

# When The Congregation Learned to Sing: German Hymnody in the Wake of the Reformation

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## Week #5 (October 8): Early Reformation Hymnals and Luther's Best-Known Metrical Psalms

Luther's methods and sources:

1. Reworkings of liturgical sources / Direct use of existing texts and tunes

→ e.g., *Ein Kindelein so löblich* (one verse from *Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich*)

2. Adoption of popular forms and melodies (ballads and bar form)

→ e.g., *Ein neues Lied wir heben an / A New Song Now Shall Be Begun* (~August 1523) – Luther's response to the execution of Jan van Essen and Hendrik Voes in Brussels in July, 1523

3. Metrical psalms: psalms as congregational hymns

Song texts and early collections

- The *Achtliederbuch*; Jobst Gutknecht, Nuremberg, 1524 – 8 hymns, half by Luther
- The Erfurt *Enchiridia*; Mattes Maler and Johannes Loersfeld (25 hymns, 18 by Luther; 16 tunes, 1524); Erfurt, 1524

→ Elisabeth Cruciger's hymn with staying power: *Herr Christ, der einig Gottes Sohn / The Only Son from Heaven* (1524) [handout]

- The *Geystliche gesangk Buchleyn* aka *Chorgesangbuch*; Josef Klug, Lucas Cranach, Christian Döring, Wittenberg, 1524 (43 songs)

→ Luther's preface

- *Geistliche lieder auff's neu gebessert zu Wittenberg* [aka *Das Klug'sche Gesangbuch*]; Josef Klug, Wittenberg, 1529/1533 (50 songs)

→ Luther's best-known metrical psalms

*From Depths of Woe I Raise To Thee* (Trinity #554; 1524): The Reformation in a Nutshell

1 Aus tiefer Not schrei' ich zu dir,  
Herr Gott, erhör' mein Rufen,  
dein' gnädig' Ohren kehr' zu mir  
und meiner Bitt' sie öffne!  
Denn so du willst das sehen an,  
was Sünd' und Unrecht ist getan,  
wer kann, Herr, vor dir bleiben?

2 Bei dir gilt nichts denn Gnad' und  
Gunst,  
die Sünde zu vergeben.  
Es ist doch unser Tun umsonst,  
auch in dem besten Leben.

Literal Translation

1. Out of deep distress I cry to you,  
Lord God, hear my calling,  
Turn your gracious ear to me  
And open it to my plea!  
For if you desire to look upon  
The sins and unrighteousness that are  
done,  
Who, Lord, can remain before you?

2. With you nothing but grace and favor  
Avails to forgive sin.  
Our doing is in vain,  
Even in the best life.

Composite Translation

1 From depths of woe I raise to thee  
the voice of lamentation;  
Lord, turn a gracious ear to me  
and hear my supplication:  
if thou iniquities dost mark,  
our secret sins and misdeeds dark,  
O who shall stand before thee?

2 To wash away the crimson stain,  
grace, grace alone, availeth;  
our works, alas! are all in vain;  
in much the best life faileth:

Vor dir niemand sich rühmen kann;  
des muß dich fürchten jedermann,  
und deiner Gnade leben.

3 Darum auf Gott will hoffen ich,  
auf mein Verdienst nicht bauen;  
auf ihn mein Herz soll lassen sich  
und seiner Güte trauen,  
die mir zusagt sein werthes Wort,  
das ist mein Trost und treuer Hort;  
des will ich allzeit harren.

4 Und ob es währt bis in die Nacht  
und wieder an den Morgen,  
doch soll mein Herz an Gottes Macht  
verzweifeln nicht, noch sorgen.  
So tu' Israel rechter Art,  
der aus dem Geist erzeugt ward,  
und seines Gotts erharre.

5 Ob bei uns ist der Sünden viel,  
bei Gott ist vielmehr Gnade.  
sein' Hand zu helfen hat kein Ziel,  
wie groß auch sei der Schade.  
Er ist allein der gute Hirt,  
der Israel erlösen wird,  
aus seinen Sünden allen.

Before you no one can boast;  
Therefore everyone must fear you,  
And live by your grace

3. Therefore I will hope in God,  
And not build on my own merit;  
My heart shall depend on him  
And shall trust his kindness,  
Which his precious Word promises me,  
That is my comfort and faithful refuge;  
For this I shall ever wait.

4. And [even] if it lasts into the night  
And again unto the morning,  
Still my heart shall not  
Despair of God's might, nor be anxious.  
Thus shall act the proper Israel  
That was engendered by the spirit,  
And shall wait for its God

5. If there is great sin in us,  
In God there is much more grace.  
We seek in vain to help his hand,  
However great the ruin we have caused.  
He alone is the Good Shepherd,  
Who shall redeem Israel  
From all its sins. Amen.

no man can glory in thy sight,  
all must alike confess thy might,  
and live alone by mercy.

