



LISTEN TO THE BIRDS: LUTHER ON MUSIC

Ouvir os pássaros: Lutero e a Música

Dr. Mark P. Bangert ¹

Abstract:

This article aims to reflect on the theological understanding of Luther about the music. Examines the relationship between music and birdsong, reflecting on the passion of Luther for this song, the inspiration for musical compositions of various types, natural theology, and so on. From this broad reflection on music and birds, the article discusses aspects of Trinitarian and Creation's Theology based on Luther as a subsidy for a theology of gospel music and the consequences of this theology for music making in the church today.

Keywords:

Birdsong and Music. Music Theology. Luther.

Resumo:

Este artigo tem como objetivo refletir sobre a compreensão teológica de Lutero a respeito da música. Analisa-se a relação entre música e canto dos pássaros, refletindo sobre a paixão de Lutero por esta música, a inspiração para composições musicais de várias tipos, teologia natural, entre outros aspectos. A partir desta ampla reflexão sobre música e pássaros, o artigo aborda aspectos da teologia trinitária e da criação com base em Lutero como subsídio para um teologia da música evangélica e as consequências desta teologia para o fazer musical na igreja nos dias atuais.

Palavras-chave:

Canto dos Pássaros e Música. Teologia da Música. Lutero.

“So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”
Rom. 10:17

Just a few days before Christmas, 2013, my spouse and I moved into a condominium located in the near southwest side of Chicago. Our eighth-floor unit overlooks the campus of the

¹ Dr. Mark P. Bangert, John H. Tietjen Professor of Worship and Church Music, emeritus, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, St. Luke Bach Choir Artistic Director and Scholar in Residence.

University of Illinois Chicago with its inviting tree-lined walkways. Behind our building four major railways claim right of way, so during commuting hours we experience a steady accompaniment of train sounds, most of which have by this time entered our personal realms of normal acoustical ambience.

By April, 2014 signs of spring arrived full force, including birds. One warmish day, windows seriously open for the first time, I was serenaded for nearly five hours by a robin perched atop the nine-story building next door. That bird's persistence and concentration astounded me, as did the clarity of his call even amid the procession of trains. His intentions eventually came clear: somewhere down the walkways a nest was being built, or filled, and his single-minded task was to see that no unwanted creature come near. Potential violators could be headed off because of his advantageous view of the scene.

What the robin couldn't prevent was a Martin Luther quote that popped up on my brain's screen, a quote learned years before while researching the reformer's views on music. "All the little flowers and the birds have the Gospel written on their throats," is the way it goes. It was a long sermon that day in April.

Birds and Music

Luther's passion for birds

At first glance Luther's observation seems naïve, precious perhaps, if not suggestive of a possible penchant of his for songbirds in particular. By itself, the quote invites a variety of interpretations, many of which are rendered irrelevant once context comes into view. The short excerpt comes from a sermon he preached on September 5, 1529 for the fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.² Luther preached from the appointed Gospel for the day, Matthew 6: 24-34, focusing on verse 24b, "You cannot serve God and mammon." A subtitle indicates his intentions for the sermon: "Mammon and God—Heathen and Christians." We get to the birds this way:

Here it says: with respect to service, I will not become disobedient towards my God, nor give in to the power of Satan, unless you value a florin more than the baptismal font. Strive to fight harder—that is right.

Two examples here, that are so beneficial and pointed that one is shamed to death before such good news, at which, even with ears half-open, we will be startled. Many a farmer, or citizen, going through fields and seeing the flowers and birds, is terrified. Another will dismiss the experience, or be shocked. Every little flower and bird has the Gospel written on their throats and they provide this instruction: how you are a simple idolater who serves mammon.

Any flower or bird is more pious than you, because they serve the Gospel, for them completely written on their wings, for you in your mouth, on your skin, and in your heart, among other things. What do I produce? Nothing. Not much more. Take the word to heart and consider whether with joy you are able to contemplate this in your heart; but your head hangs down if you look closely at the bird.

² LUTHER, Martin. Predigt Nr. 64 (5. September). In: LUTHER, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. v 29. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1993. 550ff. Hereafter this edition will be identified as WA.

