arms in fight; On earth is not his e-qual.

This textual energy is fitted to a strong and bold melody with strong rhythmical interest. The tune projects strength and boldness, not by means of dotted rhythms (there is only one dotted-note), but through syncopations (displacement of normal accents) in all phrases except the fourth and fifth where a string of half- notes gives relief from the rhythmic displacements. Such strong rhythmic elements, including devices like syncopation, were part of artistic part-writing in Renaissance sacred motets and secular German part-song, which Luther would have come to know in the works of masters like Josquin Desprez and Heinrich Isaac<sup>48</sup> as well as the Meistersinger tradition. Rather than reflecting tastes of untutored musicians, here Luther's melodic rhythm imitates art music of the urban middle class and of the most-respected composers of his day. In this melody he identified with the developed tastes of cultivated people. This is evident also in the sophisticated structure of the tune.

Once again Luther uses the bar form (AAB) of the Meistersingers. The scheme is AAB (six different musical phrases, "a" through "f," and with a letter repeated when the musical phrase reappears in the sequence: **ab, ab, cdefb**). The first two phrases repeat, making the A section; the B section is longer, four new phrases plus a repeat of the second phrase ("b"). It is typical in Meistersinger tunes that the closing phrase of the first section is repeated at the end of the second section.

This is a masterpiece of musical expression, matching sturdiness of a tune to poetry about faith in a strong God. In this hymn Luther achieves a creative level that demonstrates his full power as a writer of both hymn tune and hymn text. It is widely acknowledged as Luther's best.

**EXAMPLE 9**

Range: 8 pitches

Rhythm: several syncopations

Scale: major (Ionian)

Text/tune: slightly neumatic

Form: ababcdefb

Difficulty level: 4

## Models of Hymnody



Song in Christian worship grew from singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). By the fourth century in the western Christian church there were Latin hymns. After the ninth century, musical notation could preserve the sweeping melodic curves and melismatic word-painting of the Gregorian style of monody. Even lengthy, un-texted melismas could acquire a text and find a new life as a “sequence hymn.” Medieval secular song could celebrate historic epics; courtly love songs could generate new song structures, even incorporate dance rhythms. Fifteenth century vernacular religious songs from the Hussites in Bohemia could demonstrate to the Reformation what was possible with German hymns.

Luther's acquaintance with the music in his society — chant, hymn, polyphonic motet, art song, and folk music — is reflected in his own work of creating hymn tunes and adapting hymn melodies. Musical choices in rhythm, meter, range, scale, and text painting in these works attest to his musicianship and his creativity. As Paul Henry Lang, an eminent musicologist, has said, “Nothing is more unjust than to consider him [Luther] a sort of enthusiastic and good-natured dilettante.”<sup>49</sup> He is not one who simply happened on a good musical choice; evidence suggests that Luther consciously and artfully shaped a melody to fit a text. We can recall what he did with these elements of music in the examples discussed above.

**Rhythm.** Rhythm was a tool for expressing the text. For prayer texts (*Vater unser* and *Erhalt uns, Herr*) and for the “unlearned lay folk”<sup>50</sup> (*Jesaja dem Propheten*) he chose easy rhythms. Slightly more complicated tunes contained a gentle syncopation or two (*Verleih uns*) or pickup notes (*Aus tiefer Not* and *Vom Himmel hoch*). More complex rhythms, that is, melodies with pickup notes, dotted rhythms and syncopations, were reserved for expressing intense joy (*Mit Fried und Freud*) or firm faith (*Ein feste Burg*).<sup>51</sup>

**Meter.** All eight of Luther's melodies fit a duple pattern (for the music of the 1500s one cannot yet speak of our modern meters like 4/4 and 3/4). In general, he seems to have avoided any meter with triple patterns;<sup>52</sup> perhaps they were too dance-like or captivating for his purposes.

