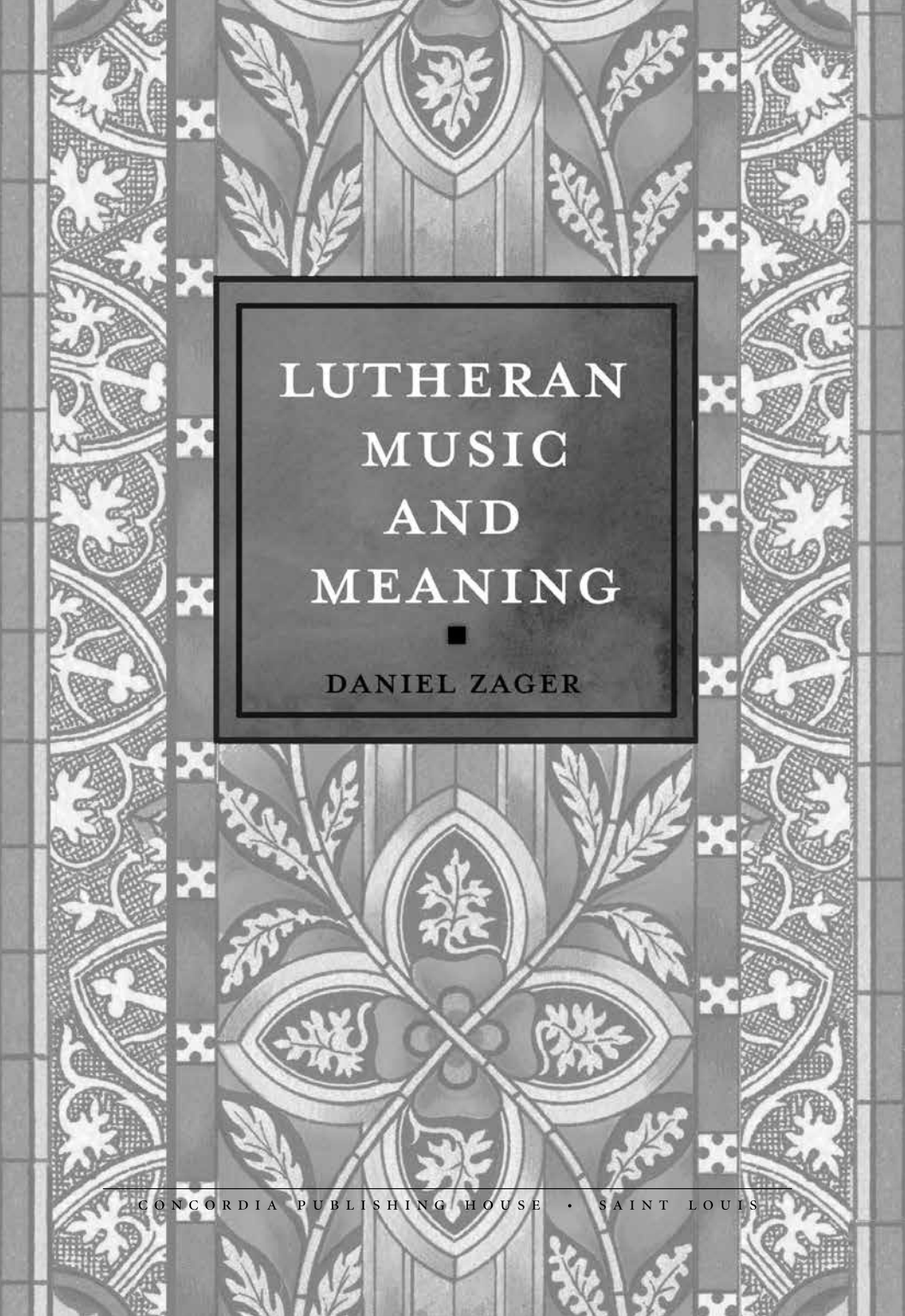
Lutheran Music and Meaning

DANIEL ZAGER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DANIEL ZAGER
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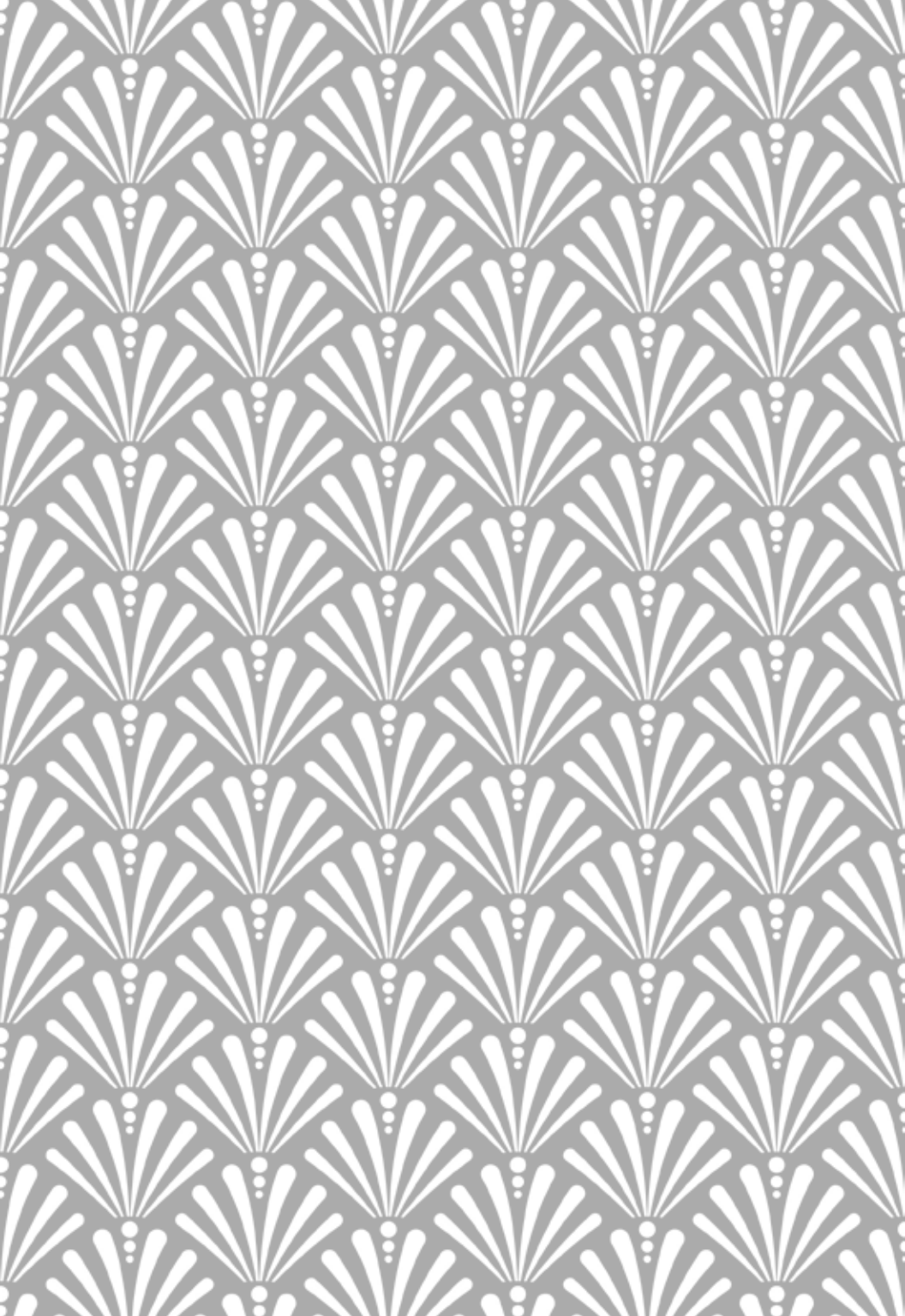


PREFACE

Why would one take the time to think about, talk about, or write about *meaning* in church music? Isn't meaning just a matter of what the words say? Isn't it sufficient just to sing the hymns and listen to whatever music happens to be included in any given worship service? Moreover, isn't meaning determined by each individual for him- or herself?

Often, the assumption is that while the words—texts of hymns or vocal/choral music—mean exactly what they say, the music itself must be neutral because, unlike words, music doesn't say anything specifically. That line of thinking assumes that music is merely like a tablecloth or a place mat—something that holds the nourishment of the feast but does not in itself contribute to that nourishing feast. I want to explore that issue in this book.

Many Lutherans would find a spoken worship service—without any music at all—to be quite foreign to both past experience and current expectations. But the idea that music should somehow be related—perhaps even tightly related—to the spoken parts of the service, so that music contributes to an integrated whole, is not necessarily expected. I also want to explore that idea in this book.

This book is *not* about how music might be *meaningful* to an individual on an emotional level, how music might relate to or

affect an individual's feelings. Indeed, it would be impossible to account for the individual emotional responses of even a small group of people gathered for worship. Moreover, how their varied emotions relate to a particular musical expression on one Sunday, in one season or year, might vary on another similar occasion, for emotions and feelings are fleeting and can and do change over time. While agreeing that meaning in Lutheran music is closely related to, even prompted by, verbal texts, I want to explore how the music itself plays a parallel role to text and can be studied objectively in terms of meaning.

Finally, exploring meaning in Lutheran music becomes a vantage point for probing and further understanding the purpose, significance, and value of music in worship. It provides a way to think about how Lutheran music plays its part in the proclamation of the Gospel.

While there is an extensive body of writing for the benefit of Lutheran church musicians—organists, choir directors, kantors—there is much less for those who make up our congregations. This book is intended primarily for congregational singers and listeners of Lutheran church music.

