The Earliest Lutheran Hymn Tradition as Illustrated by Two Classic Sixteenth-Century German Chorales

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The Pre-eminent Position of Martin Luther

The history of Christian hymns is essentially the story of contributions by countless numbers of faithful men and women to what has become for the worshipping Church a vast repertoire of congregational song. Within that story various people played a particularly influential role in the development of hymnody. One of these, for example, would be St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan in the late fourth century and the person generally credited with the introduction of hymn singing in the western church. Another such leader might be Isaac Watts, the early eighteenth-century English Congregationalist minister whose efforts led to the acceptance of hymn singing among English-speaking Christians, all of whom had previously limited their congregational singing—for theological reasons—to metrical settings of the psalms.

But neither Ambrose nor Watts—nor, for that matter, anyone else—could possibly claim a position of importance equal to that of Martin Luther, whose reforms in the sixteenth century led to the establishment of hymn singing as the principal means of expression for people gathered in worship. Prior to Luther the hymn had flourished only in monastic offices; it had no official role of consequence in the Roman Catholic mass. The church hymn, as we now understand the term (i.e., congregational song), was born with the German Reformation. Simply stated, there was no discernible tradition of congregational hymn singing in the worship of the western church until Martin Luther and the Reformation.

To Martin Luther belongs the great distinction of having given the German people in their own language the Bible, the Catechism, and the hymn...
book. Together these three books defined the Reformation in Germany, and its is perhaps significant that the hymn book was the first of the three to be published. Luther's intentions for congregational singing were quite simple: he wished to have congregational song in the language of the people; he insisted on texts which could be scripturally supported; and he favored simple tunes which could be easily sung by the faithful. Martin Luther was responsible for writing 37 hymns, which were produced during a 20-year period beginning in 1523. Luther and many of the earliest Lutheran hymnwriters followed in the tradition of the early Meistersingers in which the text-writer and tune-writer were most often one and the same. This is a distinguishing and highly important characteristic of the early Lutheran chorale, because it emphasized the fundamental unity of melody and text.

Luther drew his inspiration for hymn tunes from a wide variety of sources, including traditional Latin hymns and antiphons, and various secular and sacred folk melodies. His texts show a similar variety in origin. About a half dozen are totally original. The remainder are derived from scripture (particularly the Psalter), from pre-Reformation Latin hymns and other texts, and from a variety of other secular and sacred predecessors.

The most widely known of Luther's hymns is unquestionably "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," which is sung today by congregations across the spectrum of denominations. Yet the origins of this wonderful hymn remain somewhat obscure and the subject of considerable difference of opinion. The text may have been written as early as 1527 or as late as 1529. It has even been suggested that the hymn was written in two stages—stanzas one and three in 1524 or soon afterward, and stanzas two and four in 1527 or 1528—although little evidence supports this hypothesis.

If there is controversy concerning the text, there is an equal lack of agreement concerning the origin of the hymn tune Luther wrote. This famous chorale tune, to which the text is universally sung, may have been derived from a pre-Reformation melody, although evidence to that effect is flimsy at best. The original version of the tune is highly irregular and very rhythmic in character, as were many of the tunes from the sixteenth century:

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A might-y for-tress is our God,
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Later on, however, the rhythmic qualities of these early chorale melodies were eliminated. As a consequence, "A Mighty Fortress" is usually sung to this latter version featuring equal note values, this being particularly the case in America:

Happily, the original version of the tune is appearing in more and more modern hymnals, although many congregations find it quite difficult to sing.

**Psalm 46 as Inspiration of "A Mighty Fortress"**

The inspiration for the text of "A Mighty Fortress" was Psalm 46 ("God is our refuge and strength"). The Psalter has provided texts for praising Almighty God for thousands of years, and the use of psalm texts has been a prominent part of Christian worship since the earliest centuries of the Christian Era. Christians have obviously used psalms in translation from the original Hebrew, and some of these translations have sought to maintain, as nearly as possible, literal meanings even at the expense of meter and rhyme. Other translations have cast texts in metrical form, but often at the sacrifice of textural fidelity and accuracy. "A Mighty Fortress," however, is not a translation in either of these senses, for Psalm 46 merely provided Luther with the inspiration for his text. Therefore, the hymn is really a commentary which applies the spirit of the psalm text to the Christian experience.