3 Therefore my trust is in the Lord,  
and not in mine own merit;  
on him my soul shall rest, his Word  
upholds my fainting spirit:  
his promised mercy is my fort,  
my comfort, and my sweet support;  
I wait for it with patience.

4 What though I wait the live-long  
night,  
and 'til the dawn appeareth,  
my heart still trusteth in his might;  
it doubteth not nor feareth:  
do thus, O ye of Israel's seed,  
ye of the Spirit born indeed;  
and wait 'til God appeareth.

5 Though great our sins and sore our  
woes,  
his grace much more aboundeth;  
his helping love no limit knows,  
our utmost need it soundeth.  
Our Shepherd good and true is he,  
who will at last his Israel free  
from all their sin and sorrow.

### Translation Comparison: *Ein' feste Burg/A Mighty Fortress* (Trinity #92; 1529): The Penitential Hymn That Became a Fight Song

1. Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott,  
ein gute Wehr und Waffen.  
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,  
die uns jetzt hat betroffen.  
Der alt böse Feind,  
mit Ernst er's jetzt meint;  
groß Macht und viel List  
sein grausam Rüstung ist,  
auf Erd ist nicht seinsgleichen.

2. Mit unsrer Macht ist nichts getan,  
wir sind gar bald verloren;  
es streit' für uns der rechte Mann,  
den Gott hat selbst erkoren.  
Fragst du, wer der ist?  
Er heißt Jesus Christ,  
der Herr Zebaoth,  
und ist kein andrer Gott,  
das Feld muss er behalten.

1. Our God is a strong castle,  
A good defense and weapon.  
He sets us free from all distress  
That has struck us.  
The old evil enemy,  
He's serious about it [i.e., the fight];  
Great power and much deception  
Are his terrible armor,  
On earth is not his equal.

2. Nothing is accomplished by our  
might,  
We're quickly lost;  
Let the right man fight for us,  
Whom God himself has chosen.  
You ask who He is?  
His name is Jesus Christ,  
The Lord of the Heavenly Armies  
And no other is God,  
He must hold the field.

1. A mighty fortress is our God, a  
bulwark never failing.  
Our helper he amid the flood of  
mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to  
work us woe.  
His craft and power are great, and  
armed with cruel hate, on earth is not  
his equal.

2. Did we in our own strength  
confide, our striving would be  
losing. Were not the right man on  
our side, the man of God's own  
choosing. Dost ask who that may  
be? Christ Jesus, it is he. Lord  
Sabaoth his name, from age to age  
the same, and he must win the battle.

3. Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel  
wär'  
und wollt uns gar verschlingen,  
so fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr,  
es soll uns doch gelingen.  
Der Fürst dieser Welt,  
wie sauer er sich stellt,  
tut er uns doch nicht;  
das macht, er ist gericht'.  
Ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen.

3. And if the world were full of  
devils  
and wanted to swallow us whole,  
We shall not so greatly fear,  
We shall yet succeed.  
The prince of this world,  
However furious he may appear,  
Can do nothing to us;  
That is because he is judged  
[already]  
One little Word can fell him.

3. And though this world with devils  
filled should threaten to undo us, we  
will not fear, for God hath willed His  
truth to triumph through us. The  
Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble  
not for him. His rage we can endure,  
for lo, his doom is sure: one little  
word shall fell him.

4. Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn  
und kein Dank dazu haben;  
er ist bei uns wohl auf dem Plan  
mit seinem Geist und Gaben.  
Nehmen sie den Leib,  
Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib:  
laß fahren dahin,  
sie haben's kein' Gewinn,  
das Reich muß uns doch bleiben.

4. That Word they should let stand,  
and no thanks to them for that;  
He is beside us on the plain [of  
battle]  
with His spirit and gifts.  
If they take our body,  
Goods, honor, child and wife:  
Let them all go,  
They shall not profit by it,  
The kingdom must remain to us.

4. That word above all earthly  
powers, no thanks to them abideth.  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours,  
through him who with us sideth. Let  
goods and kindred go, this mortal  
life also. The body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still. His  
Kingdom is forever

Promoting congregational singing (and not overtaxing the congregation!)

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice, / with exultation springing, / and with united  
heart and voice / and holy rapture singing, / Proclaim the wonders God hath done,  
/ How his right arm the vict'ry won; / Right dearly it hath cost him.

*(Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein, Luther, 1524)*

From depths of woe I raise to Thee / the voice of lamentation / Lord, turn a  
gracious ear to me / and hear my supplication: / if thou iniquities dost mark, / our  
secret sins and misdeeds dark, O who shall stand before thee?

*(Aus tiefer Not schrei' ich zu dir, Luther, 1524)*

Salvation unto us has come, / by God's free grace and favor; / good works vannot  
avert our doom, / they help and save us never. / Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,  
/ Who did for all the world atone; / He is our one Redeemer

*(Es ist das Heil uns kommen her, Paul Speratus, 1524)*