

A Mighty Fortress

'*Soli deo Gloria*'

To GOD be the glory.

With these words

Johann Sebastian Bach signed his manuscripts

thereby recognizing

that it was not *his* doing

but the gift of great abilities

bestowed on him by God.

Since the days of the psalmist

people gathered together

to praise God through songs.

We don't know what their melodies were

as they were not written down

but were passed from generation to generation

through memory –

engraved on minds and hearts and souls,

...and changed

as each generation molded the songs to their ear.

So it was with the Reformers

who needed new words

to express their understanding

Of God,

new songs that this *new* church could call its own.

Historians say (and I quote) that the greatest gift Martin Luther gave us

was the "freedom and elasticity with which he established the Lutheran service and the great importance he attributed to music." (end quote)

He did not believe that one form of the liturgy would be suitable for all churches

Small rural churches did not have the resources of large city cathedrals

so could not be expected to have worship led

by well-practiced choirs and mighty pipe organs.

Luther believed that congregational singing in *the language of the people*

MUST be the basis for all worship.

So, for this *new* church,

this 'Lutheran' church,

new music was needed to give the *people* a chance to sing.

So hymns were composed

using familiar Latin hymn tunes and secular melodies

set to new texts that reflected Luther's theology.

This 'recycling' of song

allowed people to quickly learn new hymns

as the melodies were familiar to them.

Martin Luther did compose some new melodies, however.

His most famous is "Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott",

which we know as 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God'.

In Luther's original rhythmic melody,

he carefully crafted the tune to stress the most important words of the text.

Listen as the Cantor Group sings the first verse in German,
and then join in for the remaining stanzas,
singing with great gusto
this 'most Lutheran' of all hymns.

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