

An Evaluation of Professor Koehler's Dealing with the Problem of Poor Singing and the Use of Poor Music in the Congregation with an Emphasis on How This Influenced the Musical Curriculum and Thinking of Our Seminary

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The past 25 years have witnessed a decline in singing among our Christians of German extraction... I have in mind the kind of singing which is vital to us, which once was and again could get to be a powerful tool in the church, the simple, straightforward folk- and congregation-singing.¹

This is a lament Professor J. P. Koehler made in an article which he wrote in the *Evangelische-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt* in December of 1900. Because he personally felt that good singing was such an important part of worship in the church service, in the years following 1900 he spent a good amount of time literarily and practically trying to restore good singing and the use of good music to the churches of our synod. Because he did a large share of this work in the area of music as a professor at our Seminary, he has left his impact on our Seminary in the area of music. It is my intention in this paper to present both Koehler's analysis of and solution to the problem of the decline of singing and use of good music in our synod's church services. Then I will evaluate how his dealing with this problem in our synod affected the thinking and curriculum of our Seminary in the area of music. It is hoped that such a study of Professor Koehler will give us some valuable insights as we deal with what appears to be a similar decline in the singing of and use of good music in our churches today.

John Philipp Koehler was born on January 17, 1859, in Manitowoc, Wisconsin to Pastor and Mrs. Christian Philipp Koehler. His father was a pastor in our synod and was considered to be an early exponent of Lutheran confessionalism. When Philipp was still young, his father accepted a call to be pastor at the Lutheran church in Hustisford. It is here that Philipp received his primary education at the church's parochial day school. Upon completion of his primary education he was sent to Northwestern College in Watertown and there received his high school and college education. In 1877 he graduated from Northwestern College and then entered Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. There he studied under men like Walther (Dogmatics) and Stoeckhardt (Exegesis).

In 1880 he finished his formal training for the ministry and began his work as a pastor by being what we would probably call a vicar to Professor G. Hoenecke in Milwaukee. It was in these early years of his ministry that he also served as an assistant pastor to his father in Hustisford. In 1882 he accepted a call to St. John's in Two Rivers, Wisconsin. He served that congregation until 1888.

During his ministry in Two Rivers he was united in marriage to Amalia Rohlfing. The marriage took place January 4, 1882 at St. Louis, Missouri. Their marriage was blessed with ten children. His wife and five of his children preceded him in death.

In 1888 he began his career as a teacher in our synodical schools, a career which lasted until his removal from the Seminary in 1930. In 1888 he accepted a call to Northwestern College to teach history, religion, German, and Latin. Twelve years later he accepted a call to be professor at our Seminary in Wauwatosa. During his thirty years of service at our Seminary he taught courses in church history, New Testament exegesis, hermeneutics, liturgics, the history of church worship, and a church architecture appreciation course. Besides this, he also conducted the Seminary Male Chorus. From the years 1920-1930 he was the president of the Seminary.

In 1930 he became involved in the Protestant Controversy and as a result was removed from his

positions of president and professor at the Seminary. In 1933 he was suspended from our synod because he continued to practice fellowship with the Protestants. As a result of all this he left the Milwaukee area and moved up to Neillsville, Wisconsin. There he spent the rest of his life living with one of his sons. It was during this part of his life that he did much writing for the Protestant's periodical *Faith-Life*. Here he also completed a literary work he had been commissioned to do while he was still a professor at our Seminary, namely, writing a history of our Wisconsin Synod. Besides keeping himself occupied with these literary efforts, he also occupied his time by giving lectures at Protestant conferences, reading a lot, doing some painting, and spending many relaxing hours going for long walks or visiting friends. He died September 30, 1951, in Neillsville, Wisconsin and he was buried there in the local cemetery.

Although much could be said about Professor Koehler as a theologian and a historian, that is not the purpose of this paper. Rather, I will be considering Professor Koehler as a musician. He was a man whom the Lord blessed with an abundance of musical talent. This was very apparent because in spite of the fact that he had little or no formal training or education in music, yet, he was very much a musician, a self-trained musician. Through personal study and reading he acquired a good knowledge of the lives and works of the great composers. He also taught himself to play some musical instruments, one of which was a viola. Through his own personal studies he became especially knowledgeable in the area of the 16th century and early 17th century German congregational songs, songs which were very precious to him.

He not only built up this storehouse of knowledge for himself, but he also shared his musical knowledge and insights with others. For example, at one time or another from 1900-1930 he was director of at least three different choirs: Seminary Male Chorus, A Cappella Chorus, and Parochial School Teacher's Chorus. He also taught courses in liturgics and the history of church worship at the Seminary. Finally, he wrote numerous articles in the *Evangelische-Lutherische Gemeinde-Blatt*, the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, and *Faith-Life*, articles in which he expressed his views, knowledge, and insights into music. He wrote many of these articles on music in response to what he considered a decline in the use of good music and good singing in our synod churches. It is this area of music that I am now going to write about by presenting what Koehler has to say about this decline and then consider his attempts to check this decline, considering especially how Koehler's work in this area affected the musical thinking and curriculum of our Seminary.