A brief look at Psalm 46 (see page 19) will provide some valuable insight:

Psalm 46 as shown in the translation from the *New Revised Standard Bible* (right column) is clearly divided into three sections, the second and third ending with the refrain or response, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." It is perhaps safe to assume that the refrain was accidentally omitted after verse 3 at some point in history, and it is included at this point in the liturgical version printed in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (left column). Therefore, the structure becomes three verses followed by the refrain, a second group of three verses followed by the same refrain, and finally a third group of three verses again ending with the refrain.
Psalm 46 (Lutheran Book of Worship)

1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth be moved,
and though the mountains
be toppled into the depths of the sea:
3 though its waters rage and foam,
and though the mountains tremble at its tumult.

"The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

4 There is a river whose streams
make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
5 God is in the midst of her;
she shall not be overthrown;
God shall help her at the break of day.
6 The nations make much ado,
and the kingdoms are shaken;
God has spoken, and the earth shall melt away.

"The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

8 Come now and look upon the works of the Lord,
what awesome things he has done on earth.
9 It is he who makes war to cease in all the world;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
and burns the shields with fire.
10 Be still, then, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth.

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Psalm 46 (New Revised Standard Bible)

1 God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in
the heart of the sea;
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah

4 There is a river whose streams
make glad the city of God.
the holy habitation of the Most High.
5 God is in the midst of the city,
it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
6 The nations are in an uproar;
the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

"The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah

8 Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
10 Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

The initial three verses emphasize the presence of God as "refuge and strength" not simply historically but—as the psalmist says—"a very present help in trouble." Moreover, we are assured of the loving presence of God even if "the mountains be toppled" and creation itself be in danger of collapse. The second group of three verses assures us that the city of God shall not be overthrown, even when nations are in an uproar and kingdoms are overthrown. Although the image of "the city of God" probably does not specifically refer to Jerusalem, it evokes a powerful image of God's presence in Zion. Therefore, the refuge to whom we may turn in times of trouble is not a remote and distant God, but one who resides among his people. The final set of three verses begins with an invitation that we should "come" and see the "awesome things" which our God has done here on earth, the psalm ending with God himself speaking to his people, "Be still, then, and know that I am God."
Luther's "A Mighty Fortress"

In comparing this psalm text with Luther's hymn text, it might first be observed how dissimilar they are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lutheran Book of Worship</th>
<th>Original German Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'A mighty fortress is our God,</td>
<td>Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sword and shield victorious;</td>
<td>Ein' gute Wehr und Waffen;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod,</td>
<td>Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And wins salvation glorious.</td>
<td>Die uns jetzt hat betroffen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The old evil foe,</td>
<td>Der alt' böse Feind,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sworn to work us woe,</td>
<td>Mit Ernst er's jetzt meint,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With dread craft and might</td>
<td>Gross' Macht und viel List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He arms himself to fight.</td>
<td>Sein' grausam' Rüstung ist,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On earth he has no equal.</td>
<td>Auf Erd' ist nicht seinsgleichen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'No strength of ours can match his might!
We would be lost, rejected.
But now a champion comes to fight,
Whom God himself elected.
Ask who this may be:
Lord of hosts is he!
Jesus Christ our Lord,
God's only Son, adored.
He holds the field victorious.

'Though hordes of devils fill the land
All threatening to devour us,
We tremble not, unmoved we stand;
They cannot overpower us.
This world's prince may rage,
In fierce war engage.
He is doomed to fail;
God's judgment must prevail!
One little word subdues him.

'God's Word forever shall abide,
No thanks to foes, who fear it;
For God himself fights by our side
With weapons of the Spirit.
If they take our House,
Goods, fame, child, or spouse,
Wrench our life away,
They cannot win the day.
The Kingdom's ours forever!

Luther's hymn is cast in four stanzas, each consisting of nine irregular lines. For those accustomed to the metric regularity of the older Latin hymns, or to meters of later English hymns, his poetry may appear to be rather crude or even primitive. The nine lines in each stanza vary in syllable length from eight to five, the overall pattern being 87.87.55 56.7. The rhyme scheme of the original German text is AB AB CC DD B. This is more or less maintained in the English version found in the Lutheran Book of Worship, except for the ninth line which—unlike the German—does not rhyme with the ending of the second and fourth lines.