**Range.** We observe that Luther was fully aware of the impact of vocal range in a melody. He employed more than an octave only when musical expression called for it. In *Verleih uns* (six pitches) and *Aus tiefer Not* (seven pitches) the range is somewhat limited. In *Mit Fried und Freud* the range is slightly expanded to nine pitches. The widest (ten pitch) range appears in the borrowed tune *Vater unser* and in his own *Jesaia dem Propheten*.

**Scale.** These eight melodies use five different scales. Luther seems to have clearly understood the impact of mode and explored the potentials of several different scales, including the sturdy Dorian (*Verleih uns*, *Mit Fried und Freud* and *Vater unser*), the melancholy Phrygian (*Aus tiefer Not*), and the joyful, confident major (*Vom Himmel hoch* and *Ein feste Burg*). *Jesaia dem Propheten*, in its original version, can be considered Lydian, which leans somewhat toward the modern major scale. The incomplete “minor” scale of *Erhalt uns, Herr* gives us a possible fifth scale, though its single B-flat may simply be the result of *musica ficta* and thus be, in essence, yet another tune in the Dorian mode.

**Text painting.** Luther may have employed a little text painting in the descending fifth at the start of *Aus tiefer Not*, in the upward leap at “high throne,” and by the echo-like repetitions of “Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth” in *Jesaia dem Propheten*.

Handling these elements of music well would be enough for any composer of hymn tunes, but there is something even more significant — even a model for future generations, including our own. Luther showed how to employ a variety in style — choose musical elements from different music-making occasions in society.

**Variety in Style.** A good fit of music and text required a range of design and a variety of elements from which to choose. Luther employed not one “style”<sup>53</sup> of melody or one pattern or form; he used several styles and several melodic forms.<sup>54</sup> Style encompasses all the elements of a piece since the handling of details in a controlled manner leads to the overall impression that it makes. Features like scale, meter, rhythm, range and relation to text all contribute to style; the details are what give distinctive character. Style can reference personal preferences that distinguish one composer from another but it can also reference what makes genres or forms of pieces alike. The eight melodies we have examined can, on the basis of their

**Table 4** VARIETY IN LUTHER'S TUNES

1. Simplified Gregorian	Verleih uns Frieden (Example 1), Jesaia dem Propheten (Examples 2 & 3), Erhalt uns, Herr (Example 7)
2. German hymn	Vater unser (Example 5)
3. Meistersinger melody	Aus tiefer Not (Example 6) Ein feste Burg (Example 9)
4. Art song	Mit Fried und Freud (Example 4)
5. Folk song	Vom Himmel hoch (Example 8)

form and style, be assigned to the five types in TABLE 4: simplified Gregorian, German hymn, Meistersinger melody, art song and folk song.<sup>55</sup>

**Simplified Gregorian.** For some centuries before the Reformation Gregorian chant (liturgical chant, plainsong) was used to sing the psalms, the daily office in monastic communities, and the sung mass, which had its ordinary (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*) and its propers (Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Offertory, Communion). Some chant was syllabic (one note per syllable), some neumatic (from two to twelve notes for one syllable) and some was melismatic (dozens of notes for a single syllable). Choirs could rehearse and perform the complex neumatic and melismatic pieces. Monks employed primarily the syllabic and neumatic types of melodies for their daily services. They also invented hymns to serve the liturgical seasons and saints' days. The mostly-syllabic designs dominated their many hours of singing liturgy each week.

The scales used in chant were a system of eight modes that can be traced to Byzantine (Eastern) practice in the eighth century. While the rhythmic character of Western chant repertoire is open to several interpretations of the neumes used in the notation, chant melodies were a "free succession of groups of two and three notes" in phrases that would rise and then fall in pitch.<sup>56</sup> The complexity of the monastic music served particularly a closed community of singers who sang this kind of repertoire several times a day, learning it through hearing it repeatedly. Plainsong was the music of Roman Catholic worship; polyphonic choral music was featured in court chapels and in churches of major towns where the musical forces were available. Although unison chant was the dominant sound in worship music and hymns were somewhat rare, inserted with permission of a bishop, those who attended the typical "low mass" experienced no music.