In order to understand what Koehler was talking about when he spoke about this decline in singing and in the use of good music in our churches, it is first necessary to consider what Koehler meant by good singing and good music. There were a number of different and yet related factors which Koehler took into consideration. When he talked about good singing, he stressed the fact that it needed to be singing which came from the heart.

In the music of poetry we feel a great powerful movement of the spirit, urgent beneath the words. Ethan wishes to rhapsodize a situation so great and glorious, that his spirit is all atremble, so much so, in fact, that his heart expands and finds his breast too small...When he experiences great joy, his heart will palpitate...This in turn impels anyone so gifted to react to it in song. Rhythm within the soul's trembling imparts itself to oral speech, and measured lines of poetry originate following one another in beautiful sequence.²

It is a singing from the heart in which a person expresses lyrically and harmoniously what he feels inside himself and feels impelled to express.

There was also a quality in the sound for which Koehler looked, a tone quality which expressed the powerful message of the Gospel.

One reason for this attitude is the fact that the so-called musical ears of most people have been blunted by the smooth, soft, modern music thus making them imperceptive to the somewhat hard, rugged, but nevertheless staunch and honest hymn of the 16 century.

Nevertheless, these hymns do possess a peculiarly true-hearted, honest, chaste, austere trait;

and this very quality, instead of being a disadvantage, often reveals a fervent tenderness which all modern music with its smoothness and pliancy cannot approximate.³

The old songs have a resonance and a power of expression, which is lost to some extent in modern music. It is like the difference between the sound of an ancient trumpet as compared with that of the modern brass instruments which are fitted with valves not give them a wider range of tones but also the dull sound.⁴

This powerful sound which he is talking about is not only characteristic of the songs, but also of the quality of the voice which sings these songs.

Koehler also stressed the fact that the choice of good music was important. Good music to Koehler was music which expressed harmony as God created it, harmony which followed all the natural laws of sound.

Real music is not man-made but is inherent in the natural relation of material things inherent in and connected with the laws of acoustics as God created the universe. That means music never strikes a sound ear disagreeably, even if in the first moments of hearing many hide their lack of understanding by saying something disagreeable to that effect.⁵

Specifically, he pointed to music based on the diatonic scale as the best kind of music because it was the result of composers discovering the principles of the nature of sound as God created them.

I maintain that David would have appreciated the beauty of our Lutheran Chorale, even if he could not have completely fathomed it. How do you account for that? God arranged all the melodic and harmonic ideas incorporated in the diatonic scale in the nature of sound. Man did not invent the diatonic scale, he discovered it. That's the way it is with art.

This is beautifully verified in the principles of acoustics. If you press on the exact center of a violin string and then divide this half into quarters and eighths, and so on, then you get the basic tones of the diatonic scale that underlie all the basic principles of harmony and melody and in the exact sequence at that in which the development of music history was consummated in the course of 1500 years.⁶

To Koehler good music was also music which objectively expressed the truths of Scripture contained in the poetry.

In the old church-song the entire expression lies in the melody and the harmony as such, whereas the newer music gives the musician opportunity to add something of his own to the music in its rendition. This individuality or subjectivity will pass, but the typical will remain. Therefore all music that develops this trend-still farther will pass away, when the "Gemeindelied" still remains...

Everyone will understand this music according to his own bent, whereas the Lutheran congregation hymn allows for no other interpretation.⁷

Not only did Koehler praise the objective kind of music as exemplified in the Lutheran chorale, but he also negatively criticized the subjective styles of music because they draw too much attention to the music and not enough attention to the message.

Another essential ingredient according to Koehler for good singing was familiarity.

Whoever has heard much concert music knows how extremely important familiarity with the selection is for the right mood is in listening. No amount of technique, urged upon and striven

for, can accomplish what familiarity with the music achieves, namely, that the heart is lifted up. The same holds true of congregational singing.⁸

All the technique in the world will not produce good singing in a congregation unless people are familiar with the songs.

Here Koehler is not only referring to the music of the song, but also the poetry of the song. Koehler stressed the importance of having songs with a poetic message which is familiar so that the congregation can then sing the songs better.

Nevertheless they are of such a nature that they proclaim the simple Scriptural truth which is reflected in the Christians' hearts. Above all, they speak in a narrative tone what Scripture proclaims: the Gospel, which is familiar and dear to the congregation, so that when the melody is struck, everyone joins in the familiar hymn and sings along.⁹

Of course that familiar message which he was referring to was the Gospel message. This he especially stressed as a necessity.

The oldest hymns of the 16 century are the best, because they sing the simple and plain thoughts of Scripture without spiritual fuss and mess; they proclaim the spiritual truths which we so urgently need for our spiritual life. Therefore we call them the choice hymns of our church.¹⁰

There is yet one more characteristic which Koehler felt was essential in the poetry if the congregation was to sing it well, that is, as a unified and undivided body. The thoughts need to be objective rather than personal or subjective. The words should express the sentiments of the whole congregation. This would create a spirit of fellowship which Koehler felt was so necessary for good singing.

Something similar happens when a group of people are called upon to sing together; for instance the congregation in the church. If this is to be done properly there must be a bond uniting the singers. It is not enough that all sing in the same key. That can be done, but the results sound like it, too. One who has an ear for such matters can readily hear whether they sing the prescribed melody perfunctorily or whether the inner harmony of the singers, carried on the wings of a common thought, lifts their united voices on high as a congregation, thereby giving the singing its real and peculiar life.¹¹

Besides the common objective thoughts, Koehler also pointed to the need for the objective thoughts to be expressed with a childlike simplicity if the song is to be sung well.