The lack of traditional poetic characteristics, however, should not be considered as a weakness in Luther's text, for Luther and his immediate contemporaries were not interested in the meter and rhyme of the Latin Office hymn, nor were they particularly interested in poetic language. The only thing which mattered to these early Lutheran hymnwriters was the message of the text, a message which was presented in the simplest and most direct manner.

That message in "A Mighty Fortress" was inspired, as we have seen, by Psalm 46. The three central themes of this psalm might be summarized as (1) God as refuge and strength, (2) God's presence among us, and (3) God's invitation to us. The first of these is strongly developed in Luther's first stanza, not only through identifying God as "a mighty fortress," but also by specific mention of the "old evil foe." This is, of course, a reference to the devil, but in the heated spirit of the early Reformation must also have been an allusion to the enemies of the Reformation who represented in Luther's eyes an incarnation of evil itself. Luther's second stanza declares that no strength of ours can face the devil, but that we have a champion, Jesus Christ our Lord. This, then is the second theme of Psalm 46—the concept of God's presence among us—the presence now being "God's only Son, adored." This stanza articulates a very strong Reformation theology, namely that our salvation is assured through Christ and Christ alone. Luther's third stanza expands upon the evils and dangers which beset the world, but assures us that "this world's prince" is doomed to fail. The final stanza expands upon the third theme of Psalm 46—God's invitation to us. Whereas the psalmist spoke of the "awesome things he [i.e. God] has done on earth," Luther speaks of God fighting by our side, "with weapons of the spirit," ending with the final assurance that "The kingdom is ours forever!" Whatever we shall lose in this earthly existence is nothing compared with the heavenly reward which awaits us.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of "A Mighty Fortress." All of the principles and aspirations of the Reformation came to be represented by this powerful hymn, and it has been translated into many different languages. If it is perhaps an overstatement to claim that "A Mighty Fortress" is the most famous and well-known hymn in history, surely no other hymn is more famous and more well-known. It is sung today by Christians of all denominations, and has achieved a place in the repertoire of congregational song which is truly unique. In addition, Luther's sixteenth-century hymn has found a place in the music of succeeding generations, most notably in works by Bach and Mendelssohn, but also in music of composers as diverse as Meyerbeer and Glazunov.

**Martin Schalling**

While Martin Luther has needed no introduction in the foregoing discussion of "A Mighty Fortress," Martin Schalling is a much less well-known figure. Therefore, a few words about the author of "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart" would be appropriate.

Martin Schalling was born on April 21, 1532, in Strassburg. He was, therefore, almost 50 years younger than Luther. The Reformation had gained a foothold in Strassburg about 12 years prior to Schalling's birth. Consequently, he was very much a child of the Reformation and sought an education at the University of Wittenberg, where he became a favorite student of Melanchthon.

Following the completion of his degree, Schalling accepted an appointment as diakon in the southern German city of Regensburg. A theological dispute with the Superintendent led to his resignation four years later and his acceptance of a new position in Amberg, Bavaria. These disputes were unfortunately common at the time and involved deeply contested efforts between Calvinists and Lutherans to gain control of the local church. After a short ministry in Amberg, Schalling was once again forced to leave but was permitted to minister to the local Lutherans in the nearby town of Vilseck. A half dozen years later he was permitted to return to Amberg, and, with the Lutherans once again in ascendency, he became General Superintendent of Oberpfalz (Bavaria) and court preacher at Heidelberg.

Ironically, it was the signing of the Formula of Concord in 1577, an attempt to reconcile differences between Lutherans and Calvinists, which led to the next crisis in his life. All of the clergy were required to sign this agreement, but Schalling refused because he felt it dealt too harshly with his mentor, Melanchthon. His refusal led to his banishment from the court of Heidelberg and his being deprived of his offices. Then in 1585 he was finally given the opportunity of a new position as pastor in Nürnberg, where he spent the remaining years of his life. He died on December 19, 1608.