For congregational singing it was helpful to reduce rhythmic complexities and to limit the length of melodic material. People had to learn the worship music through repetition and usually without reference to any written version since many were not able to read, which changed as the Reformation encouraged schools for both boys and girls. EXAMPLE 1 is a simple design — hymnic, but with only one stanza. It is entirely syllabic. The duple meter character makes the two opening phrases fit the syllables easily but the third and fifth phrases each have some alternating long and short notes that create syncopations in this duple meter context. Thus, Luther retained a bit of the rhythmic freedom of chant but not so much that it would be difficult to remember after a few uses. He employed the Dorian scale, linking the melody to ancient worship music and prayer life of the church. The range is limited to six pitches. It has a strophic design, that is, a short five-phrase melody that could fit several stanzas of poetry.

EXAMPLE 7 also fits the simplified Gregorian category. It has quarter notes throughout, rises to its highest pitch in the third phrase, uses a range of only seven pitches, and employs the Dorian scale modified only with a B-flat between to As, which is a usual *musica ficta* adjustment and makes it sound just like the modern minor scale. It shows just how simple Luther could make a tune since it was intended for children to sing at a time when Turkish forces were threatening the German States. Its design (four phrases like *veni redemptor gentium*, TABLE 1, No. 7) resembled the simplest plainsong Latin hymn. More could be said about Reformation recycling of Latin hymns but this example is sufficient to illustrate how vernacular hymnody could emerge from the Gregorian repertoire context.

EXAMPLE 2 is the only Luther melody which is clearly not strophic. Ten phrases gradually raise the melody to its highest pitch, the next three phrases repeat the “holy echo,” and the final three phrases fall away, bringing the melody home to its central pitch. This lengthy melody explores the wide range of a tenth. The third mode (Lydian) character of the melody is clear but was erased in later centuries by adjusting its pitches to fit the major scale. The most important changes from plainsong practice: simplifying of the rhythm, making each phrase the same number of pitches, and using only quarter-notes for interior note values. Not a single syncopation or grouping of three occurs; it has only duple patterns to fit the natural accents of the text.

These three examples show Luther's desire to adapt Gregorian style — with its familiar qualities of mode, range, rhythm, and melodic shape long-used for prayer and liturgy — by reducing its complexity.

**German hymn.** This category differs somewhat from the Latin hymn, a large repertoire primarily for use in the monastic daily office. Latin hymns, especially the Sequence hymns, were allowed in the mass. Luther translated several Latin hymns into German, e.g., TABLE 1, Nos. 7, 8, 17, 34 and 37.

There had also been a pre-Reformation tradition of German *lieder* for school and church that the Reformation could build on; some songs had become standards for extra-liturgical church life (TABLE 1, Nos. 9 and 20). Luther and others added stanzas to provide them with texts that would better serve the Reformation theology (*sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*). Luther encouraged others to create new songs that would teach and apply this theology through congregational singing, not just through preaching, scripture reading, or choral music with biblical texts.

It is not surprising that a tune of the Bohemian Brethren could be borrowed and adapted for Luther's paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer.<sup>57</sup> To fill the need for Christian songs in church, at home, and in school Luther apparently felt free to reach into hymnic resources of other German-speaking religious circles. We do not know how Luther might have come to know the tune which was published with his "Our Father" paraphrase in 1539. It can be traced to Michael Weisse's 1531 hymn on the Lord's Prayer, "*Begehren wir mit Innigkeit*,"<sup>58</sup> which was part of the Bohemian Brethren's vernacular hymnody. Luther revised this melody, which had been associated with a text on the same topic.

