

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EARLY AND MEDIEVAL CHURCH ON THE
GERMAN EVANGELICAL HYMNODY FROM 1524 UNTIL 1675

by

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[i.e. Abstract of]

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Abstract
Dissertation

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The influence of the Early and Medieval Church on the German Evangelical hymnody during the initial periods of its history, namely, those of the Reformation, the Counter Reformation, and the Baroque is deep. Much of this influence comes from the fields of art, literary science, theology, and song.

The indifference of this influence may be attributed to a lack of knowledge. There is a need to remedy this neglect. It is not generally understood that the German Evangelical hymnody of these three periods maintained a spiritual and textual continuity of theology derived from the Latin hymns of the Early and Medieval Church.

Martin Luther was the most important leader among the Reformers who Germanized the Latin hymns. He and his colleagues relied upon the texts of the old Latin hymns which they Germanized into the vernacular of their day. They did not want to dispose of any Catholic forms that were true, as they saw it, with the Gospel.

The hymns of the Counter Reformation were chiefly eschatological. Certain hymns like the "Dies irae, dies illa," that go back to the 13th century, were reworked by the German Evangelical poets.

The pattern shift in the Baroque period introduced a new style in respect to meter and certain artistic embellishments. In the analysis of the Baroque hymns it is necessary to bring out the mechanics of the poetry in order to show the difficulties that the poets experienced in their striving to attain the level of their European contemporaries. The reemphasis on the Latin and Greek studies in this period brought about the resurgence of interest in the old Latin hymns.

Even though the hymns of these three periods faced different problems, basically they reveal the important truths expressed by the Latin hymns of the Early and Medieval Church. The Latin derivation can be seen running through the German Evangelical hymns like a red thread.

PREFACE

This dissertation is about the influence of the Early and Medieval Church upon the German Evangelical hymnody. Since there is a general indifference to this influence, based no doubt on a lack of knowledge, an attempt will be made to remedy this neglect.

Since the period of my childhood my education brought me into intimate contact with the hymns of the German Evangelical Church. My father, who was born and reared in Germany, came to the United States, studied theology, and became a minister of the Lutheran Church. He conducted the congregational services in the German language. As a child I became well acquainted with many German Lutheran hymns. When I was confirmed in 1912, each member of our confirmation class received a hymnal entitled as follows: Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gesangbuch fuer Kirche, Schule und Haus or Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal for Church, School, and House. I have always had an abiding interest in the hymns, learning many of them from my mother.

The following year I entered Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, a Lutheran institution of learning. The first four years I spent as a high school student. The other four years I devoted to collegiate studies. The

classical education that I received consisted of seven years of the study of Latin, five years of Greek, and two years of Hebrew. These languages were taught through the medium of the German language. My outstanding professors had received their doctoral degrees from such famous German universities as those of Berlin, Halle, and Jena. To them I am grateful for their help in deepening my knowledge of the classics. At the end of my college career I received a B.A. degree.

Later I received a B.D. degree from the Seminary of the Wisconsin Lutheran Synod and an M.A. degree from the University of Chicago. My advisor there was Dr. Ferdinand Schevill who broadened my knowledge of the study of German history.

In the 1960's the courses that I studied, first at the University of Chicago, then at Marquette University, were invaluable to me as a college professor, teaching future theological students in the field of German literature.

I enrolled as a graduate student in the University of Heidelberg in 1966. I am most grateful to Frau Prof. Dr. Elfriede Stutz, under whose guidance I studied Old High German and Middle High German. In 1972 I completed my study of the history of the German language and earned an M.A. degree.

In 1975 I reenrolled in the Graduate School of Marquette University. In order to earn a doctoral degree in religious studies with an area of concentration in Latin

and German hymnody, I completed all the requirements in the theological department's doctoral program. To Drs. Burns, Egan, Lienhard, and Sheehan, the chairman of the Department, I am grateful for their assistance.

Under the guidance of Dr. Kenneth G. Hagen a scholarly relationship was developed that prevented the customary "retirement syndrome" characteristic of "advanced age" from overtaking me. To him I give my deepest appreciation.