In truth, Schalling's life was neither more nor less distinguished than that of many pastors of his time. He is remembered today only because he wrote the text of one of the classic Lutheran hymns, "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart," this being the only hymn Schalling apparently wrote. Curiously, this hymn is not well-known among Americans. It has had virtually no use among non-Lutheran Protestants or among Roman Catholics, and it has been
notably absent from many of the earlier American Lutheran hymnals. Despite the neglect with which it has apparently been treated on this side of the Atlantic, however, "Lord, Thee I Love" is one of the great sixteenth-century hymns, one of the more prominent and beloved hymns in the German Lutheran tradition. An indication of the position which this hymn occupied in Germany is its use by both Buxtehude and Bach. Bach, for example, incorporated the hymn into several of his most important works, including two of his cantatas and the St. John Passion.

Psalms 18 and 73 as Inspiration for "Lord, Thee I Love"

Martin Schalling drew his inspiration for this, his only hymn, from the Psalter, his text being based upon Psalm 18 ("I will love thee, O Lord, my strength") and Psalm 73 ("Truly God is good to Israel"). However, the connections between these psalms and Schalling's hymn text are far less concrete than is the relationship between Psalm 46 and Luther's "A Mighty Fortress." Psalm 18, the fourth longest of the Psalter, is a "royal psalm," probably intended as a celebration of David's exploits but applicable to any king coming to the throne as a servant of the Lord. The text of this psalm, with minor variations, also appears in 2 Samuel 22, where David celebrates his deliverance from his enemies and from the hands of Saul.

A lengthy poem consisting of 50 verses, it opens as follows:

1 I love you, O Lord, my strength,
   O Lord my stronghold,
   my crag, and my haven.

2 My God, my rock
   in whom I put my trust,
   my shield, the horn of my salvation,
   and my refuge:
   You are worthy of praise.

The psalm continues by developing the relationship between the psalmist and God, setting forth the evils besetting the psalmist. These are described in verses four and five:

4 The breakers of death rolled over me,
   and the torrents of oblivion
   made me afraid.

5 The cords of hell entangle me,
   and the snares of death
   were set for me.

This is followed in verses six and seven by God's response to the psalmist's plea for help and then, in the subsequent verses, by a dramatic description of the awesome power of God and the rescue of God's servant:

10 He reached down from on high
   and grasped me;
   he drew me out of great waters.

18 He delivered me from my strong enemies
   and from those who hated me,
   for they were too mighty for me.

19 They comforted me in the day of my disaster;
   but the Lord was my support
20 He brought me out into an open place;
   he rescued me
   because he delighted in me.

The psalm continues with affirming that God acts favorably towards those who obey him, describing the power which comes from God in the traditional terms of the warrior king. It ends in the form of a doxology which places the psalmist's triumph over his enemies:

40 Therefrom I will extol you among the nations, O Lord,
   and sing praises to your name.

38 He multiplies the victories of his king;
   he shows lovingkindness
   to his anointed,
   to David and his descendants forever.

Both Luther and Calvin left commentaries on Psalm 18, and many Christian authors have given the psalm a strong Christological interpretation. The other psalm which provided inspiration for "Lord, Thee I Love" has an equally compelling text. In many respects Psalm 73 resembles Job, since the psalmist is lamenting his misfortune and the apparent good fortune of the wicked:

But as for me,
   my feet had nearly slipped;
   I had almost tripped and fallen;

3 Because I envied the proud
   and saw the prosperity
   of the wicked.

4 For they suffer no pain,
   and their bodies are sleek and sound;

In the misfortunes of others
   they have no share;
   they are not afflicted as others are.

15 In vain have I kept my heart clean,
   and washed my hands in innocence.

But the psalmist is shown God's justice and the ultimate end for the wicked:

16 When I tried to understand these things,
   it was too hard for me;

17 Until I entered the sanctuary of God
   and discerned the end of the wicked.

18 Surely, you set them in slippery places;
   you cast them down in ruin.

19 Oh, how suddenly
   do they come to destruction,
   come to an end,
   and perish from terror!

And, at the end of the psalm, he declares his belief in God's wisdom and mercy:
Though my flesh and my heart
should waste away,
  God is the strength of my heart
  and my portion forever.
Truly, those who forsake you
will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful.
But it is good for me to be near God;
  I have made the Lord God
my refuge.
I will speak of all your works
in the gates of the city of Zion.

