

2. SONGWRITING AND CHORALE BY MARTIN LUTHER

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Abstract: *The five hundredth anniversary that we commemorated in 2017 is a good opportunity to remind the significance of vocal works by Martin Luther. Creative musical activity of Dr. Martin Luther is somehow in the shadow of his other historically significant activities. It is a well-known fact that he was an outstanding musician who could play lute and could sing. In his household, he constantly played music and sang, while he actively engaged his family in performing music. In performing the reformatory ideas, he was aware of the extremely important role of religious singing, which he started composing since 1523. He is the author of 38 songs – chorales, while at the same time, he is the author of 20 melodies. In most cases, he used the texts of the Psalms. From his chorals the best known is entitled Ein feste Burg is unser Gott – The Fortified Castle is the Lord our God, that became worldwide the anthem of the Protestants. Luther have become an important inspirational source for the next generation of composers, and they culminated in the work of Johann Sebastian Bach, including the works of contemporary Slovak composers – Roman Berger, Vítázoslav Kubička. The prevailing majority of Lutheran chorales is also the part of the Protestant Songbook in Slovakia.*

Key words: *Reformation, music, compositional activity, songs, significance, present time*

1. Introduction

Dr. Martin Luther is one of the most significant personalities of modern European history. The reform influenced by him to a great extent affected the development of culture in music and musical life in our continent. Lutheran reformation has also affected the development of education by the belief that education in mother tongue democratises the educational process and makes it accessible to all social segments. The emergence of the position of a cantor became crucial in this process. The music itself evolved in a particular way, and composers fully respected Luther's views on the close link between music and theology. Under the influence of the broad spectrum of Luther's opinions of music, a church song is being developed, which is later referred to as a chorale (a choral song). His interpretation in the language that was well-understood to people had influenced music literacy from the lowest social class to the highest one. The emergence of other musical types of Protestant church music such as cantata, oratorio, and passion – in a distinct way interfered with the pattern of the divine order. The stimulus for the author to write this study was not just the 500th anniversary of the reformation that we commemorated in 2017, but especially our long-term interest in the influence of Lutheran reformation on

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music, which culminated in the work of Johann Sebastian Bach. We have been exploring his compositional heritage for longer time. The subject of our study is to explore the relationship of Martin Luther with music, the main aim is to approach his songwriting and to emphasise his position as the founder of Protestant church music. Luther's songwriting is an important phenomenon of musical history that has greatly influenced the composers from the 16th to the present.

Although the topic of Luther's songwriting was already examined and analysed in our territory by Anna Predmerská-Zúriková in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, as well as by Ľudmila Michalková – we also approached it on the basis of practical interpretative experience when it was the part of the programme of the old music ensemble *Musica historica Prešov*, in which the author of this study was a performer of viola da gamba, when we celebrated three choral works by Luther that were performed in the framework of the Slavonic Concert in Prešov, the 490th anniversary. We mainly relied on foreign references, represented mainly by the professional and scientific works by Hermann Abert, Martin Gecko, Konrad Küster, Johannes Schilling and other German music scholars and historians as well as theologians. In most cases, the contributions were published in the years 2016 and 2017. In our research we rely primarily on the historical, comparative and analytical-synthetic method. Martin Luther made the composition of his church songs in his mature age of a four-week-old composer that is reflected in their literary, theological and musical qualities, with the emphasis of the unity of word and music. This phenomenon makes them a successful direct pillar of Protestant music, and not only Protestant, of music composers.

2. Luther and Music

Reformer Dr. Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) is one of the most prominent personalities who have deeply affected the development of European civilisation in several areas of its spiritual life. His reformist efforts to transform the church and the overall social and political life include influencing the world of music as a powerful means of promoting reformation. He had loved music since his early youth and school time: At the Latin schools that he attended in his childhood in the years from 1485 to 1496 Mansfeld, in 1497 Magdeburg School of Dormitory, and from 1498 to 1501 at the Eisenach Parish school where the classes began and ended with singing which was largely influenced by Luther's life and its relationship to music. In addition to the fact that singing was an integral part of the educational process in these schools, M. Luther was also a choir singer of local churches in these cities. He studied musical-theoretical and practical education at the University of Erfurt, where there he studied seven artistic disciplines: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, rhetoric, dialectics and grammar in the years from 1501 to 1505. He graduated as *Magistrem Artium*. The music was studied from the theoretical works of French musician,

mathematician and astronomer Johannes (Jean) de Muris (1290 – 1351), as well as from the tract of St. Augustine (354 – 430) *De musica* (Geck, 2017). M. Luther was a great lutenist and singer, he also played diagonal flute (Schilling, 2017), and his love for music can be characterised by the phrase – “I love music” (Schilling, 2008).