To my wife, Ellen, I am grateful for her encouraging attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

The influence of the Early and Medieval Church on the German Evangelical hymnody during the initial periods of its history, namely, those of the Reformation, the Counter Reformation, and the Baroque was profound. Much of this influence came from the fields of art, literary science, theology, and above all else, song.

At a time when the indifference to the influence of the Early and Medieval Church on the hymnody of the German Evangelical Church may be attributed to a lack of knowledge, there is a need to remedy this neglect. It is not generally understood that the German Evangelical hymnody of these three periods maintained a continuity of spiritual and textual content of theology derived from the Latin hymns of the Early and Medieval Church. The foundation of a building is not always visible, but is important because the structure of the building is usually as sound as its base. The German Evangelical hymns have endured, and many are still sung in Germany and America today.

Martin Luther was the most important leader among the Reformers who Germanized the Latin hymns. It is fitting at this time to define the title, "German Evangelical." Luther called his Church "Evangelisch" or "Evangelical" by

way of emphasizing the teaching and the authority of Holy Writ. As a member of the Evangelical Church he stressed the tenet that salvation is achieved by personal conversion to faith in the atonement of Christ.

Since Luther's time the German Evangelical Church has gone through some revisions. During the time of Friedrich Wilhelm III, who ruled over Prussia from 1797 until 1840, a unification of the churches called the "Evangelical" and those called the "Reformed" was effected. Nothing is said in the thesis regarding the hymns of the Reformed Church. These events are mentioned for the sake of clarification of the term, "Evangelical," as it is used in this thesis. The Church of the Protestants in Germany is a state church known as the "Evangelische Kirche" or the "Evangelical Church" today.

A book that is valuable for research into the hymns of Luther is the Cesangbuch published by Valentin Babst in 1545 in whose foreword Luther wrote a year before his death as follows:

If any would not sing and talk of what Christ has wrought for us, he shows thereby that he does not really believe and that he belongs not into the New Testament which is an era of joy, but into the Old, which produces not the spirit of joy but of unhappiness.

The other books that were useful for the dissertation are the following: Geschichte des deutschen evangelischen Kirchenliedes by Dr. Wilhelm Nelle and Liederkunde edited by thirteen German professors.

Luther's reliance upon the texts of the old Latin

hymns was no doubt due to his deep involvement in the Latin language. As a friar and priest in Erfurt he became a great Latin scholar. As professor at the University of Wittenberg he taught through the medium of Latin. He admired the beauty and clarity of this language with which he had become familiar throughout his religious career.

The brevity with which deep feelings are expressed in Latin is an advantage for all lyricists. Luther and his colleagues, as opposed to other groups, like the Calvinists, appreciated the beauty and the truths of the Latin hymns of the Early and Medieval Church. Although some of these hymns had been translated into the earlier German languages, namely, the Old High and the Middle High German, Luther and his associates used the vernacular of their day in their hymns.

Luther's hymns serve three purposes. There are those hymns which appeal to the personal needs of the individual Christian. They are sung in any private service, especially in the home. Most of his hymns pay a tribute to the different periods of the church year. Finally, a few hymns stress the doctrines of the German Evangelical Church.

Many members of the German Evangelical Church were inclined to resort to prayer hymns more than ever during the period of the Counter Reformation. Although the eschatological prayer hymns were products of a sense of uncertainty, dread, and fear that was prevalent during this period of

unrest with its threat of war, plagues, and the rise of sectarianism, there were a few poets who wrote joyously. The hymn, "Wie schoen leuchtet der Morgenstern" or "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star," was written by one such poet, Philipp Nicolai. The beautiful Marienlied or hymn in honor of Mary, "Es ist ein Ros entsprungen" or "Behold, a Branch Is Growing," which originated in the Rhineland toward the close of the Middle Ages and is best known today in the revised version of the German composer and writer of musical works, Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), is another which gladdened the hearts of many depressed Christians. It is necessary to discuss both kinds of hymns of this period in order to show that hope was not dead.

A pattern shift in the Baroque period was brought about by several leaders, one of whom was Martin Opitz (1597-1639) who introduced a new style that embodied the use of rich symbolism, contrast, and emphasis by the repetition of certain words or expressions which encouraged the development of a more elegant poetry and prose. Although the rules that Opitz introduced created stilted interpretations, it may be said that in spite of some regimentation the majority of the hymns did become more refined and elegant.