Schalling's "Lord, Thee I Love"

These two psalms provided the inspirational basis
for Schalling's hymn. The hymn is in three stanzas, each consisting of 13 lines or verses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lutheran Book of Worship</th>
<th>Original German Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lord, thee I love with all my heart;</td>
<td>Herzlich lieb hab' ich dich, o Herr,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pray thee, ne'er from me depart:</td>
<td>Ich bitt', woll'st sein von mir nicht fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With tender mercy cheer me.</td>
<td>Mit deiner Gü't und Gnaden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth has no pleasure I would share.</td>
<td>Die ganze Welt nicht freuet mich,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare</td>
<td>Nach Himmel und Erd' nicht frag' ich,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If thou, Lord, were not near me.</td>
<td>Wenn ich dich nur kann haben;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And should my heart for sorrow break,</td>
<td>Und wenn mir gleich mein Herz zerbricht,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My trust in thee can nothing shake.</td>
<td>So bist doch du mein' Zuversicht,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thou art the portion I have sought;</td>
<td>Mein Teil und meines Herzens Trost,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thy precious blood my soul has bought.</td>
<td>Der mich durch sein Blut hat erlöst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Jesus Christ,</td>
<td>Herr Jesu Christ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My God and Lord, my God and Lord,</td>
<td>Mein Gott und Herr, mein Gott und Herr,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forsake me not! I trust thy Word.</td>
<td>In Schanden lass mich nimmermehr!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yea, Lord, 'twas thy rich bounty gave
My body, soul, and all I have
In this poor life of labor.
Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place
May glorify thy lavish grace
And serve and help my neighbor.
Let no false doctrine me beguile,
Let Satan not my soul defile.
Give strength and patience unto me
To bear my cross and follow thee.
Lord Jesus Christ,
My God and Lord, my God and Lord,
In death thy comfort still afford.

Lord, let at last thine angels come,
To Abr'hams bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until thy reappearance.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, thy glorious face,
My Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ,
My prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise thee without end!

Bs ist ja, Herr, dein G'schenk und Gab'
Mein Leib und Seel' und was ich hab'
In diesem armen Leben.
Damit ich's brauch' zum Lobe dein,
Zu Nutz und Dienst des Nächsten mein,
Woll'st mir dein' Gnade geben!
Behütt mich, Herr, vor falscher Lehr',
Des Satans Mord und Lügen wehr,
In allem Kreuz erhalte mich,
Auf dass ich's trag' geduldiglich!
Herr Jesu Christ,
Mein Herr und Gott, mein Herr und Gott,
Tröst mir mein' Seel in Todesnot!

Ach, Herr, lass dein' lieb' Englein
Am Letzen End' die Seele mein
In Abrahams Schoss tragen!
Der Leib in sein'm Schlafkammerlein
Gar sanft, ohn' ein'ge Qual und Pein,
Ruh' bis am Jüngsten Tage.
Als dann vom Tod erwecke mich,
Dass meine Augen sehen dich
In aller Freud', o Gottes Sohn,
Mein Heiland und mein Gnadenthron!
Herr Jesu Christ,
Erhöre mich, erhöre mich,
Ich will dich preisen ewiglich!
The 13 lines of each stanza follow a pattern of two groups of three lines, a group of four, and a final group of three, with a syllable pattern of 887.887.888.488. Schalling’s rhyming pattern might be described as AAB for each group (extended to AABB for the group of four lines), with the exception of the final three lines which have the reverse pattern of ABB. Lines three and six rhyme with one another, this being the only rhyming which occurs between groups within the stanza. The overall rhyming structure, therefore, is AAB CCB DDEE FGG. All of this suggests a more complex and organized poetic structure than was noted in Luther’s earlier hymn, “A Mighty Fortress.”

Schalling probably wrote this hymn sometime between 1567 and 1570, either shortly before his forced departure from Amberg, or after his arrival in Vilseck. However, he was not responsible for writing the tune to which the text is practically always sung. The composer of this wonderful hymn tune, first published in 1577, is unknown.