I extend my deepest thanks to two friends for their assistance with this book. Richard C. Resch read an early draft and provided valued advice, his vast knowledge and experience as a Lutheran kantor and seminary faculty member having shaped my thinking since I first met him in the late 1990s. Every author should be as fortunate as I have been in having a knowledgeable and collegial

editor. Peter C. Reske, senior editor of music/worship at Concordia Publishing House, is a longtime friend, and it has been a privilege to collaborate with him on this project, his academic training in musicology and his experience with Lutheran music making him the ideal partner. While acknowledging the assistance of these two colleagues, it is important to state that errors or shortcomings in the book are solely my responsibility. Finally, I thank my wife, Kathy, fellow singer and listener, who has always supported my work as a musicologist and Lutheran musician.

ABBREVIATIONS

AE *Luther's Works: American Edition*. 82 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1955–.

BWV *Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis. Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke von Johann Sebastian Bach*. Edited by Wolfgang Schmieder. 2nd expanded ed. Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1990.

CW93 *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993.

CW21 *Christian Worship: Hymnal*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2021.

EG *Evangelisches Gesangbuch: Ausgabe für die Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchen in Bayern und Thüringen*. München: Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern; Weimar: Wartburg Verlag, [1995].

ELH *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. St. Louis: MorningStar Music Publishers, 1996.

ELW *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.

Jenny Markus Jenny, *Luthers geistliche Lieder und*

Kirchengesänge: Vollständige Neuedition in Ergänzung zu Band 35 der Weimarer Ausgabe. Archiv zur Weimarer Ausgabe der Werke Martin Luthers, Texte und Untersuchungen, Band 4. Köln, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1985.

LBW *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978.

LSB *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006.

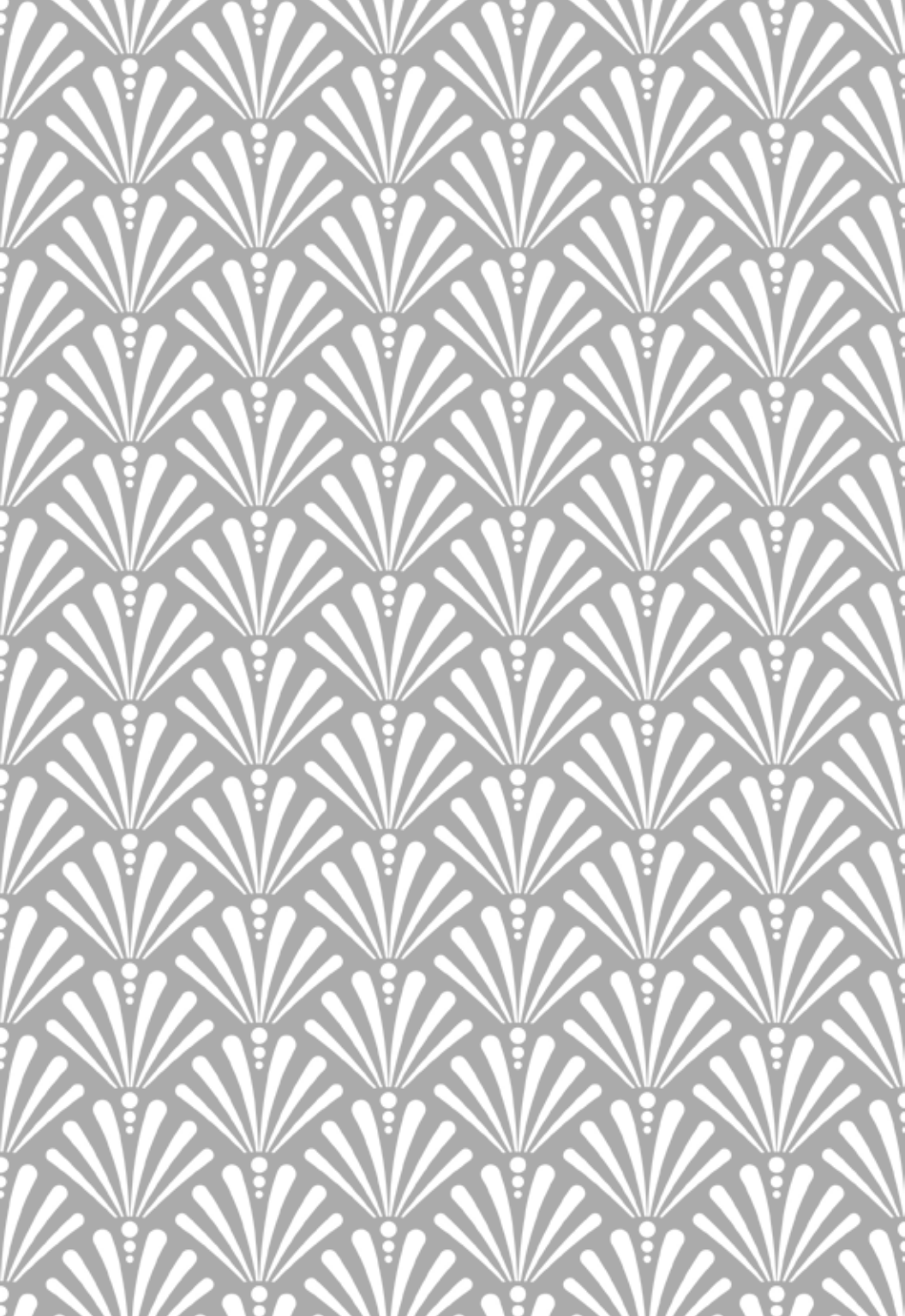
LSB-CH *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns*. Edited by Joseph Herl, Peter C. Reske, and Jon D. Vieker. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019.