His most significant expression of his relationship to music, according to which his whole life was governed, is rather extensive poem *Madamme Musica* in which he accurately characterises all the features of music, its mission, divine origin, and a positive impact on man. We should remember that in the field of music his advisor was an excellent composer Johann Walter (1496 – 1570). And we also have to remember the fact that his reformist co-operator Philipp Melancthon (1497 – 1560) was very well educated in the field of music too. The remarkable phenomena of his life is the fact that in his household there had constantly played music, as was evidenced by many paintings by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472 – 1553) who was his personal painter. From the contemporary composers M. Luther was very fond of Josquin Desprez (1440 – 1521), whom he depicted in the following very positive way: “*Er ist der Noten Meister, die die müssen machen, wie er gewollt die dieren Sangmeistern müssen machen, wie es die Noten haben wollen*” (Rößler, 2015, pp. 45 – 46). (He is the only composer who perfectly manages the music, and with other composers they do what they want). Since 1525, Martin Luther co-operated with Johann Walter in the field of music. This co-operation resulted in very fruitful results which influenced significantly the development of German Protestant music and musical culture that culminated in the composer’s work by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and in the theoretical works by Johann Mattheson (1681-1764).

3. Luther as the Author of Songs

Dr. Martin Luther was a composer and poet already in the 1520s of the 16th century. It is a period in his life, when he stabilised his reformational thinking and began to think of the part of music during worship. He is the author of 38 preserved songs, with the presumption that he wrote probably 45 songs. Out of these 38 songs, there are at least 20 songs with music that he composed. He also knew the rules of the composition (Rößler, 2015). It should be noted, however, that Johann Walter, was his literary adviser for musical matters within the framework of the ongoing reformation, and he strongly supported him in composing his own songs. In his songs, M. Luther emphasised one important, proclaimed rule, the unity of the word and the music. He has made it to such perfection that his songs have the role of preaching (Rößler, 2015). This is also due to the fact that his songs are rich in the extent of the textual side, they contain from 7 to 15 strophes of poetic text. In his songs, M. Luther respects the tradition of German church from the beginning of the 16th century, which had mostly short stanzas and resembled prayers. The lyrics of individual songs

suggest that their author spent a lot of time in every day prayer (Geck, 2017). The melodic aspect of his songs was influenced by Gregorian choral as well as the old Latin melodies (Rößler, 2015). Not less interesting is the fact that singers, wandering singers and students have worked for him. M. Luther used almost exclusively homophony in his songs, except for his only composition – motet entitled *Ich werde nicht sterben, sondern leben und des Herrn Werke verkündigen* (Geck, 2017). His texts were inspired by psalms, he either quoted them directly, or by his own theological vision. As an example, we can mention his most famous song, *The Fortified Castle*, which was inspired by *Psalm no. 46* that Luther modified according to his artistic and spiritual imagination.

Concerning the musicising of the psalm texts, Luther is a composer who has made into music a great deal of psalms, and he is the first to be considered an author of this spiritual wisdom and poetic beauty. In his work he also used modified texts of the songs of the earlier development of the Church song – the Ambrosian chorale or the ballads of minstrels. They include, his first preserved song *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland (Come, you Redemption of Pagans)*, dedicated to the 1st Advent Sunday. However, we do not feel these remote text relationships when we read the text, he can translate them into his own poetic speech. It means that even from the old texts he was able to create the most up-to-date lyrics. An important perception of Patrice Veit, with whom we fully agree, is the fact that the Bible is the most important partner of songs written by Luther. It was conditioned by the fact that Martin Luther grew up on the *Holy Bible* that guided him throughout his life, and he was his most important interpreter.