**Meistersinger tradition.** This tradition became widely known through Wagner's 1868 opera *Die Meistersinger from Nürnberg* with a story involving the shoemaker Hans Sachs and a singing contest. In the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, lower and middle class citizens of German cities (bakers, weavers, barbers, nail-makers) organized singing schools to emulate the ancient song tradition of traveling musicians by devising texts and tunes in their amateur fraternities and by holding singing competitions.<sup>59</sup> They had a preference for texts on religious topics and required that they be performed according to strict rules. The songs seldom had less than three stanzas, with seven to twelve lines of one to twelve syllables

each, and were performed by solo voice usually to an existing melody.<sup>60</sup> Their pieces typically used bar form, that is, an AAB design for text and tune in which the opening is repeated (AA) and is followed by a B section with a similar, new amount of melodic material.<sup>61</sup>

Two of the Luther tunes (EXAMPLE 6 and EXAMPLE 9) are patterned after this important melody-type in German society. The design was associated both with serious religious texts and with a striving for excellence in text and music.

**Art song.** While all hymns are songs, there are many types of songs including a type that can be called an “art song,” EXAMPLE 4. This designation is used for “solo songs” with strophic poetry that can be inferior to the texts of the highest literary quality. Much of medieval song was monophonic plainchant or Latin hymn. The high Middle Ages developed vernacular song types: troubadour and trouvere songs (France), *Minnesang* (Germany), *laude* (Italy), *cantigas* (Spain), and carols (England). Before the Reformation polyphonic song grew in the sacred context and then was employed also for courtly love texts and secular ceremony. By the fifteenth century there were many solo songs with accompaniment and even more with polyphonic settings.<sup>62</sup>

Luther wanted to employ melody types that were more artistic, expressive and musically interesting than the hymn and folk song. We can see the more difficult aspects of rhythm in EXAMPLE 4 as a willingness by Luther to incorporate techniques found in the art song (solo or polyphonic) into tunes for congregations. This is seemingly confirmed by another hymn tune, apparently by Luther, which is even more soloistic. “*Sie ist mir lieb, die werthe Magd*” (TABLE 1, No. 30) has challenging melismas and meter changes and for that reason, after it was published in 1545, did not appear in subsequent hymnals.<sup>63</sup>

**Folk music.** The term “folk” designates a type of music that is handed on from one person to another, is normally performed by nonprofessionals, is used by many segments of a population, has a relatively simple style, and is often claimed as their own by a particular part of society (ethnic group, social class, nation). This became a recognized category in the late nineteenth century as collectors located and annotated the oral traditions of various people groups. “Folk music” is not defined precisely and can be used to describe carols, children’s songs, and music transmitted by media (e.g., American popular music, for example, the song “Amazing Grace” which typifies the folk-song movement in late twentieth-century America).

### *Luther's Hymn Melodies*

In celebration of Christmas at home Luther created a text “patterned after a pre-Reformation secular folk song”<sup>64</sup> for his children to sing to a borrowed folk tune; several hymnals printed his text together with this widely-known melody. One can imagine that adults would have experienced the “two-text-problem” when they tried to “erase” the folk text and its associations from their thoughts as they sang Luther’s sacred text. It needed to have a melody all its own. Eventually, Luther created one that was simple and memorable (EXAMPLE 8); it has been linked to his Christmas text ever since.

## Conclusion

We have seen how Luther created songs that would carry the Reformation teachings, how he gained musical skills and insights, how his tunes show an ability to craft melodies, and how they exhibit a spectrum of style from his society. Five centuries later it is easy to lump them in one category, for example, “old tunes,” but with a little effort it is possible to see a variety of styles — not unlike the many distinctions that divide today’s music into categories. Luther’s tunes modeled after *folk music* and his short hymn melodies were especially suitable for children. Melodies that were *simplified Gregorian* or based on the *German hymn* or *Latin hymn* drew from established religious traditions and could be handled by his adult singers. Tunes designed in the *Meistersinger tradition* drew from musical patterns of dedicated amateurs and were more challenging. Melodies patterned after the *art song* introduced interesting, though sometimes difficult rhythms, from the world of professional musicians. Some tunes were easy; some were more challenging. Some reflected commonly-known musical models. Some drew from musical procedures experienced in refined circles.