LW *Lutheran Worship*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982.

PraeSM I Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum* I, trans. Michael D. Fleming, "Michael Praetorius, Music Historian: An Annotated Translation of 'Syntagma Musicum' I, Part 1" (PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 1979).

TLH *The Lutheran Hymnal.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941.

WOV *With One Voice: A Lutheran Resource for Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995.



INTRODUCTION

In Martin Luther's Small Catechism (1529), each of his explanatory comments is prefaced by the question "*Was ist das?*" ("What is this?"). The English version of the catechism that I used as an elementary school student translated the question a bit more freely: "What does this mean?" Since this book is concerned with questions of *meaning* in Lutheran music, I borrow that concise yet profound question as a central focus for this book. What—if anything—does Lutheran music mean? In fact, can *music* (composed of nonverbal pitches and rhythms) take on meaning? If so, how? More precisely for this inquiry, can Lutheran music convey, indicate, or signal theological meaning? If so, how does that happen, and what categories of church music might do so: congregational hymns, vocal and choral music, organ or other instrumental music?

Of course, an obvious answer to such questions is that meaning in Lutheran music derives from associated theological *texts*, for example, the texts of congregational hymns, or liturgical texts such as the Kyrie ("Lord, have mercy"), the Gloria in Excelsis ("Glory be to God on high"), the Sanctus ("Holy, holy, holy"), the Agnus Dei ("Lamb of God"), the Nunc Dimittis ("Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace"), or the Magnificat ("My soul magnifies the Lord"). Given this omnipresent link between music and texts in

Lutheran music, we don't ask merely, "What does the music of a particular hymn mean?" Rather, we explore how that music—hymn tune and setting—participates in *signaling* and conveying the meaning of an associated text (or texts). We ask how the music supports and enhances the *sacred* nature of the text in a way that is distinct from the secular culture in which we live. It is in this sense that we consider questions of how Lutheran music takes on meaning—how sacred music appropriately *complements* sacred texts, "sacred" indicating musical and textual expressions that are set apart to be employed appropriately in the Church's worship.

To use a single brief example: when we sing "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" (*LSB* 805) to the well-known tune OLD HUNDREDTH, we draw on music that is distinct from the secular culture, music that won't be heard at a rock or country western concert, or at the halftime extravaganza of the Super Bowl, or in connection with television advertising. Such sacred music grows out of the varied historical cultures and epochs of the Western Church, ranging from the monophonic, or "Gregorian", chant of the Early Church (monophonic = only one vocal line), to the vast repertory of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century polyphonic sacred music (polyphonic = two or more vocal lines), to the chorales (hymns) of the Lutheran Reformation, the metrical psalm tunes (like OLD HUNDREDTH) of the Calvinist strain of the Reformation, the sacred cantatas of J. S. Bach, and on and on through the Church's vast and rich musical history.

How does music intended for Lutheran worship differ from, say, Western art music (or "classical" music) heard in concert

halls and opera houses, or from concerts by jazz, rock, or country musicians? Sacred music in the Lutheran tradition has long been characterized by a *proclamatory function*—music playing its role in proclaiming the Gospel. Unlike in a concert, music in the Lutheran Divine Service (or *Gottesdienst* = "God's service to us") is never merely music for the sake of music, or music for the sake of art. Luther himself articulated this proclamatory function of music:

> After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music and by providing sweet melodies with words. (AE 53:323–24; brackets in original)

Luther's drawing together of words and music established the foundation for the proclamatory role of music in Lutheran worship and the necessity for music to complement the meaning of texts, thus for music to take on a textually dependent theological meaning of its own. Related to questions of meaning are questions of *identity*: how might church music contribute to a distinctly Lutheran identity? Does music play a role—along with liturgy, preaching, and creedal and confessional statements—in establishing Lutheran identity?