I mean with this the childlike originality, the childlike simplicity, the joy, the earnestness, and the childlike truthfulness of the hymn, in the way it originated, in the thoughts it presents, and in the manner in which it expresses itself.¹²

The thoughts are not lofty, intellectual, and subjective, but rather simple and to the point. Koehler pointed to this problem if the thoughts were not expressed in this way.

For not everyone is able immediately to follow such keen thoughts, be they ever so truly and beautifully drawn from Scripture. That it would surely disturb the singing if the singer would first need to consider what the text means to say, and then, before he has arrived at an answer find the stanza ended. The result would be that the people would be singing words without concern for the sense.¹³

Koehler also had little use for alien expressions, figurative expressions, and extensive detail (20 verse hymns) for that too he felt took away from the childlike simplicity of the song.

In the same way our earlier church hymns differ from our latter ones. It is with the latter that the trend first appears which evolves and employs artificial phraseology, affected comparisons, detailed similes, predominantly figurative expressions, and studiously labored thoughts. Such hymns for the most part are not suitable for congregational singing.¹⁴

Thus, when Koehler was talking about good singing and good music, there were a number of things, a number of factors which he felt needed to be considered. For him good singing involved singing music in a tone quality which by its austerity, ruggedness, and honesty portrayed the powerful truths of the Gospel. It involved the use of music which had harmony and melody based on the natural rules of sound as God created them. It was music which could be sung from the heart because it contained the familiar messages of the Gospel in a style which was characterized by childlike simplicity. Because of the objective character of both the music and poetry, it could create a feeling of fellowship among all the people in the congregation, a feeling which he felt was essential for good singing.

If you would have asked Koehler what kind of music best contained all these qualifications, there is one answer he would have given you immediately, the early German chorales.

I therefore plan to present their old chorale to our Lutherans in a number of articles, not that they might now become acquainted with it, but that they might give attention to its unique nature and again develop an appreciation of the fact that all the world's art and poetry cannot outweigh the treasure which we Lutherans possess in our hymnal.¹⁵

This is what Koehler meant when he talked about good singing and the use of good music in our churches. In 1900 when he took a close look at the kind of singing being done in our churches and the kind of music being used, he was moved to make this lament.

The past 25 years have witnessed a decline in singing among our Christians of German extraction...I have in mind the kind of singing which is vital to us, which once was and again could get to be powerful tool in the church, the simple, straightforward folk- and congregation-singing.¹⁶

In his analysis of the decline of good singing and the use of good music in the church, he pointed to a number of European developments which helped to bring about this decline. The Enlightenment was one of those influences which he felt helped to subvert and corrupt the 16 century German chorales and thus also good singing.

This Enlightenment contained many kinds of elements of truth which we have appropriated and still retain. Yet nevertheless already at that time it led to a general apostasy from faith and naturally pulled also the congregational hymn along into the pernicious development.

Now what did the Enlightenment perpetrate in the way of the congregational hymn? Already in the foregoing period when secular opera made its debut in Italy the church concert was introduced into the divine service. Its most rounded out form is the cantata, a short sacred oratorio which calls for choir, solo, arias with duets, trios, etc., organ and instrumental accompaniment...This impaired the folk melodies of the old congregational hymns and a personal, subjective, emotional taste came into fashion. Yes, the preference for the congregational hymn disappeared because the superficial concert music was supposed to rest on

a higher level.

Instead of the rhythmical folk melody they were now to receive a solemn, devotional air which gave the notes equal time value and slowed down the tempo. At the same time, however, the aria style came into vogue. This is a melodious, emotional art song which leans toward the secular and which pours forth feeling unrestrainedly in tones that were hitherto considered unbecoming in church and in congregational hymns... We see all these influences in Bach who nevertheless outmastered them.¹⁷

Superficiality, personalizing, emotionalizing, retardation and simplification of the rhythm; these were all corruptions which Koehler felt the Enlightenment gave to German chorale. Add to these corruptions the secular aspects and the tastelessness which the Enlightenment also brought into the church and you have a good idea of what Koehler felt was the pernicious influence which the Enlightenment had on the Lutheran churches in Germany during the 18th and 19th centuries, and on our churches in our synod because they received their heritage from Europe.

Koehler also pointed to Pietism as a European-born influence which led to some of the decline of singing and of the use of good music in our churches.

But when Pietism came along, the church hit upon soft, pining, amorous, nostalgic tunes of the secular folk songs when these were published as the Halle melodies in Freylinghausen's hymnal of 1704. Of these you are probably familiar with "My Soul's Best Friend, What Joy And Blessing," "One Thing's Needful" with the waltz tempo in its second half, or "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates." Other more worthy, sober melodies were written such as "Praise The Almighty, My Soul Adore Him," "Jehovah, Let Me Adore Thee." All of these melodies reflect something of a light dainty character which should distinguish them expressly as the so-called dashing from the "old Frankish" melodies.