Clearly, this spectrum of melody-types shows that Luther wanted suitable, but interesting and varied, musical designs for the Lord’s royal priests to sing.<sup>65</sup> They didn’t rely on musical cliché or all have the same features of range, rhythm, scale, form or relation to the text. Rather, they gained a place among Christian people through their craftsmanship, artistic expression, and variety in musical style. Because Luther placed music next in importance to theology,<sup>66</sup> he sought the best of musical art whether drawn from ecclesial models, folk models, devoted amateurs models, or art-music models. And since this music had a spiritual purpose, to declare the wonderful deeds of God and to lift up the prayer and praise of God’s people, a hymn’s form and style had to serve that purpose. It was important to choose from society’s musical forms and styles what would best carry the thought of each text and be worthy of the royal priests who would sing them. A breadth of styles was needed to serve Christian people from all walks of life, from peasant to noble and from non literate to learned. In order to create this repertoire he often sought melodies that reflected strongly Germanic elements merged with pan-European and traditional Christian styles.<sup>67</sup> Luther’s melodies, newly created or borrowed/adapted from others, show artful design and significant craft. Edward Foley, a contemporary theologian, scholar, and musician, said it well

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when he wrote that Luther accomplished this “without sacrificing either art or the community’s participation in the same.”<sup>68</sup>

Thus, each new generation may study Luther’s hymns as a model of variety in musical style and design for carrying a spiritual text. Even 500 years later Luther’s principle is still good: find the best melodies for the royal priesthood to sing in worship of God, tunes that are well-crafted and varied in design.

<sup>1</sup> The New Testament does not call a minister of the Gospel “priest” (Greek, *hiereus*; Latin, *sacerdos*).

<sup>2</sup> Information on authorship is derived primarily from standard sources: “Luther, Martin,” John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957; a reprint of 2d rev. ed., 1907) I:703-4; *Luther's Works*, Volume 53: *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. by Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965); Martin Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 35 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1923); these are interpreted in the light of Markus Jenny's supplement to Volume 35 of the Weimar edition: Markus Jenny, *Luther's geistliche Lieder und Kirchengesänge*, Archiv zur Weimarer Ausgabe der Werke Martin Luthers, Vol. 4 (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> The manuscript is reproduced in various places, e.g., Walter Blankenburg, “Martin Luther,” *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 8, Tafel 69 (hereafter cited as MGG) and a colored offprint of the same is provided with Jenny's *Luthers geistliche Lieder und Kirchengesänge* (see inside of back cover).

<sup>4</sup> Walter Buszin has reviewed the main literature on the question of musical authorship. He states that Wilhelm Bäumker and Salomo Kümmerle, Roman Catholic scholars, argued that Luther patched together various phrases from Gregorian melodies to create “*Ein feste Burg*” and other tunes attributed to him. In rebuttal, Protestant scholars like Hermann Abert, Hans Preuss, and Hans Joachim Moser developed the case for Luther's musical creative ability. See Walter E. Buszin, “Luther as Creative Musician,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 15/9 (September 1944):625-27. For a similar overview of the musical authorship debate, see Paul Nettl, *Luther and Music*, trans. by Frida Best and Ralph Wood (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967; reprint of Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 28f.

<sup>5</sup> See Wilhelm Bäumker, “*Ein feste Burg*,” *Monatshefte für Musik-Geschichte*, 12/9 (1880):155, 173-74. Cf. Wilhelm Bäumker, “Das deutsche Sanctus von Luther,” *Monatshefte für Musik-Geschichte*, 12/1 (1880):14-15, 200-22. Here Bäumker's point that Luther's *Sanctus* parallels a Gregorian melody in the fifth mode is well-made. Furthermore, his case for borrowing from Gregorian models may imply a compliment, namely, that Luther valued Gregorian melodies enough to use them as models for his melodies. From his viewpoint, Bäumker thought Gregorian melodies more suitable for worship than those modeled after a folk idiom or “secular” traditions of the Meistersingers.