That bird sings “We praise you, O God” in the morning. Ah, dear birds, wherefore then is your prey, your berries, your food cellar? The bird answers: no need to labor, etc. But I have provisions, a cookery whose name is heavenly Father. Thus the bird is worthy of more praise than any caesar or king. Contrarily, the whole world is mammonistic while a single bird is much richer; there is no comparison because they all are richer.

For what of all treasure is comparable to God? Thus the bird sings: you are foolish, a rogue; shame on you for your god and works. You get up and don’t sing; you rest and work—and at night you don’t sleep because of all your concerns. I sing.³

Clearly Luther refers to birds in this sermon not as subject but as example to illustrate a concern. He wants to elicit carefree trust in God, the kind exhibited by birds that sing their way through the day without concern for stockpiling stuff. The birds have God and mammon figured out.

It is worth noting that this is not the only time Luther looks to birds for illustration. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (referencing Mt. 6:26-27), following the lead of the evangelist, he again lifts up birds as examples of creatures who trust God. Humans are to imitate such behavior.

Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher. He exhorts you with this Gospel, not with mere simple words but with a living deed and an example. He sings all night and practically screams his lungs out.⁴

The specific choice of the nightingale is not without significance according to Robin Leaver. Building on what was then thought by many to be common knowledge about music and birds, fourth-century Augustine identified the “sweet song of the nightingale as the model for good singing,”⁵ Luther’s preferences were perhaps influenced by this mentor of his. In any event the nightingale figured prominently in a German poem Luther wrote, titled *Frau Musica* (Lady Music). The last lines of the poem call attention to the pervasiveness of songbirds in the Reformer’s consciousness.

³ WA 29, p. 550-51. Translation by the author. The sermon was recorded by two different scribes, the version here by Georg Röer: *Hic dicit: umb deint will ich nicht ungehorsam werden deo meo et in potestatem dare Satanae, si tu fl so gros alls der tauffstein. Erbeiten das man guter kriegt, das ist recht. Dat duas similitudines, die sind so benichsch und spitzig, das sich einer zu tod schemen vor diesem Euangelio, das wir die oren nur halb auff theten, so wird wir erschrecken. Mancher bauer vel civis pertransit agrum videns so viel flosculos und voglein, terretur. Alias, so wird er sich entsetzen. All blumlein und voglein haben das Euangelium am hals geschrieben et illa docent: wie ein abgottischer tropff bistu qui servis Mammonae. Omnis flos et avis ist fromer den du, quia illae serviunt Euangelio et illis tantum in pennas scriptum, tibi in os, cutem, cor scriptum, noch u. Quid facio? “non” u. “Quanto magis”. Nimb die wort zu hertzen et considera, an gaudio possis intueri in cor, sed caput tuum demitteres, si inspiceres avem. Avicula illa canit “Te deum laudamus”, metten. Ey, liebs voglein, quare tam ictus, ubi cocus, keller? Dicit avis: Non laboro u. Sed habeo ein vorrad, koch, der heist himmlischer vater. Sic gloriari potest avis ea quae nullus Caesar, rex. Econtra totus mundus ist Mammonisten et una avicula so viel reicher, ut nulla comparatio sit, quando omnes reicher. Quid enim omnes thesauri in comparatione dei? Sic dic: Tue es nar, schelm, pfu dich mit dem Got und dienst. Tu surgis, non canis, die muhe und arbeit et nocte non dormis prae curis. Ego cano.*

⁴ LUTHER, Martin. The Sermon on the Mount. In: LUTERO, Martim; PELIKAN, Jaroslav; OSWALD, Hilton C.; GRIMM, Harold J. (Ed.). *Luther’s Works*: American ed. v. 21. St. Louis: Concordia, 1956. p. 197. Hereafter this edition will be indicated as AE.

⁵ LEAVER, Robin. *Luther’s Liturgical Music*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007. p. 75.

The best time of the year is mine
when all the birds are singing fine.
The heav'ns and the earth are filled
with much good singing, clear, and skilled.
Above all, the precious nightingale
makes all now joyful overall
with her delightful songs and lays
for which she must be thanked always.
But more so to God our maker,
who carefully created her
to be his own beloved songstress
and of *musica* a mistress.⁶

Perhaps the nightingale earned its rave of “precious” because nightingales well-populated the hills surrounding the Wartburg castle where Luther was protectively confined for several months in 1521. He did think of the castle and its environs as the “region of the birds,” and no doubt the local songbirds accompanied his project of translating the New Testament during those months. In any event, Hans Sachs of Nürnberg (1494-1576), the most famous of the Meistersinger—a vocalist’s guild that frequently met at the Wartburg, wrote a lengthy poem celebrating Luther’s achievements, titling his 1523 salute *Die Wittenbergische Nachtigall / Die man jetzt höret überall* (The Wittenberg Nightingale that one can hear now everywhere).