It is important to clarify at the outset what I mean by the phrase "Lutheran music." By that phrase, I refer to the distinctive living heritage of music composed intentionally (or borrowed/adapted) from the sixteenth century to the present day for use within the

Lutheran Divine Service and the Office hours (Matins, Vespers, and Compline). Of first importance, I include hymn melodies and settings for congregational singing; secondarily, music composed for choirs and for instruments, with particular emphasis on music for the organ, which during the first half of the seventeenth century began to assume a prominence in Lutheran worship that continues to our own time. As living Lutheran composers write well-crafted, hymn-based compositions for the organ, thus continuing this rich genre of Lutheran music, they are also finding new potentials in hymn-based compositions for the piano, thus enlarging the possibilities of keyboard music for the Church.

While this book is for all who have an interest in Lutheran music, it is intended especially for the singers and listeners who make up Lutheran congregations. Thus, it is not a history of Lutheran music, though it makes use of that history to examine questions of meaning in Lutheran music. Nor is it a "how-to" handbook for Lutheran kantors, organists, and choir directors who lead music in Lutheran congregations, some of whom have no doubt pondered these same questions as a part of their own work. My goal is simply to explore questions of how Lutheran music might have the capacity to convey theological meaning to the singers and listeners in our congregations. My presupposition is that Lutheran music does indeed have that capacity, which is why composers from Martin Luther on have created hymn tunes for congregational singers, and why composers from Luther's day to our time in the twenty-first century have provided a rich legacy of vocal/choral and instrumental music.

CHAPTER 1

DOES LUTHERAN MUSIC HAVE MEANING?

The Case of Hymn Tunes and Their Texts

Browsing in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill bookstore in 1999, I came across a then recently published volume by Nicholas Cook entitled *Music: A Very Short Introduction*. It didn't take long for this book to stimulate my thinking, for on only the second page of his foreword the author wrote:

> To talk about music in general is to talk about what music means—and more basically, how it is (how it can be) that music operates as an agent of meaning. For music isn't just something nice to listen to. On the contrary, it's deeply embedded in human culture.[1]

A large part of my musical identity was (and remains) that of Lutheran organist and church musician, so I began to apply Cook's statements to my small corner of the larger musical world that he was exploring. What about the organ music I played each Sunday at a Lutheran church in nearby Durham, North Carolina—what does it mean? Does it mean anything at all to my fellow congregants?

1 Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), vi.

Or is it "just something nice to listen to"? How might the music at a Sunday morning worship service take on meaning? And how might such music be "deeply embedded" in a particular "culture," such as that of the Lutheran Church at worship in late twentieth-century America?

Cook's statement prompted my thinking about such questions, and, in truth, it nagged at me, for this was not the first occasion for me to ponder such basic, underlying concerns related to my vocation as a Lutheran church musician. As an undergraduate organ performance major at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, I was fortunate indeed to be the organist for a Lutheran student congregation for five years, and for four of those years to work with a pastor, the Rev. Dr. Wayne E. Schmidt, who was himself a fine organist and church musician (who would, subsequent to his work as campus pastor, become a faculty member at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis). We had wonderful, extensive conversations about Lutheran music, and I likely made him late for dinner with his family on more than one occasion. He helped me to refine my thinking about the purpose of music in Lutheran worship, and I remember that on walks back to my apartment, I would continue to try to work out in my mind questions regarding the function and purpose of music in Lutheran worship—existential questions for one who wished to devote his life to Lutheran music.

In graduate school at the University of Minnesota, I was fortunate to have a position as organist at a Lutheran church in suburban Minneapolis. There I was invited to do occasional teaching in the context of Sunday morning adult classes. At one point, I decided to

explore some of these questions with my fellow congregants. One Sunday in January, we met in the organ and choir balcony so that I could play, as an example for our discussion, Andreas Armsdorff's (1670–99) setting of the chorale "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern," the Epiphany hymn "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" (*LSB* 395). I purposely chose this setting because the hymn melody was unornamented and could be heard prominently; it was a hymn familiar to this congregation, and the melody in Armsdorff's chorale prelude couldn't be missed by those listeners. I suggested that an appropriate way to listen to such an organ prelude at the beginning of a worship service would be to read the text in the hymnal as I played the composition—the text being what prompted the composer to write this setting, the hymn text thus lending a particular *meaning* to this musical composition. The next Sunday, one of those congregants told me that he did precisely that, and the organ prelude at the beginning of the service took on new meaning for him. I was thrilled because music, hymn text, and theology had coalesced in a meaningful way for that listener—at least on that one occasion.