<sup>6</sup> On Luther as hymnwriter see pp. 38-55 in Hans Joachim Moser, *Die evangelische Kirchenmusik in Deutschland* (Berlin-Darmstadt: Carl Merseburger, 1953). On the tunes, see Hans Joachim Moser, *Die Melodien der Lutherlieder* (Leipzig: Gustav Schönmanns Verlagsbuchhandlung [1935]), which is the most extensive treatment on the authorship of the tunes. A helpful, though now somewhat quaint, overview is given in James F. Lambert, *Luther's Hymns* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1917), especially pp. 18-19. The most precise and up-to-date treatment is Jenny's supplement to volume 35 of the Weimar edition of *Luther's Works* (see footnote no. 1, above).

<sup>7</sup> Nettl, *Luther and Music*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Moser, *Die Melodien der Lutherlieder*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Nettl's translation of this quotation (given in Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum*, I:452) is reproduced in Robin A. Leaver and Ann Bond, “Luther, Martin,” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 11:336, hereafter cited as *NG*.

<sup>10</sup> See Rudolf Gerber, “Zu Luthers Liedweisen,” *Festschrift Max Schneider zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Hans Joachim Zingel (Halle: Ernst Schneider, 1935), 26-39.

<sup>11</sup> See *Luther's Works*, 53:337-441.

<sup>12</sup> *Didonis novissima verba* has a rather doubtful attribution. *Höre Gott mein Stimm'in meiner Klage* (Ps. 64) is a four-part harmonization of a melody closely resembling the first psalm tone. While the single sheet carries the name of Luther in bold type, it, unfortunately, gives no hint as to date, place or publisher. Its homophonic style provides little evidence of contrapuntal skills. One notes that two recent “lists of works” attribute only *Non moriar* and the setting of Ps. 64 to Luther. See Blankenburg, *MGG*, 8:1334 and *NG*, 11:371.

<sup>13</sup> Lessons were conducted in Latin, hence the name “Latin school.”

<sup>14</sup> Blankenburg, *MGG*, 8:1334.

<sup>15</sup> G. Kraft, “Eisenach,” *NG*, 6:87.

<sup>16</sup> David G. Wagner, ed., *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) gives an extensive description of this ancient curriculum, its history and content built around the study of word and number.

<sup>17</sup> A section of this work has been translated in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History: From Classical Antiquity through the Romantic Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950), 172-79.

<sup>18</sup> His *De inventione et usu musicae* was published around 1487. For a translation of excerpts from *Tinctoris's Proportionale musicas* (1476) and his *Liber de arte contra-puncti* (1477) see Strunk, 193-96, 197-99.

<sup>19</sup> For greater detail regarding what was covered see Theodore C. Karp, “Music” in Wagner's *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages*, 169-195.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Blankenburg, *MGG*, 8:1336.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Joachim Moser, *Die Melodien der Lutherlieder* (Leipzig: Gustav Schönmanns Verlagsbuchhandlung, [1935]), 21, where Moser references a letter written to Johann Agricola, 15 May 1530