While he seemed content to live with this new moniker Luther’s own focus on birds was not limited to a single species. Several years after composing his own paeon, Lady Music, he wrote a preface for a 1538 collection of vocal music published by the Wittenberg printer Georg Rhaw. Its Latin prose reveals Lady Music as primary source, though editorial expansions contain some new thoughts, such as this colorful observation.

Music is still more wonderful in living things, especially birds, so that David, the most musical of all the kings and minstrels of God, in deepest wonder and spiritual exultation, praised the astounding art and ease of the song of the birds when he said in Psalm 104 [v.12] “By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation; they sing among the branches.”⁷

Luther is not reticent about his fondness for songbirds; yet, this is not a music-loving ornithologist writing here, as if he were trying to convince the reader of the peculiar charm of these winged creatures. Rather, his amazement reaches beyond the birds to music in general, including that mysterious sound transmitted by sudden movements in the air.

Even the air, which of itself is invisible and imperceptible to all our senses, and which, since it lacks both voice and speech, is the least musical of all things, becomes sonorous, audible, and comprehensible when it is set in motion.⁸

⁶ AE 21, p. 78. The reader will want to know that Leaver carefully sorts out the origins and fortunes of this poem.

⁷ PREFACE to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae iucundae. Liturgy and Hymns*. In: LUTERO, Martim; PELIKAN, Jaroslav; OSWALD, Hilton C.; GRIMM, Harold J. (Ed.). *Luther’s Works: American ed.* v. 53. St. Louis: Concordia, 1956. p. 322.

⁸ PREFACE, 1956, p. 322.

The entire world of sound fascinates him and he can't help but see God also in this aspect of life, lauding God as the "maker of this gift."⁹ Apart from the birds Luther invites the believer to apprehend all things musical as elements of the creation, called into being by the maker of heaven and earth. Indeed, this theme runs through much of his writing about music, showing his grasp of the theoretical heritage he and his generation inherited. The full significance of music as creature will have to wait until we go back to the birds for a moment.

Birdsong as inspiration and compositional matter

Western classical tradition

Connections consciously made between birds and music have existed for millennia. Before the advent of scripted music singers and players, aware of their surroundings, likely tried to imitate the sounds of birds. A thirteenth-century manuscript from Reading Abbey contains a six-part canon on the text, "Sumer is Icumen In," liberally sprinkled with references to the cuckoo. Its popularity shows up in the dozens of subsequent compositions the song inspired. Repertoires of French secular song from the fourteenth-century hold a surprising number of *virelai* (a dance-based song with refrain and three stanzas) the texts for which explore interactions of the nightingale and the cuckoo, a subject with a long shelf life.¹⁰ A hundred years later Clement Jannequin (1485-1558) attempted to insert actual vocal imitations of birds in his *chansons* (songs generally in French). His contemporaries did likewise. The complexity of birdsong made it a perfect source for gestures of vocal virtuosity and pictorial representation. Contrasting the mellifluous strains of the nightingale with the naïve wail of the cuckoo yielded desired laughter but the cuckoo served as subject matter all by itself too, as demonstrated in the keyboard works of Antonio Frescobaldi (1583-1643), Johann Kerll (1627-1693), Bernardo Pasquini (1637-1710) and Louis Claude Daquin (1694-1772).

The tradition continued. In the slow movement of his sixth symphony, the "Pastoral," Beethoven sought inspiration in the songs of the nightingale and cuckoo. Friedrich Delius deployed his impressionistic style in the 1912 "On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring." Ralph Vaughn Williams followed two years later with "The Lark Ascending," and Benjamin Britten sought inspiration from birds in his 1949 "Spring Symphony."

In nearly all of these instances a kind of musical translation functions, that is, composers in one way or another let the songbirds inspire whatever musical means were at hand. A different approach comes from Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) who employed "concrete birdsong"¹¹ in his 1923-24 tone poem, the Pines of Rome. Capitalizing on the latest technology, Respighi directed that a specific recording of a nightingale be played towards the end of the third section of his four-

⁹ PREFACE, 1956, p. 324.