There also sprang up among them the tasteless, foolish songs in which God and the Lord Jesus were addressed with a brash familiarity. In these the Holy Trinity was called Papa, Mama, and their little Sweetheart, little Brother Lamb... Zinzendorf loved to indulge in such pathetic expressions in spiritual matters... Therefore there is not much to be expected in the way of melodies originating from Zinzendorf's circles. I name only the best because these are familiar to you, "The Grace Of Our Lord Jesus Christ," and "I Am Jesus Little Lamb."¹⁸

Pietism was a detrimental influence to good singing and the use of good music in the church because it also made popular the more emotional and rhythmically poor music. It brought further corruption to church music by introducing brashly familiar expressions and tasteless songs into the church. Thus Koehler branded Pietism as another one of the European-born influences which led to the decline of good singing and the use of good music in our churches.

Koehler was not about to let rationalism go unscathed in his literary attacks against European influences which nurtured the decline in singing and use of good music in our churches.

In Germany there has long been underway work to create new interest in the musical nature of the great period of our Lutheran Church, the 16th and 17th centuries. The object of this renewed study is the elevating and vitalizing of congregational singing, following the period of Rationalism which had vulgarized, sabotaged and suppressed it.¹⁹

The mighty, ancient introit hymns were replaced with ordinary devotional hymns. The principal hymn no longer took cognizance of the church year but now in academic fashion became the sermon hymn. The texts of the old hymns which the congregations refused to allow to be taken from them were vandalized by way of alteration so that in place of their powerful language the

flippant, affected and spiritless nonsense of that time crept in, still another proof how unspiritual the time was not only in that the period itself brought forth nothing solid, but in that it could neither understand nor treasure what it had received. In music they reduced the old church modes to the new major and minor keys and altered the harmony as they did the text, The old, bold magnificent intervals were filled out with transitional notes. With the introduction of notes of equal time value the singing became dragged out. The thought connection between the lines was now mutilated in that the organist filled in the intervals with interludes which served to exhibit the dexterity of their fingers and feet. At the end of the century a hymnal was issued which states in its foreword: "The chorales should be sung in the slowest conceivable tempo." Whereas this generation possessed no spirit and faith, this tedious singing style was intended to preserve at least the appearance of it. It was natural that the method should be equally as spiritless as the content.²⁰

There were no doubts in Koehler's mind that these three European-born influences were partially responsible for the decline of singing and use of good music in our churches. They did this by misleading the people who would eventually come to America into thinking that the German chorale needed to be changed, that more emotion needed to be added to singing and to congregational songs, that personal subjective music and poetry was desirable for congregational singing, and that even brash familiarity was even desirable at times. Koehler made the point that all this really led to was a singing which lacked inner spirit and thus which also lacked the ability to create a feeling of togetherness among the singers.

This lack of singing with spirit was something Koehler especially emphasized as a cause for the decline of singing and use of good music in our German Lutheran churches.

However, it is likely that many rejoice over the improved choir music, while the singing of the congregation is considered to be relatively unimportant, especially when it is done perfunctorily, thus lacking the life and heartbeat of inner fellowship, as is unfortunately the case very often.²¹

This is one way in which he expressed the decline in the churches he was associated with. To check this decline and, in fact to improve, he felt that unless the spirit was improved, all the methods in the world would not work.

For our trouble is not only a matter of methods; it lies deeper than the plane of external methods. The spirit in us is sick and you can't get at that except with Bible and hymnal. But he who has understood what was intended to be carried out here must acknowledge here that the other matters will automatically set themselves right once we have begun to get at this root of the evil.²²

As much credit as Koehler gave to the European influences for leading to the decline in good singing and the use of good music which Koehler was seeing his churches experience during the early 1900's, yet he also pointed to some detrimental influences which were a part of the American scene. The change in the American's life style from simple and ingenious to hectic, complex, and feverish was one influence which Koehler pegged as being instrumental in causing the decline in singing and the use of good music.

Our fathers were more simple and more ingenious than we are. Circumstances accounted for this. They lived in the early days of the revival that followed the overstimulated culture of the previous century, The plain circumstances of pioneer life in our country were ideal soil for nurturing this way of life. Church-life also shared these advantages and here, too, they proved themselves pioneers.

And it was thus that the character of our fathers was molded. In such times and circumstances men act more spontaneously in life, they restrict themselves to fewer things, and

devote themselves to these matters with correspondingly more energy. This was the case with their singing... The voices, molded by the austerity of their life, had become harsh and lacked the training which is available today; but they sang out of simple, true hearts; they sang the plain, sincere songs of the glorious days of the Reformation; and all this harmonized together...

Today things are somewhat different... In general, our church-life, when compared with that of our fathers, has been colored so that it blends in with contemporary society. Thus, our life today is more complicated. We participate in many diversified matters; we feel our needs to be greater; simplicity has vanished. Our efforts are dissipated in many directions and therefore are no longer directed upon one central thing with the same energy as in past times... This feverish pursuit of possessions, which characterizes our American life, offers little animating inducement to sing...

Our life has also become more external. We pay much more attention to the outward form and appearance of all things, and therefore do not live and express ourselves in a manner as simple and straightforward as did our fathers...