Despite its anonymous origin, the tune is absolutely masterful and supports Schalling’s text to a extraordinary degree. Its moment of true greatness occurs with the treatment of the final three lines of text which, as we have seen, has the syllable pattern of 488. The tune first elongates the short line of four syllables (“Lord Jesus Christ”) through the use of longer note values:

\[\text{Lord Jesus Christ,}\]

Then it uses two quick and contrasting melodic units for the repetition in the next line (“My God and Lord, my God and Lord” in stanzas one and two, “My prayer attend, my prayer attend” in stanza three):

\[\text{My God and Lord, my God and Lord,}\]

Finally, the tune conveys the concluding eight-syllable line with only three pitches, six of which are the tonic note (or key center). This creates an impression of great spontaneity and fervor, surely one of the most effective and moving conclusions to any hymn text in the repertoire:

\[\text{For sake not! I trust your Word.}\]

Schalling’s hymn text, written “For the Dying,” begins with a direct reference to Psalm 18, the opening of both the hymn and psalm beginning with very similar language. Unlike the psalmist, however, Schalling expresses an unshakable faith. There is no envy of the wicked, nor is there any real sense of despair. This essential difference between the two psalms and the hymn which they inspired reflects the Christian assurance of a Savior and Redeemer in the person of Christ. While Schalling gives expression to human weakness, asking for strength and patience, and for protection against false doctrine and Satan, he yet realizes that salvation through faith is the ultimate promise of his Savior.

In comparing Schalling’s text to “A Mighty Fortress,” one immediately notices the very different language used by the two authors. “Lord, Thee I Love” is very much a personal testament of faith, such as in the passage “and then from death awaken me, that these mine eyes with joy may see.” The persistent use of the first person is in stark contrast to the absence of the first person in Luther’s hymn. Yet, in spite of this difference, the two texts share a common characteristic: both Luther and Schalling are intent upon confessing fundamental Christian truth. These two hymns are both catechetical or confessional in nature, despite their very different language.
Conclusion

The two hymns which form the basis for this study are survivors of a much larger repertoire which emerged in sixteenth-century Germany as a consequence of the Reformation. Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress,” survives not only because of its effectiveness but also because it is the hymn most widely associated with an author who was such a dominant leader of the Reformation. Schalligh’s hymn, by contrast, has had to find a continuing place in the hymn repertoire more on its own merits rather than those of its author. Perhaps for this reason it is less well-known, despite its being a particularly beloved hymn among German Lutheran congregations.

The continued use of these and other sixteenth-century Lutheran hymns is an important testimony to the importance of this repertoire and the importance of this particular period in the history of the Christian church. These hymns emerged from a time which witnessed the very beginnings of congregational song as we have come to understand the term in Christian worship. If for no other reason, our continued singing of these hymns is an important testimony to the accomplishment of Luther and his followers in establishing a liturgical role for congregational hymn singing.

But the hymns of Luther, Schalligh, and their contemporaries also have a wider historical significance. The sixteenth century was the time of both the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. While it is common to think of these two movements—one Protestant and one Roman Catholic—as being essentially in opposition to one another, historians generally concede that they were actually parallel movements in the Christian church. The church which emerged from the sixteenth century was admittedly one which was severely divided, not only between Lutherans and Catholics, but also among an increasing array of Protestant denominations. The church was not only divided but also deeply bruised and scarred by strife and conflict of sometimes horrifying proportions.

Nonetheless, what developed from this painful and divisive process was a church—Lutheran, Calvinist, Catholic—prepared to face the challenges of an enlightened and modern world. Medieval Christianity, if not dead, was dying, and a modern church built upon faith rather than fear, reason rather than superstition, and biblical truth rather than fanciful legend was taking its place. As that process began to unfold throughout the Christian world, the poetic and musical expression of this post-medieval church was first nurtured and developed by Martin Luther and his followers. Those earliest hymns, including Luther’s own “A Mighty Fortress” and Schalligh’s “Lord, Thee I Love” are, therefore, not only vivid expressions of the German Reformation but, more important, these texts witness to the faith of a modern church. Born in an age of division and conflict, these hymns are now appropriately embraced and sung by Christians of all denominations.