That welcome response aside, problems remained with regard to my thinking on the role and function of music in Lutheran worship—problems for the church musician and for the listener. From the standpoint of the Lutheran musician: while I continue to prefer organ music with clearly audible hymn tune references for the worship service, such compositions are not always available. And perhaps such choices are not always desirable, since organ preludes with ornamented or somewhat disguised hymn tune

references still merit a place among musical settings chosen for the worship service. From the standpoint of the Lutheran congregant: not all listeners have the familiarity—gained over years of hymn singing—to link a hymn melody to its associated text and then to the theological content of that text (even when the hymnic basis of an organ setting is referenced in the printed Sunday bulletin). Even more to the point, not all listeners have the desire for such active listening in worship services. Does that mean that music in Lutheran worship might be, contrary to Cook's point, "just something nice to listen to," or music that sets a mood, or, as some might say, something that (vaguely) "prepares the heart for worship"? To settle for such a premise would be to deny historic Lutheran propositions that music is a means of Gospel proclamation (about which, more in the following chapters). Does that proposition require our congregants to take a course in Lutheran music appreciation? That is emphatically not the case, nor is it the purpose of this book; rather, I simply wish to heighten awareness of the potential of Lutheran music to participate in the proclamation of the Gospel. That such a premise may suggest a need for active listening is hardly anomalous, for worship does require effort: to focus, to think, to concentrate, to learn, to pay attention to God's Word. That is true for Scripture readings, for the pastor's sermon, for the prayers, for the liturgy, and for church music in all its varied forms—whether sung by the congregation, chanted by the pastor, sung by a choir, or played on the organ or other instruments.

Text, Music, and Meaning in Hymns

Contrary to Cook's premise "that music operates as an agent of meaning," there are many in the Church who believe that meaning derives only from verbal texts, that music is neutral, and that its pitches and rhythms do not contribute to or convey meaning. As an example, consider this statement from Rick Warren:

> Music is nothing more than an arrangement of notes and rhythms; it's the words that make a song spiritual. . . . If I were to play a tune for you without any words, you wouldn't know if it was a Christian song or not.[2]

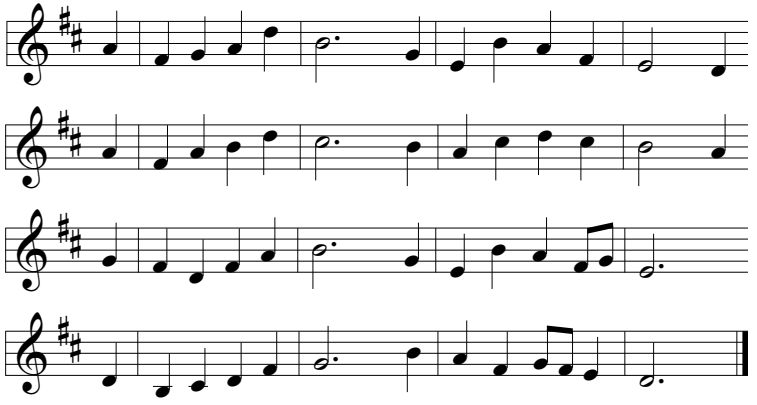
Lutheran pastors who agree with such a statement know that they can evaluate verbal texts on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, thereby permitting doctrinal judgments about hymn texts or the words of vocal/choral music. There is, however, no parallel or similar evaluative process for the pitches and rhythms of musical compositions. Some Lutheran pastors have concluded, therefore, that music is neutral and that any type or style of music can be used in the Divine Service—so long as the texts are not in error when measured against Scripture and the Confessions. Moreover, it's probably not far off the mark to acknowledge that many singers and listeners in Lutheran congregations would agree.

Let's consider the second part of Warren's quotation: "If I were to play a tune for you without any words, you wouldn't know if it

2 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 281.

was a Christian song or not." To be precise, he means a tune without either a sung text or an implied text such as with "Yankee Doodle," which, even if the words aren't sung, has a tune that by itself is sufficient to bring those words to mind for the average American listener. In thinking specifically here about hymns, we can look at Example 1 below, which shows a melody without any text—actual or implied. It has the characteristics of a hymn tune, and it could accommodate a text such as "O God, My Faithful God" (*LSB* 696) or "Now Thank We All Our God" (*LSB* 895). But, in fact, it is wedded to no known hymn text; it is simply a stand-alone melody—in this case, one I wrote to demonstrate Warren's point. What does this melody mean? One could sing or play the melody to become familiar with it. One could evaluate the melodic contour of this melody and the harmonic implications of the melodic phrases. One could critique the musical construction of this melody. But

Example 1



such musical matters, important as they may be, do not shed any light on the meaning of this hymn melody. In fact, this melody, by itself, conveys no theological meaning. If it is to be a hymn melody, it needs an associated hymn text or *texts*, for in hymnody it is often *not* the case that a given melody consistently bears a one-to-one relationship with only a single hymn text. As we shall see, however, that circumstance does not negate the fact that a well-composed (or appropriately borrowed) hymn melody has the capacity—even when coupled with multiple texts—to signal theological meaning.