The analysis of the Baroque hymns in respect to meter and various components of the new style may seem belabored. It is necessary to bring out the mechanics of the poetry in order to show the difficulties that the poets

experienced in their striving to attain the level of their European contemporaries. It can probably be said safely that they did not always achieve this greatness. The introduction of new meters such as the Alexandrine, the Alcaic, the Sapphic, and the "Nibelungenstrophe" brought the German hymn into closer contact with the Romance languages which are based on such movements as the Renaissance and the Greco-Roman. The reemphasis of Latin and Greek studies produced a resurgence of interest in the old Latin hymn.

Though the hymns of these three periods faced different problems, fundamentally they reveal the important truths expressed by the Latin hymns of the Early and Medieval Church.

and "all-alles."

G. Concluding Remarks about the
Period of the Reformation

In conclusion it may be stated that Luther and his colleagues Germanized much of the hymnody of the Early and Medieval Church. Above all, not only the hymns of St. Ambrose, who is the father of Christian Latin hymnody, but also those of other poets who had adopted the Ambrosian hymn became well known to thousands of German Christians through the German Evangelical Church. These poets revived the Apostle Paul's conception of hymnody which he expressed in Colossians 3:16 as follows:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Through struggles for a type of hymnody that stressed Christian dogma, Evangelical hymnody rallied the support of Christian theologians by providing for the church a solid and lasting foundation, based on Latin hymns.

Luther edited the early medieval hymns and kept what he considered to be true. He related hymnody to the liturgical worship practices of the Church.

The three classes of Luther's hymns give structure to their organization. Those for private service, the liturgical, and the liturgic-catechetical are always related to doctrine with lyrics that are usually clear and interesting. The majority of his hymns are associated with the

ecclesiastical year.

Luther's loyalty to the Latin text was translated into the German of his day with fidelity and with a choice of lyrics that turned them into hymns of word pictures that many of his admirers think to be as appealing as the ecclesiastical structures with their paintings and sculptures were to the Medieval Church.

His colleagues also translated parts of Latin texts or composed original German hymns of their own.

Some of the hymns were not only translated into the German of Luther's time, but also into the tongues of the different European nations and sung by thousands of Christians in their churches and homes.

Ultimately, they constituted the basis for the composition of modern hymns, most of which were Germanized and Anglicized, and today are sung by many Christians who live and practice their faith in all parts of the world.

The poets of the Reformation took the monumental step of reaching for the new with the one hand, while holding firmly to the old with the other.

but upon the one important spiritual event, namely, Christ's birth that reopens the paradise for all mankind, which was closed by an angry God because of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.⁹⁸

The particular feature about Herman's hymn is that instruction and song constitute a unity. This instruction does not rest upon the revelation of many events, but upon the revelation of a message of joy which is not based upon any exuberance of emotion, but upon the theological insight that mankind since its fall is able to pass through the door of paradise again. After the fall the Cherub stands before this door. Until Christ's birth the first step of mankind was the following: From paradise to earth. Now, since Christ's birth, the second step has come to mankind: from earth to paradise.⁹⁹

Kindly
begin
here:

→ G. Concluding Remarks about the Counter Reformation

The imminence of the Thirty Years' War, the prevalence of plagues, the growth of sectarianism, and the general uncertainty with its terror and dread of death gave rise to the eschatological hymn. Perhaps the finest example of the hymns of that time can be shown through the translation of the Sequence, "Dies irae, dies illa," which was translated from an earlier Latin version. As the original text is said by some to have illustrated the mood of the age, so this translation in the Counter Reformation reflected the gloom and pessimism of its period.¹⁰⁰ Its

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Biblical background is derived from the Gospel passages referring to the Last Judgment. The first verse reflects the medieval "Sibyl" tradition and the present translation has preserved the original majesty. It crystallized man's thought into a stirring picture of the horror of the Last Judgment. Its classical reminiscences make it a poem as dark as any of Dante's tormented dreams. Not until the time of the Counter Reformation did the Sequence find its entrance into the German Evangelical Hymnal. It has remained popular. No other Sequence has had more numerous translations into vernacular language.