Consequently our church-singing (that of the early German chorale) impresses many a one as being harsh, crude, and uncultured. This often leads to a search for more emotional, sweet, and sentimental melodies. As a result music of more artistic form is seeking to gain a foothold among us a new means of grace in our churchlife. The serious efforts of those who sought improvement in matters musical therefore confined themselves to choral work, whereas they certainly would have borne fruits, in no less degree, had they occupied themselves with the singing of the whole congregation.²³

Then Koehler pointed to an independent character taking root in Americans, a desire to be independent of Europe and its culture. Thus Koehler stated that many of the Germans in America were anxious to drop their German singing traits and songs and replace them with the singing traits and songs of the Americans.

And without doubt the observation is probably to the point that those Germans who were the first to discard their German traits were also the first to abandon singing. Various factors contributed to this abandonment: the arduous struggle to make a living or to gain a position of independence, the desire for wealth, the ambition to emulate the English-speaking Americans, and the lack of such English folk-songs which really touch the heart in the manner of the German songs.²⁴

If the matters continue to develop on the basis of the premises existing up to the present time, then we will soon have lost the Lutheran hymn in our transition into English. The English hymn is no substitute for it.²⁵

As this last quote also spells out quite clearly, Koehler also pointed to a factor which made the German Lutherans' tendencies to discard European heritage for American heritage an even more serious problem. He felt that America had no good English substitutes in the area of congregational songs which could foster good singing in our churches, "Then again, the American does not have access to such a glorious wealth of songs as do the German people."²⁶

Yet another problem which Koehler pointed to in his attempt to explain the decline in singing in our churches was the lack of singing done at home.

In my childhood we were wont to sing folk songs and church hymns when we were gathered together. The teenagers, too, as they congregated in the shade about some house during the summer, would soon be singing our simple German songs, which for the most part were gems of poetry and music. They sang in the homes likewise, where the older folk would join in... In my parental home as well as in others I no longer find this kind of singing.²⁷

The point he wanted well taken was that practice makes perfect.

Finally, Koehler attributed some of the decline in good singing and the use of good music in our churches to a lack of good poets and composers. In his estimation there were plenty of poets and composers around, but not what he would consider good ones. They either were too emotional in their poetry or music, too much influenced by the general decline in creating art, or they were outright heathens. Concerning unbelievers and their ability to write good church songs, he had this to say.

Classicism amounts to heathenism, and one can as a matter of course expect as little church music from the great classicists as Goethe or Schiller were prepared to compose congregational hymns. No church music can possibly come forth where the feeling for the congregational hymn is lacking. An understanding of it was recaptured only when the feeling for Luther's Gospel again became widespread in the reawakening of faith in the 19th century.²⁸

So the sum and substance of all great heathen poetry and music is trifles, externalities, lust of the flesh, untruthfulness. Is that supposed to lift up the heart? One can understand now why the whole practice of poetry and music which we can observe and hear on stage and in concert runs to externalities; preoccupation with flawless intonation, polished diction, imagery and metaphors; cupping the ear for unusual melodies and harmonies, for sheer virtuosity at the piano, for rousing crescendo; all aspects which reach merely the eye and ear. The heart, however, remains cold and empty. To be sure, this music and poetry is capable of setting off emotions, but what does this come to? A sensuous excitement which like the pleasures of intoxication leaves nausea and shattered nerves the next day. Missing is the truth, the one truth which is able to cancel out the incontrovertible fact for natural man, his sin, and thus alone bring peace to the heart. What Ethan pronounces in the text therefore must still be true: the grace of the Lord and His truth is the theme of genuine music and poetry, of all music and poetry, if you really mean business.²⁹

Thus Koehler was on the look out for a good poet and musician.

I am on the lookout for a genius, a style, with originality, greatness, freedom, effectiveness, after the image of Luther and the Scriptures. One cannot, of course, manufacture this, but God gives it. And He doesn't give it in such a way that it will be wasted in an unappreciative environment or community inasmuch as He let it drop in a manner of speaking from the sky; but when God gives it, it will be the result of the combined development of our circumstances. First much of the old must die off before a new growth can sprout.³⁰

Koehler was not only a man of words. He was also a man of action. He not only verbally lamented and analyzed this decline in good singing and the use of good music in his churches, but he also put a lot of time and effort into trying to solve this problem. He did this literarily and practically. Although there is not one work of Koehler that one can go to and find all the various plans and methods Koehler implemented to try to improve the singing and the use of good music in the congregations, a study of his literary works on music offers a number of the plans he implemented.

To work on the technique of singing well Koehler suggested the idea of teaching the people how to sing well.

The serious efforts of those who sought improvement in matters musical therefore confined themselves to choral work, whereas they certainly would have borne fruits, in no less degree rich in blessing, had they occupied themselves with the singing of the whole congregation.³¹

He also hoped to bring about an improvement in singing and in the use of good music when he expressed this caution.