4. The Origin of Lutheran Songs

Luther began writing his first songs at the end of 1523 and at the beginning of 1524. For the first time, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland (Come, you Redemption of Pagans)*, was the first of his songs, but according to recent research, the first publicly known song is *Ein neues Lied wir heben an* (Geck, 2017) in 1523, by which he “responded in the style of *minessängres* in the form of a rhymed ballad to burning of the two reformation orientated Augustinian monks in Brussels on July 1, 1523” (Predmerská-Zúriková, 2017, p. 16). Regarding the chronology of Lutheran songs, Anna Predmerska-Zúriková (2017, p. 16) states: “The earliest church song by Martin Luther, which began his musical-reforming efforts, is his song *Nun freut euch lieben Christeng’mein* from 1523”. Similarly, Martin Geck (2017, pp. 32-33) came to similar conclusion when he wrote about the song the following: “*Nun freut euch lieben Christeng’mein*, included in his writings like follows: „Um dieses älteste unter den bis heute viel gesungenen Luther-Liedern ranken sich einige charakteristische Geschichten.“ (“Several characteristic stories are linked to this oldest songs written by Luther and have been so far performed a lot.”). From

aforementioned it is clear that the first song written by Luther was *Nun freut euch lieben Christeng' mein*.

Michael Praetorius writes about this song in his theoretical work *Syntagma musicum I* of the year 1615 as of a golden German song (Geck, 2017). The most famous song, which became a hymn to Protestants around the world, *Ein feste Burg* (The Fortified Castle) was founded in 1527. In addition to the songs that were published separately by the end of 1523, four songs were produced in the *Achtliederbuch* (Book of Eight Songs) in Nuremberg at Jobst Gutknecht. *Geystliche(n) Gesangk Buchleyn* – the first collection of songs was published by Josef Kluga in 1524 in Wittenberg (Predmerská-Zúriková, 2017). The collection contains 24 songs, including 5 Latin Hymns and 8 Wittenbert Fight Songs (Veit, 1986). All the works from this edition have not been preserved. The second unaltered edition of the following year 1525 has been preserved, which was published in Worms (Predmerska-Zúriková, 2017). The year 1524 was extremely successful for M. Luther when it came to publishing his songs because they were published in three different collections: *Geystliche Gesangk Buchleyn* (Ecclesiastical Songbook, Wittenberg), *Erfurter Enchiridien* (Erfurt Handy Book, Erfurt), *Achtliederbuch* (Songbook of Eight Songs, Nuremberg). There were 24 songs in these songbooks. In fact, these songbooks began the reformation in the field of church songs and church music at all.

Other songs were released later in 1526, 1527, 1529, 1535, 1539, 1541, 1543 and the last in 1545. All these editions were published by Joseph Kluga. An important aspect of the release of songbooks with the songs written by Martin Luther is the fact that he writes an introduction to them, what makes them an important source of information about his opinions of music. In addition to these songbooks, Luther's songs were released between 1524 and 1545 in another 120 songbooks (Veit, 1986), which shows how popular and significant they were in the formation of the Protestant ecclesiastical song. Protestant ecclesiastical song becomes the real spiritual support of the Reformation. Veit (1986) mentions that 1487 songs were created over the past 20 years.

Taxonomy of Lutheran Songs

It is said that Martin Luther worked very systematically on writing his songs and 24 songs in the years 1523 to 1524. These songs can be arranged in a concise systematic way (Geck, 2017, p. 62):

- „*Psalm songs*;
- *Songs to Catechism* – there are 10 prayers, *Credo*, *Songs to the Supper of the Lord*;
- *Songs to the Church Year* – *Advent*, *Christmas*, *Revelation of the Lord*, *Easter*, *Pentecost and Trinity*.”

In principle Martin Luther did care so much about the promotion and creation of a German songbook, but rather about creation of a reform of liturgy based on church songs. They become their main musical support and thus acquire a

decisive liturgical position. The systematic arrangement of the songs according to the church year gives the basis for the development of German Protestant church music that adopts this system, while it culminates in the work of the late Baroque composers Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Georg Philippe Telemann (1681-1767) and Christophe Graupner (1683-1760). These are the composers in the work of whom the influences of Luther's ideas culminate in music and in the connection of theology and music.

Lyrics of Lutheran Songs

The texts written by Luther fulfill the role of artistic text and at the same time have a purposeful function. They have several meanings (Geck, 2017):

- Inform of the novelty in the Church;
- Present reformational teaching;
- Teach children the foundations of Christian life, which is an extremely important didactic function, while, some of his songs M. Luther refers to as children's songs;
- Consolidate the community of believers;
- It is difficult for contemporary poets to understand that despite these practical purposes these poems have lost none of their artistic function.