- <sup>23</sup> Luther Reed, *Luther and Congregational Song* (New York: The Hymn Society of America, 1947), 2.
- <sup>24</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:339-41; *Werke*, 35:437. This work was recorded under the direction of Hans Grüss in 1982 (*Musik der Reformation*, Capriccio Digital 751007 [LC 8748], a three record set, co-produced by Delat Music GMBH and VEB deutsche Schallplatten Berlin/DDR. The notes by Grüss (p. 9) give this estimate of the work: “*Non moriar sed vivam*’ is a *cantus firmus* motet, though short [40 seconds], perhaps so short that it reveals the too short breath of the amateurish music lover, yet it reveals a neat mastery of the composition work.”
- <sup>25</sup> Josquin Des Prez (1450-1521), the greatest contrapuntalist of late fifteenth century Netherlands, had held many positions including some in Italy. He was Luther’s favorite composer.
- <sup>26</sup> Admittedly, it is difficult to know where to draw the line on authorship. The two strongest attributions (*Jesaia dem Propheten* and *Ein feste Burg*) must be included. Two Gregorian-inspired tunes (*Verleih uns Frieden* and *Erhalt uns, Herr*), one revision of a German hymn-tune (*Vater unser*), and three tunes which seem to have no other source than Luther’s creativity complete the eight. Other choices from the thirty-seven might be discussed with benefit, but it is doubtful if they would yield significant, new observations about musical style and form.
- <sup>27</sup> Don Randel, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), hereafter *NHDM*, s.v., “Style.”
- <sup>28</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:286f; *Werke*, 35:521. This melody, as well as the other seven, are studied here in the version exhibited in the Weimar edition of Luther’s works and treated again in Jenny’s 1985 supplement to volume 35. The transcriptions employ note values which have been quartered. The English texts are from *Lutheran Service Book*.
- <sup>29</sup> Konrad Ameln, *The Roots of German Hymnody of the Reformation Era* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 18. Another source suggests that the tune is derived from a Gregorian *Da pacem*; see Marilyn Kay Stulken, *Hymnal Companion to the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 494. See also *Luther's Works*, 53:286, where Leupold calls attention to similarities between *Erhalt uns Herr*, *Nun komm der Heiden, Heiland* and this hymn tune. On this point see Ameln’s extended discussion of similarities, 18-20.
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. *Luther's Works*, 53:235, where Leupold describes the melodic adaptations from the Gregorian original.
- <sup>31</sup> See LBW 471, LW 219, CW 522, EG 421, LSB 778 and ELW 784. It should be noted that Jenny’s 1529 source and 1531 source (used in Jenny’s EXAMPLE A) differ in pitch and rhythm from these modern editions. See Jenny, 274.
- <sup>32</sup> The “church modes” are used to classify Gregorian chant. Each mode is defined by the final (the pitch on which the melody ends), the relation of the pitches to this final pitch, and the range of the pitches. There are only four finals (d, e, f, and g). The melodies that range from the pitch below to an octave higher are labeled “authentic” (modes i, iii, v, vii) and the melodies that stretch from a fifth below the final to the sixth above are labeled “plagal” (modes ii, iv, vi, viii) Thus there are eight “modes,” four authentic modes and four plagal.
- <sup>33</sup> Leupold in *Luther's Works*, 53:325.
- <sup>34</sup> Jenny, 105 (see also Moser, 521).
- <sup>35</sup> This might be a version of the Gregorian melody that Luther had in mind and is from *The Liber Usualis* (Tournai: Desclée Company, 1962), 61.
- <sup>36</sup> See footnote 5.
- <sup>37</sup> The term *musica ficta* is used to describe “intended accidentals left unwritten ... but added in performance” such as singing a flatted B (written as natural B) that occurs between two As. See *NHDM*, s.v., “Musica ficta,” 517.
- <sup>38</sup> For example, Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537) in a German part-song, *Mein’s traurens ist*. See *Historical Anthology of Music*, Vol. 1, No. 93, 96-97.
- <sup>39</sup> See the facsimile in MGG, vol. 8 (TAFEL 69) after column 1334, in Blume, *Protestant Church Music*, 25, or in Jenny, which has a fold-out, color reproduction mounted on its inside back cover.
- <sup>40</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:295. A comparison of Michael Weisse’s 1531 melody and Luther’s revision of it is given in Ameln, 22, where one easily sees the significant changes that were made!
- <sup>41</sup> *Werke*, 35:527.
- <sup>42</sup> For a more extended treatment of Luther’s absorption of Meistersinger techniques see Johannes Riedel, *The Lutheran Chorale: Its Basic Traditions* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 38-53.
- <sup>43</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:223.
- <sup>44</sup> *Werke*, 35:527.
- <sup>45</sup> Ameln presents a TABLE (19) which compares the Latin hymn *Veni redemptor gentium* with five other tunes, three of which came from Luther’s workshop. Here *Verleih uns Frieden*, *Erhalt uns, Herr* and *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* show remarkable resemblances to the twelfth century model. Carl von Winterfeld had pointed out this resemblance already in 1843. However, the third phrase of *Erhalt uns, Herr* is clearly new material and seems to show Luther’s creative sensitivities! Thus, the resemblances, rather than arguing against his musicianship, show that “in spite of their common origin each of Luther’s melodies has acquired its own characteristic features” (20).
- <sup>46</sup> This secular folksong, *Aus fremder Landen komm ich her*, is discussed in Ameln, 17f. The secular tune is given in Luther,