You can not simply take over such forms of worship from ancient times, when the general conditions, the external forms of the church, and its means of expression are not the same as ours. That was tried and it failed in the 19th century in all fields of art. Why repeat it? For, that very reason you can not avoid to concern yourself with the historic background. But it must be done on historic ground. For instance, it is not Pietism and Rationalism which is to be fought now, as one hundred years ago. That was done in the last century to some extent with the same means and along the same lines that are suggested now. Whatever then was accomplished, came not from liturgical changes but from a rise out of rationalism and pietistic legalism. The liturgical changes were the result, not the means. Wherever the situation was reversed, the varnish did not last.³²

There are two basic cautions which he is making here. The first is this: What works musically well in one period of history or among one kind of people isn't necessarily going to work well in another period of history or among another kind of people. The other caution is closely related to the first one. When dealing with a problem, you must not only consider the historic background of the problem, but you must deal with the problem by implementing a solution which takes into consideration not only the background of the problem, but also the kind of people involved in the problem. Koehler would have considered it very dangerous to try to solve the problem of poor singing by going back into a period of history where the singing was good and using their kinds of music as the solution or means to improve singing of his day. To Koehler's way of thinking problems do not necessarily change, but the solutions do because people change.

Educate, don't degenerate. That was another plan of attack he implemented to improve singing and the use of good music in his congregations.

Our assignment is to achieve the highest goals in every field with the understanding that the Gospel affords us. In connection with music, when someone objects, "Why, the people don't understand that all, they don't want to hear all that stuff!" and more along this line, it amounts to an admission. At the same time this contention is incorrect if the issues are examined from every side. Anyone who talks like this has never tried to produce in the right spirit a really great offering for the people. If this argument were correct, why haven't we trained our people in the proper appreciation? Didn't we, don't we still, possess a prime educational means, the congregational school? We have acted like the nobility which in recent years has fallen into discredit. We have talked too much about our blue blood instead of properly nourishing it. There is something to nobility. If it is to mean anything to us, however, we must of necessity observe the noble principle: "noblesse oblige" (noble is as noble does). This has slipped our grasp and now we truckle after the masses instead of leading them. Hence the general apathy toward correctly directed suggestions which in spite of everything do present themselves among us.³³

Closely related to this last idea of his was his plan to educate the clergy in the texts and music of the congregational hymns of the German Lutheran churches.

In conjunction with this work, there is another which must be carried through at our seminaries, one that has been altogether neglected. This is a thorough study of the text and music of the congregational hymn, following the same pattern outlined above for the study of Scripture. The congregational hymn plays such a prominent role in the life of the individual congregation, and has also played it in the life of the church, that it ought to be obvious how little attention this fact

has received in the training of our pastors...

Therefore it is not necessary first to bring proof that a pastor should learn to know the hymn in all its parts, in the composition of its text and music, in its history and effectiveness, because it is quite obvious that, since the congregational hymn is of the most vital importance for the life of the church, a proper or improper employment of the same will be proportionately of far-reaching consequences, for better or for worse...

Therefore it is necessary that the congregational hymn be treated and cultivated in the same way and, with the Scriptures, be elevated to the prime position in the theological curriculum.³⁴

Finally, because he felt that the 16th century German chorale was both good music and also ideal for good congregational singing, he also spent time educating both the clergy and the laymen about the kind of spirit these songs needed to be sung in.

For the present this will hardly show far-reaching results, because such developments require time. Then, too, a sense for beautiful choir music does not at once betoken a correct understanding of worthwhile congregational singing. This is especially true among us; for our Lutheran chorales are early church music; and if they are to have their full effect they must be sung in the spirit which pervaded the church at that time. For that purpose it is necessary that our church people again learn to appreciate the fact that the introduction of the early music is not a step backward. Such comprehension is still lacking at the present time.³⁵

As a man of action Koehler did not only devise different ways in which he felt he could restore good singing and the use of good music to our Lutheran churches. He energetically put these plans into action. To improve singing and also to instill in the people an appreciation for good music (early German chorales), he either set up and/or directed three different choirs: the Seminary Male Chorus, the A Cappella Chorus, and the Parochial School Teachers' Chorus. Concerning the latter two choirs he had this comment to make in regards to the purposes and results of them.

When the A Cappella Chorus and the Parochial School Teachers' Choir came into being here in Milwaukee, they were induced by their director to devote themselves to church music and in part to early church music. In a very short time the director succeeded in turning these raw recruits into technically proficient singers, resulting in a noticeable improvement in the church music of our congregations throughout the state. But that improvement is confined chiefly to choir singing; and only as such choristers participate in the singing of the congregation, thus contributing their skills and abilities which they have acquired, to congregational singing, was the latter affected also.³⁶

In regards to his second plan of attack, that of issuing a warning against using any form of worship you please without considering the people who will be using it, he carried out that plan mainly through his pen. Many of the articles he wrote on music more or less dealt with that caution. There was also one book review I came upon in which he was very critical of introducing into the worship service certain ancient forms of worship because they weren't really that relevant for the church services of his day.