Consider, for example, the wonderful hymn tune WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET by the Lutheran pastor Philipp Nicolai (1556–1608). This Epiphany hymn—text and tune both written by Nicolai—has been translated as "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" (*LSB* 395) and "How Lovely Shines the Morning Star" (*TLH* 343). But this strong melody has also been joined to other texts such as a one-stanza Christmas hymn by the Danish poet Birgitte Katerine Boye (1742–1824), "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn" (*LSB* 391); a one-stanza Easter hymn by the same poet, "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word" (*LSB* 488); "Alleluia! Let Praises Ring" (*LSB* 822), which in its 1698 publication specified the melody WIE SCHÖN LEUCHTET (*LSB-CH* 1:1247); and "O Holy Spirit, Enter In" (*LSB* 913), which in its 1640 publication specified the same melody (*LSB-CH* 1:1460). While this tune retains a primary theological meaning relating to its original Epiphany text by poet-composer Nicolai, it has been appropriately joined to these other texts, all of which sound some of the same theological notes of praise and adoration found in the initial 1599 text by Nicolai.

But now to Warren's first point: "Music is nothing more than an arrangement of notes and rhythms." This is demonstrably false. Why? Because in church music, especially with congregational hymns, we don't encounter the kind of melody shown in Example 1, which has no known relationship to any hymn text. Hymn melodies sung in Christian congregations, and printed in Christian hymnals, are connected with texts and—to use Cook's apt phrase—are subsequently "deeply embedded" in Christian cultures of sung theology. As congregational singers, we *learn* these text/music relationships over time, and they become "deeply embedded" in our memories.

Consider the well-known melody for the Christmas carol "Silent Night." Once connected with that text, the melody becomes more than "an arrangement of notes and rhythms." The melody itself conveys meaning; it signifies the feast of Christmas, more particularly perhaps, Christmas Eve worship. Music + text = meaning. It would be foolish to think that this melody is neutral and, therefore, could work equally well on Easter morning, to accommodate this text:

Jesus is raised from the dead.
Now He lives, as He said.
Crucified upon a cross,
When it seemed that all was loss,
    Christ is risen today,
    Christ is risen today.

Franz Gruber's melody is inextricably linked to Joseph Mohr's Christmas text, learned by Christian singers the world over.

The pitches and rhythms of this melody have taken on meaning by virtue of the text for which it was composed. Text + music = meaning. Moreover, even without a text, the melody of "Silent Night," with its gentle rocking motion, is unlikely to suggest itself as a suitable melody for a newly written Easter text. Nor would the melody for "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia" (*LSB* 463), with its rising fanfare-like gestures, necessarily be an obvious choice to accommodate a Christmas Eve hymn text. It is not true that "music is nothing more than an arrangement of notes and rhythms," for in our hymns and hymnals, we don't encounter textless tunes. Rather, texts confer meaning on their associated hymn melodies, and congregational singers and listeners assimilate and learn those connections and meanings over a lifetime of singing the faith.

Hymn melodies are not only the most straightforward and concise musical expressions within Lutheran worship but, arguably, the most important, for the congregational hymn is where the assembled singers and listeners of the congregation join to play their part in proclaiming the Gospel and in "worship[ing] one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity" (Athanasian Creed 4; *LSB*, p. 319). The meaning of Lutheran hymns derives not only from their texts but also from the music. The *sound* of the music will play an important role in either *complementing* the sacred nature of the hymn text or *competing against* that text by introducing musical sounds, gestures, and genres rooted in the secular cultures around us. Hymns are such *concise* theological, poetic, and musical expressions, and in any consideration of meaning, the musical dimension of a hymn must not be neglected, however difficult that

evaluation may be—compared to the more straightforward textual (both theological and poetic) dimensions of Christian hymnody.

If text + music = meaning, then it is not just a matter of judging a hymn based on its text; the music, too, contributes to its meaning. While the musical pitches and rhythms will indeed play a part in signaling meaning, by themselves they are insufficient to establish full theological meaning. Thus, for its meaning, a hymn melody is contingent in part on a hymn text, but the equally important parallel proposition is that the hymn text needs to be coupled with a melody that complements and supports it, without suggesting or evoking nontheological meanings alien to that text.

Consider the hymn text "O Christ the Same" by Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926–). The 1995 hymnal supplement *With One Voice* coupled that text with the tune LONDONDERRY AIR (*WOV* 778), an Irish folk tune bearing significant nontheological meaning through its well-known association with the text "Oh, Danny Boy" (written in 1910). When the 2006 hymnal *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* was compiled, Dudley-Smith's text was paired with a new tune and setting by Carl Schalk (1929–2021), RED HILL ROAD (*ELW* 760), which fits the text well and avoids connection with a secular tune that continues to bear its own associative meanings. Paul Westermeyer offers the following insightful commentary on LONDONDERRY AIR:

> Though not a bad tune, it poses vocal and associative problems for an assembly at worship: it is a solo venture of an octave and fifth, not a communal vocal

endeavor; and its tie to "Oh, Danny Boy" and a dead lover's grave may pull at the heart strings but superimpose fantasy on truth.[3]

LISTENING: Listen to Dudley-Smith's text "O Christ the Same" sung to Schalk's tune RED HILL ROAD on YouTube by searching "O Christ the Same, ELW 760, Mount Olive Lutheran."