It is interesting that some open attacks against the Pope and against the Turks appear in several songs written by Luther. However, later these lyrics are reworked and the attacks moderated, for example in the song *Vom Himmel Hoch* (Geck, 2017). At present, all songs are transcribed into modern German, both their grammar and syntax. In the analysis of songs written by Luther their original text has to be taken into account and in particular, the affective relationship of the word and the music. This means that it is necessary to go back to the original editions of these songs. The beauty of the songs written by Luther is mostly seen when they are performed within the community of believers. The poet and master singer Hans Sachs (1494-1576) named M. Luther "a nightingale from Wittenberg". And when mentioning the value of songs by Martin Luther, German romantic poet, Heinrich Heine called Luther "the Marseillais Castle Fortified of the reformation, which has lost nothing of its enthusiastic power" (Geck, 2017, p. 83).

Initially, his songs were referred to as spiritual songs or German songs; the term chorale began to be used only from the end of the 17th century. M. Luther had a number of followers in the writing of chorales, such as Nikolas Herman, Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608), Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676) – the most prolific author of Luther, Matthias Claudius and others.

Musical Aspect of Lutheran Songs

Luther has made considerable efforts to the choice of the right tone chord which should be based on the nature of the text. It gives the evidence of his control of affect theory in close co-operation with musical rhetoric. Luther is one of the key personalities of the development of musical poetics in German music in the 16th – 18th centuries. This generation of German Protestant

composers has made a significant contribution to this principle, culminating in late Baroque composers, led by Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Philipp Telemann and Christoph Graupner. The distinctive feature of Lutheran songs is their composition on the principle of the unity of word and music, by which they gained theological and musical unity and grip. Because of this feature, they lose nothing from their value as the time passes, especially verbal value, and we still find it also in the works of contemporary singers. An insignificant sign of their high value is the fact that, to the present they are significant source of inspiration for contemporary composers as well as musicologists and theologians who constantly study and explore them. Martin Luther during composing his songs paid attention to their inner form. Despite retaining the older form of the bar form in the form of *a a b* bar, he emphasised the internal logic of their composition with obvious mathematical influences. It was based on the then-well-known thesis that included music in scientific disciplines.

Typology of Lutheran Songs According to Patrice Veit

An excellent expert of Lutheran songs, Patrice Veit has divided his songs according to their character into several categories with which we fully agree. According to him, they have the following character:

- Prayers – the fact that songs have the character of prayer was emphasised by M. Luther himself.
- Catechism – there is no need to differentiate very much between prayer and catechism, for in M. Luther, prayer has often got catechistic dimension that can be seen for example in the song *Wyr gleuben all an eynem Gott*,
- Recognition songs – which have great power to promote faith, an example is the song *Ein feste Burg*,
- And finally liturgical function (Veit, 1986).

In the songs written by Luther there is quite an interesting fact that God in the sense of his triune is the focus of attention in his 29 songs, while he further specifies them (Veit, 1986, p. 81):

- *Christ* – in 13 songs,
- *God the Father* – in 9 songs,
- *St. Ghost* – in 3 songs,
- *St. Trinity* – in 4 songs.

This review is the evidence of Luther's deep humiliation and belief, which is also fully transmitted to the faithful community during singing his songs in worship or in intimate domestic contemplation.

5. Lutheran Chorale in the Works of Other Composers

Lutheran chorales were compiled by the composers of the musical past as well as the 19th and 20th centuries. In the 16th to 17th centuries about 10.000 songs were created which were influenced by Luther (Passion, Cantatas, Vocals, Instrumental and Organ Compositions). The attention was given to the German

Baroque composers Samuel Scheidt (1587-1654), Johann Eccard (1553-1611), Johann Hermann Schein (1586-1630), Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), Dietrich Buxtehude (1637-1707), and Heinrich Schütz (1585 – 1672). The composition of chorales by Luther is in Johann Sebastian Bach's work, which produced 30 of his songs. In Bach's concept, however, it is not only a musical treatment of chorales by Luther in a new sound form, but their application is made in the compositions by Bach of unity of theology and music, in the sense that a great reformer declared in a letter addressed to the court composer Ludwig Senfl in Munich in 1530.