A point in question is the use of the three creeds in the liturgy. True art is not given to reflections, as in the nature of the "Nicene Creed" and the "Quicumque." The "Apostolic Creed" grew in the minds of the seven centuries right along as the property of the people, so that we cannot trace the intellectual work of the individuals; this creed is folklore. The two creeds were introduced into the liturgy as measures of the school and government. They will never enter into the minds of the individuals in the 20th century as their common form of expression. Luther's

considerations concerning their use were proper in his time; they do not obtain now. Luther's situation was different from ours.³⁷

Concerning the education of the pastors both in the area of good singing and in the use of good music, there were three tools he used at the Seminary. By means of the Seminary Male Chorus he worked on improving the singing techniques of the future pastors of our synod. Through this medium he also strove to cultivate in the students an appreciation of what he considered the best kind of church music, the German chorale of the sixteenth century. He tried to accomplish the latter of these two goals by limiting the kind of music sung in this choir to mostly these German chorales. Also to improve the singing of the future pastors of our synod, Koehler spent some time during the first period of each class day practicing the singing of four-part arrangements of these early German chorales. Because he had all the students first hour, this meant that all the students were involved, whether they liked it or not, in this practice session of Koehler's. Finally, so that the future pastors would have a good knowledge of the texts and the music of the congregational hymns, Koehler started and taught two music courses at the Seminary, "Liturgics" and "The History Of Church Worship."

So that not only the clergy would receive the benefit of his knowledge of music and especially of what Good church music is, at the concerts which he directed for the public he introduced besides the singing also lectures on the music that was being sung. If you have had the opportunity to attend a concert put on by the Lutheran Chorale under the direction of Pastor Kurt Eggert, you probably also saw the kind of concert Koehler put on in terms of the format of "songs and lectures on the songs." Because a good share of the music in a Koehler concert was music from this early German heritage, his lectures interspersed between the songs often centered around the German chorale and its excellence as far as being the best kind of church music. Thus through his concerts he not only gave the audience a good taste of what he thought was good music and good singing, but he also gave to them in lecture form the reasons why he felt this way.

Finally he sought to educate both the clergy and the laymen by way of his pen. He wrote a number of lengthy articles on good singing and the use of good music in the church. He quite regularly wrote book reviews on books which dealt with various aspects of music. He took the time to write criticisms of musical compositions composed by musicians in our synod, musicians like Fritz Reuter. He also compiled into books collections of what he considered good music and then used these collections of music many times as the basis for preparing his choirs for concerts. If one were to take the time to read all the articles Koehler wrote on music as they are published in the three religious periodicals he most often wrote for, (*Gemeinde-Blatt*, *Faith-Life*, and *Theologische Quartalschrift*) one could not help but know what Koehler meant by good singing and the use of good music in the church.

Because Koehler was a professor at our Seminary for thirty of the years that he was literarily and practically involved in dealing with this problem in music, it is of no surprise that he has left a lasting influence on the musical curriculum and thinking of our Seminary. Practically speaking the most obvious fixture he added to our Seminary was the Seminary Male Chorus. Until his arrival at the Seminary there was no male chorus. The other practical fixture which he added to the Seminary and which is in part still with us today is four-part singing in the morning chapel devotions. In fact, when Koehler was a professor at the Seminary, all the music that was sung in the morning chapel devotions was sung in four-part harmony a cappella. There was no such thing as singing in unison with an instrumental accompaniment. He added these fixtures to the Seminary make-up with the idea of improving the singing in our synod by teaching the pastors how to sing well.

Until Koehler came to the Seminary music was not a part of the Seminary curriculum. During the course of his thirty years of service at the Seminary, he added to the curriculum on a permanent basis two courses in the area of music. Although I was not able to obtain information as to the exact format of the music courses as he taught them, the courses taught today have the same names and they in many ways reflect very closely his ideas about music. Compare the descriptions of the courses we have today at our Seminary with the ideas Koehler expressed concerning what he thought should be included in the music curriculum,

LITURGICS--To prepare future pastors to conduct services of worship properly, courses in

Liturgics are given. These cover the following ground: a history of the forms of worship in the Christian Church, a critical examination of their value, and practice in their use.

"Practice in Liturgical Forms"

"Doctrine and History of Worship"

CHURCH MUSIC--The purpose of this course is to acquaint the student with the historical background of modern church music practice and to prepare him for intelligent and faithful leadership in this phase of congregational life.

"Lutheran Hymnology"

"Choral Study"

"The History of Christian Church Music"³⁸

His stress on knowing historical background, knowing the texts and poetry of the congregational hymns, the choral study which most of the time is a class in which the whole student body is told how to sing well various forms of the liturgy and then immediately practices the various forms by singing them, or the in depth study of the history of church worship from early times up to today, these are all reflections of what Koehler felt should be a permanent part of the music curriculum of a seminary student. Indeed, Koehler not only initiated and taught the first courses in music at our Seminary, but he also established the format and content which would be a permanent part of the music courses of our Seminary.

In the area of what I call musical thinking, Koehler has also left his mark at the Seminary. In the three years that I have attended the classes of our Seminary, especially the music classes, this has become very apparent to me. Just consider some of the questions and answers in music which Koehler expressed himself on in the light of how our Seminary would respond to these same questions and answers and his permanent influence on the Seminary becomes obvious. What is good congregational singing? If our chapel services are any indication of what our Seminary thinks it is, the answer our Seminary would give would agree with Koehler: loud, strong, a faster rather than slower tempo, in a steady rhythm, and in a spirit which shows the unity of all of us in Christ. When there is a problem in a congregation as far as good singing is concerned, what advice would the Seminary give you? It has been my experience that the answer given is the same kind of answer Koehler would have given: educate the people as to what really is good congregational singing and then have them practice that kind of singing.