Werke, 35:524 and in Jenny, 287.

<sup>47</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:283.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see *Historical Anthology of Music*, Vol. 1, No. 87 and No. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted from *Music in Western Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1941), 207 by Walter Buszín, "Luther as a Creative Musician," 627.

<sup>50</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:63.

<sup>51</sup> Note that "*Sie ist mir lieb, die werthe Magd*" (TABLE 1, No. 30), which is included in none of the modern hymnals, had the most complex rhythms of all of Luther's hymns. Among other challenges are a melisma with eight and another with eleven pitches for one syllable. See *Luther's Works*, 53:293; Jenny, 292.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Luther's Works*, 53:148f. Luther's German Gloria in excelsis uses a syllabic chant style within duple rhythm. Compare this with the triple "meter" melody by Nikolaus Decius (See *Lutheran Service Book*, 947, "All Glory Be to God on High") for a more popular German *Gloria* tune. The closing portion of "*Sie ist mir lieb*" has a section with a triple pattern but this complex melody was so soloistic that it was dropped from hymnals after appearing in 1545.

<sup>53</sup> The word "style" here refers to "the manner in which something is said as distinct from what is being said" (*NHDM*, 811). When used of music this meaning can point to the features that characterize works of a genre or a composer. It is meant to encompass all aspects of the music. In Luther's case, it is obvious that *Ein feste Burg* and *Jesaia dem Propheten* are distinctly different, for example, in rhythmic pattern and in form. Thus, it is possible to speak of contrasting "styles" in Luther's hymn melodies.

<sup>54</sup> For example, compare Luther's tunes with the four-line strophe in the "ballad style" (e.g., common meter with alternating lines of eight and six syllables) which has long dominated English hymnody.

<sup>55</sup> Others have proposed similar categories, e.g., Riedel (13-31) identifies from pan-European and Germanic traditions these sources: Roman chant, medieval hymns (Latin hymns, German folk hymns and extra-liturgical folk hymns) and secular folk melodies.

<sup>56</sup> *NHDM*, 352.

<sup>57</sup> Jenny, 115.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* Jenny reproduces the melody used with Weisse's text, "*Beghren wir mit Innigkeit*."

<sup>59</sup> *NDHM*, s.v., "Meistersinger."

<sup>60</sup> *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., 16:295-297.

<sup>61</sup> *NDHM*, s.v., "Bar form."

<sup>62</sup> *NHDM*, s.v., "Song." By the end of the nineteenth century "popular song" publishing became big business and during the twentieth century recorded songs replaced publishing as the primary way of distributing songs; first sheet music and then recordings overwhelmed the art song category.

<sup>63</sup> *Luther's Works*, 53:293.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 53:289.

<sup>65</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10 discusses a priesthood of all believers: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the quotations in Carl F. Schalk, *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), especially 34 and 37.

<sup>67</sup> On this point, see Riedel's excellent summary (30f) regarding the influences on and sources of the Lutheran chorale.

<sup>68</sup> Edward Foley, "Martin Luther: A Model Pastoral Musician," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 14/6 (December 1987): 418.

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