Thus, in a congregational hymn, musical meaning will be understood in part by whether the melody has extratheological associative meanings that continue to be familiar to congregational singers, or whether the melody derives from the Church's own creative culture and supports the text without introducing conflicting meanings. That creative culture for Lutherans begins in the 1520s with Luther and his co-workers composing new tunes and extends to living Lutheran composers of our own day.

In addition to music *composed* for Lutheran worship, hymn melodies have sometimes been *borrowed* from secular repertories of the Western *art music* tradition; prominent composers such as Heinrich Isaac (ca. 1450/55–1517), Hans Leo Hassler (1564–1612), and Gustav Holst (1874–1934) come readily to mind. Secular melodies by these composers have been judiciously borrowed to accommodate sacred hymn texts. Isaac's secular song "Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen" is used for three hymns in *LSB*: the Epiphany hymn "Arise and Shine in Splendor" (*LSB* 396), the hymn for Holy Week "Upon the Cross Extended" (*LSB* 453), and the evening

3 Paul Westermeyer, *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010), 621–22.

hymn "Now Rest beneath Night's Shadow" (*LSB* 880). Hassler's art song, "Mein gmüth ist mir verwirret", provides the well-known melody for "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (*LSB* 450 and 449). Holst's melody, known as THAXTED, is drawn from the "Jupiter" movement of his orchestral work *The Planets*, and in *LSB* accommodates Stephen Starke's paraphrase of the Te Deum laudamus, "We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God" (*LSB* 941).

Moreover, Lutheran hymnals borrow hymn texts, melodies, and settings from the distinctive repertories and heritages of various Christian denominations and hymnals, as well as music from a variety of folk and ethnic traditions. Of course, that raises the question of why not utilize the Irish folk tune discussed earlier? An essential consideration is that of an appropriate *distance of time* between (1) the original contexts and the well-known, common uses of that folk tune and (2) its inclusion in hymnals. While LONDONDERRY AIR is not sufficiently distant from its connection to "Oh, Danny Boy," there are other Irish folk tunes that carry no such associative meanings for the twenty-first-century American listener; see, for example, the tune MOVILLE, an Irish folk tune used for the hymn text "Christ Is the World's Redeemer" (LSB 539).

LISTENING: Listen to the tune MOVILLE on YouTube by searching "Moville hymn tune."

Contexts for Meaning in Lutheran Music

These brief case studies of hymn melodies demonstrate that meaning in Lutheran music is contingent, or dependent, on factors

other than the purely musical. The contexts for probing meaning in Lutheran music—not only in hymns but also in vocal/choral and instrumental music of all kinds—involve the following factors:

- Theological and poetic **texts**.
- The historic **liturgy** of the Western Church, which is the overall framework for music in Lutheran worship.
- The **Church Year** as a means of organizing and defining time through the annual cycle of feasts centering on God's redemptive work in Christ.
- A **lectionary** as a means of organizing and specifying scriptural content for each feast or day in the Church Year.
- **Historic** Lutheran **musical repertories**, which not only continue to provide content for Lutheran worship but also establish standards of musical craftsmanship and liturgical functionality, thus furnishing examples for newly composed music in our present culture of Lutheran worship.

Thus, the meaning of music in Lutheran worship depends on this complex web of contextual factors: (1) how the music supports an actual or implied text, (2) how the musical plus textual expression finds its place in the liturgy, (3) how that expression fits into and supports both Church Year and lectionary, and (4) how the music connects with the standards and patterns established by the long history of music composed (or borrowed) for use in Lutheran liturgical worship.

Summary

In Lutheran worship—whether the Divine Service or the Offices of Matins, Vespers, and Compline—music plays a prominent role. Whether that music is sung by the congregation, chanted by the pastor, sung by a vocal or choral ensemble, or played on instruments, the music, in Cook's words, "operates as an agent of meaning." There are, however, no compositional guidelines or recipes that specify for the composer how to establish certain meanings or indeed tell the listener how to discern those meanings. But that reality does not inevitably result in a kind of simplistic relativism that concludes only that an infinite number of meanings may reside in the ears and minds of multiple listeners. Lutheran music exists in a rich contextual web of theology and liturgy, based in the long-standing (from Luther on) expectation that music in the Lutheran liturgy will, in fact, be the sung proclamation of the Gospel. Of course, such music is coupled with actual or implied verbal texts, but that fact never denies the nonverbal power of music to convey and enhance theological meanings deeply rooted in the Christian Gospel. The chapters that follow explore the expectation that Lutheran music is more than an expression of beauty, that it does indeed operate as an agent of theological meaning in the service of Gospel proclamation—both in the case of congregational hymns as well as music composed for choirs and for instruments.