When it comes to a choice of what is the best kind of music for congregational singing, there too our Seminary would for the most part agree with Koehler. The early German Lutheran chorale is the song that ought to be considered number one in terms of hymns to be used in a church service. It is to be preferred because of its strong, dignified, and objective flavor. It is to be preferred because of its good rhythm and harmony and because of its lack of excessive emotionalism and sentimentality and vulgarness. It is to be preferred because of its more religious overtones as opposed to much of our "contemporary" music of today with its worldly and heathen overtones. It is also to be preferred because it is the kind of music which people of all races and cultures will come to like and appreciate and find easy to sing. It is preferred because it expresses best the simple truths of the Gospel.

How do you go about introducing good music into a congregation which has an excess of the "bad" kind of music? Here again the Seminary as a whole would agree with Koehler when he suggests that you educate, let them hear, and then let them practice or sing. Educate them to what good music is and why. Let them via concerts or the choir hear some good examples of the old German Lutheran hymns. Finally let them practice by singing the old German hymns and soon you will have a congregation that not only *sings well* the good old Lutheran hymns, but you will also have a congregation that *appreciates* them.

I am not going to take the time in this paper to give my personal evaluation of what Koehler has to say about good singing and the use of good music in our congregations. Nor am I going to spend time giving my personal evaluation of how our Seminary has adapted and made use of Koehler's ideas as much as it appears they have. Rather I am going to make what I feel are some rather pertinent comments. First, Koehler was a genius who had many good and valuable insights into the area of music and we can learn much from him by

reading what he has to say about music and its use in our church. I would encourage all of you to take the time to read Koehler just for that reason. However, I would do it with some caution and with some caution for two specific reasons. Koehler lived and worked in a situation which was different from ours. He was working with a people who were not only German in background, but who were for the most part still speaking German. We, on the other hand, do not find ourselves working almost exclusively with German cultured and German speaking people. We are working with a conglomeration of many kinds of cultures and nationalities. Although we may have the same kinds of musical problems which Koehler had, the solutions to these problems are not necessarily going to be the same. I also have some serious doubts about whether the early German chorale really is the ultimate congregational hymn as Koehler said it was and as many at our Seminary would say it is. I can see where it probably was very good for the people in Koehler's churches, people who were Germans in background and in language, but that is not the case with our people today. As Koehler himself would have put it, "What was good in one time isn't necessarily good for another time." This elevation of the old German chorale to such a high position in our church reminds me too much of the problems we have been experiencing in trying to get other translations into use in our synod other than the KJV. Are we really doing our people a service by elevating the German chorale to such a high pedestal and placing the other styles of music into the background or are we placing a barrier in front of them?

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- ¹ J.P. Koehler. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 4:10, 1964.
² _____. "Music," *Faith-Life*, 3:12, 1976.
³ _____. "Anent a Concert of Our Church Chorales," *Faith-Life*, 3:12, 1964.
⁴ _____. "American Lutheran Hymnal," *Faith-Life*, 7:12, 1931.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ J.P. Koehler. "Music," *Faith-Life*, 3:8-9, 1975.
⁷ _____. "Great Childlike Trait..." *Faith-Life*, 6:11, 1966.
⁸ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 5:10, 1964.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ J.P. Koehler. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 6:13, 1964.
¹¹ Ibid., p. 9.
¹² J.P. Koehler. "The Great Childlike Trait..." *Faith-Life*, 6:6, 1966.
¹³ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 5:10, 1964.
¹⁴ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 8:10, 1964.
¹⁵ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 4:12, 1964.
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 10.
¹⁷ J.P. Koehler. "Decline of the Congregational Hymn..." *Faith-Life*, 1:12@16, 1972.
¹⁸ Ibid., p. 16-17.
¹⁹ J.P. Koehler. "Anent a Concert of Our Church Chorales," *Faith-Life*, 3:11, 1964.
²⁰ _____. "Decline of the Congregational Hymn..." *Faith-Life*, 1:17, 1972.
²¹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.
²² J.P. Koehler. "Our Forms of Expression..." *Faith-Life*, 3:12, 1967.
²³ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 4:11-12, 1964.
²⁴ Ibid., p. 11.
²⁵ J.P. Koehler. "Our Forms of Expression..." *Faith-Life*, 3:13, 1967.
²⁶ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 4:1, 1964.
²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ J.P. Koehler. "Decline of the Congregational Hymn..." *Faith-Life*, 1:17, 1972.
²⁹ _____. "Music," *Faith-Life*, 3:13, 1976.
³⁰ _____. "Our Forms of Expression..." *Faith-Life*, 4:9, 1966.
³¹ _____. "Song of God's People, The," *Faith-Life*, 4:11-12, 1964.
³² _____. "Webber-Studies in the Liturgy," *Faith-Life*, 9:16, 1938.
³³ _____. "Music," *Faith-Life*, 3:11-12, 1976.
³⁴ _____. "Our Forms of Expression..." *Faith-Life*, 3:11-12, 1967.
³⁵ _____. "Anent a Concert of Our Church Chorales," *Faith-Life*, 3:11, 1964.
³⁶ Ibid.
³⁷ J.P. Koehler. "Webber-Studies in the Liturgy," *Faith-Life*, 9:16, 1938.
³⁸ *Catalogue Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary*, pp. 29-30.

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