Among the composers of the 19th century, a significant place in the processing of Lutheran chorales belongs to Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847). His *Symphony no. 5 in D major Reformational*, Op. 107 (1830), with the "The Fortified Castle", belongs to the peak works of its kind. The same song was also inspired by a remarkable composer from the turn of the 19th and 20th century by Max Reger (1873-1916). The compilation of Lutheran chorales attracts composers of the second half of the 20th century, as evidenced by the works of German composers, members of various generations, Thomas Jennefelt (* 1954), Volker Jaekel (* 1965) and Jonathan R. Brell (1987). This is evidenced by the constant theological and spiritual life of Lutheran chorale and their extraordinary power of silence even in the current turbulent times.

Lutheran Chorale in Slovakia

Songs by Luther were the part of every Protestant songbook, based on the needs of Protestant worshippers in Slovakia. It was like that in the legendary *Cithara sanctorum* by Juraj Tranovský (1592 – 1637), which was published for the first time in Levoča in 1636. Songs by Luther were also engaged in the Protestant songbook from 1868, written in Slovakian Czech language and contains 17 songs by Luther (Predmerska-Zúriková, 2017). In the first Slovak Protestant songbook from 1992 there were included 15 songs by Luther. The songbook contains a total of 700 songs.

The song *The Fortified Castle* composed by Martin Luther was the source of inspiration also for the works of Slovak composers of artificial music. Roman Berger (* 1931) uses this most famous Lutheran chorale in his song from 1997 – *EXODUS III. (PSALMUS)* for organ. Similarly, Vítázoslav Kubička (* 1953) took as a source of inspiration this official Protestant anthem in a homonymous spiritual opera *The Fortified Castle*, which was made in 2016 on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Lutheran chorale frames the story of opera, at the beginning it is instrumental performance of the solo violoncello and the organ and it is concluded in all its hymnic beauty which is performed by chorus, soloists and instrumentalists. The celebratory premiere of the opera was on the day of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation with the Slovak Radio Symphonic Orchestra conducted by Adrian Kokoš on October 31st, 2017 in the historical building of the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava.

In the pre-premiere, the opera was performed in chamber performance of piano and violoncello on July 7th, 2017 in the church in Kežmarok, on July 9th, 2017 in the sports' hall in Prešov, on July 25th, 2017 in Modra and on September 10th, 2017 in Necpaly. It is an opera that approaches the spiritual world of Martin Luther and its transformation to world famous historic event. The dramaturgic center of the opera based on Lutheran chorale highlighted the theological and spiritual fullness of his music.

6. Conclusions

Through the history of world civilisation we meet in the personality of Dr. Martin Luther not only a man who has changed not only the course of a human history, but also the development of European music. His spiritual songs, entitled as chorales since 17th century, have affected the spiritual world of a common man. They approached the magic of singing, and through that they made a direct contact with the Providence of God. Even in this fact we can see how popular Lutheran songs were and this popularity has lasted until the present time, because we can find them in present-day Protestant songbook in Slovakia. By emphasising the fondness and significance of Lutheran songs in contemporary church life, we have succeeded in meeting the main goal of our study. Philipp Melachthon and Martin Luther, put a special emphasis on the emotional power of music, which they highlighted in the preface to individual songs. They became the founders of the importance of using the theory of affection in German music of the 16th to 18th century, and in close cooperation with the musical rhetoric it became the basis of the poetics of German Baroque music. It is not without interest that the next generation of composers, regardless of the confessions, drew largely from the inexhaustible inspirational well of the German Baroque composers. Other interesting fact is that Lutheran chorale is still the great source of inspiration for European composers, including the youngest contemporary generation.

The interconnectedness of music and theology, so much proclaimed by M. Luther, found its culmination not only in the German Late Baroque music of the first half of the 18th century but also in the 20th century music. Especially the second half of the 20th century is characterised by the tendency of composers to spiritual or even church music. It is interesting that European composers have a membership in a particular confession and their creation serves a single basic idea and mission – the celebration of the Providence of God. Oliver Messien or Arvo Pärt are contemporary composers who made songs with this theme in Europe. In Slovakia, the celebration of the Providence of God is largely included in the songs by Romer Berger, Vítazoslav Kubička, and by Pavel Krška (* 1949). It is undisputable fact that Lutheran have gained over-professional significance and have a durable place not only in liturgical ceremonies, but by their spiritual message and extraordinary artistic quality, they help men to reach their spiritual balance.

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