Many more prayer hymns were strongly eschatological. The composers were concerned over the retention of the word of God in its truth and purity because they believed that the Day of Judgment would be preceded by a period of neglect and disbelief in the Gospel of Christ.

Yet not all of these hymns reveal a pessimistic spirit. For the first time one can hear the clear and lovely sounds of the Jesus Hymns that give comfort and hope to the devoted followers of Christ and his Gospel.

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follows in 2 Timothy 2:5, and 4:7-8:

No one who competes in the games is awarded a crown unless he obeys the rules.

I have had a part in the great contest, I have run my race, I have preserved my faith: Now the crown of uprightness awaits me, which the Lord, the upright judge, will award me on that Day, and not only me but also all who have loved and hoped for his appearing.¹⁹⁶

The final stanza is a serious admonition of the poet to cling to that which is recorded in Revelations 2:10b:

Prove faithful even unto death and I will give you the crown of life.¹⁹⁷

One may say that for Scheffler as a mystic all antitheses exist as mental delusions. Yet the fact remains that for any mystic who like Scheffler is deeply devoted to God all antitheses are the highest forms of expression of a divinity that is able to unify all contrasts.¹⁹⁸

Catholic, not only in a denominational sense, but in the traditional dogmatic sense with a personal flavor of rich imagery, his bold poetry met with the approval of the Catholic and the German Evangelical Churches. Outwardly ascetic, inwardly ecstatic, his Baroque paradoxy led the way toward Pietism.

H. Concluding Remarks about the Baroque Period

The re-emphasis of Greek and Latin studies renewed an interest in the old Latin hymns, presenting them in a style that, in general, became more refined, while keeping old values unchanged. The text became bolder in the

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symbolism of its pictures. Closely allied with solemn doctrinal theses, the architecture, art, and literary style of the Baroque period created a milieu in which some majestic hymns were produced. The rules and regulations set up by Opitz brought out the finest and the worst in the poets. Some artistic embellishments worked while others did not. The artificiality of superimposing the Alexandrine meter, for example, on the German language more or less dried up the spontaneity of some poets. Gerhardt paid little attention to the regulations of Opitz, and his hymns are among the best of the Baroque poets. His songs are known for their straightforwardness and freshness of language.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In retrospect upon these three periods, it is interesting and important to know how many hymns of the German Evangelical Church originated from two sources. The one source is that of the Latin hymns of the Early and Medieval Church. The other is that of the "Mischpoesie" or mixture of German and Latin words or phrases in any Medieval hymn that is based on its Latin precursor.

Luther spent several years in Erfurt, first as a student of the University, secondly, as a friar of the Augustinian Order, finally, as a priest of one of the urban churches. He devoted most of his time to the study of Greek and Latin literature in the original, philosophy, and theology. He became so well acquainted with the music and texts of the Latin hymns that during the initial years of his professorship at the University of Wittenberg, which was founded in 1502 by the Elector Frederick III, "the Wise," of Saxony, he found it difficult to free these hymns from their lofty Latinity in order to make them well known to and well liked by his Christian followers in their Germanized version. As Ambrose is the father of the Latin hymn, Luther is the propagator of the Ambrosian hymn from its exclusive use by the clergy during the congregational service to that of all members of the Church.

Luther may be regarded as the pioneer of a movement which developed from a vernacular hymnody closely related to the lines of German folk song to that of the magnificent hymns of the Baroque period. On account of the introduction of new meters and forms of expression, particularly from France and Italy, the individual members of the German Evangelical congregations became better acquainted with and more appreciative of the Latin hymns through the medium of their native language.

As St. Augustine, who was converted to Christianity by Bishop Ambrose of Milan, has recorded how deeply moved he was by the hymns of this great church father because they expressed the central and distinctive convictions of the Christian faith, likewise many poets of these three periods continued the work of Ambrose and other pioneers of ecclesiastical hymnody.

The strength of the German Evangelical hymns lies in the spirit of sincerity to the word of God that was not always elegantly expressed, but was conveyed with a text that was never superficial. The Latin derivation can be seen running through the hymns like a red thread. Each different period produced, by virtue of its time, certain influences that put their own stamps on the hymns. The heritage of hymnody was shaped by the development of the church through its poets.