¹⁰ LEACH, Elizabeth Eva. *Sung Birds: Music, Nature and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007. p. 127-137.

¹¹ The term comes from LEACH, 2007, p. 293, where she comments, "The reproduction of a 'real' bird, but one introduced 'mechanically' and disembodied, throws into relief the eerie otherworldly sound of the performatively present, acoustic orchestra." Respighi also employed the sounds of birds in an imitative mode; he is famous also for *The Birds* (1927), an orchestral transcription of Jean-Philippe Rameau's (1683-1764) *Le Rappel des oiseaux* (The Call of the Birds).

part composition. In his own notes to this segment he writes: “the pines on the Janiculum¹² stand distinctly outlined in the clear light of a full moon. A nightingale sings.”¹³ The moment is captivating, made all the more so by the drawn-out crescendo of sound that concludes the piece.

It’s no secret that contemporary life, especially urban life, not only drowns out such peaceful sounds of nature but increases one’s hunger for hearing them once again. A radio station located in Zug, Switzerland attempts to fill that need. Billed as “Brazilian Birds Radio,” this internet station “streams the natural sounds of birds from the Amazon rainforest,”¹⁴ creating a zen-like experience that stands against the racket of urban life.

Folk tradition

Western musicians in the classical stream share their ornithological fascinations with colleagues from folk traditions. Beginning on the lighter side, some nineteenth- and twentieth-century pipe organ builders, such as Wurlitzer, specialized in instruments designed for movie theaters. So as to provide resources for every conceivable scene they developed a contraption called *Vogelgesang* (birdsong), consisting of a handful of high-pitched pipes that circled and bent into a bowl of water to create a kind of chirping, gurgling sound.

Birds frequently inspired popular songwriters and vocalists. One website with the moniker “Alaska Jim’s Music Charts”¹⁵ offers a list of over sixty titles that refer to birds, one way or another. Beginning with the anonymous “Turkey in the Straw,” the list continues with names including Jimi Hendrix, Michael Jackson, The Beatles, Barbara Streisand, The Beach Boys, Simon and Garfunkel, The Everly Brothers, Prince, and Lynrd Skynrd. To be sure, few of these works attempt to incorporate the actual sounds of birds, but these artists found the realm of birdsong to be a useful sonic envelope for trading their lyrical wares.

So it is elsewhere in this world. Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld discovered that among the Kaluli people of New Guinea the *muni* bird (fruitdove) binds together the Kaluli culture in most profound ways. Not only does its song constitute generative material for the people’s music making; the bird itself is thought to embody mysteriously the sinews of the culture as the people negotiate the past and future. On quoting one member of the Kaluli, “To you they are birds; to me they are voices in the forest,” Feld reflects:

[This] meant that there are many ways to think about birds, depending on the context in which knowledge is activated and social needs are served. Birds are ‘voices’ because Kaluli recognize and acknowledge their existence primarily through sound, and because they are the spirit reflections of deceased men and women.¹⁶

¹² The second tallest hill in western Rome, though not considered one of the seven famous hills on which the city is built. Home to the ancient cult of Janus, the hill provides memorable views and is still a respite from the rigors of life surrounding it.

¹³ As offered by Michael Steinberg in his program notes for a 2005 performance of the work by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. See [bso.http.internapcdn.net/bso/images/program_notes/RESPIGHIPinesofRome.pdf](http://internapcdn.net/bso/images/program_notes/RESPIGHIPinesofRome.pdf).

¹⁴ See 1FM BRAZILIAN BIRDS RADIO. Disponível em: <tunein.com/radio/1FM---Brazilian-Birds-Radio-s214680>. Acesso em: 18 ago. 2015.

¹⁵ See ALASKA JIM’S MUSIC CHART. Disponível em: <http://www.alaskajim.com/lists/bird_songs.htm>. Acesso em: 18 ago. 2015.

¹⁶ FELD, Steven. *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982. p. 45.

Without trying to find non-existent consonance with what now follows, it is hard to escape the observation that the Kaluli respond to the call of the bird as if it has more to communicate than animal soundings that strike one as lovely. While the cuckoo may never be expected to prompt any profound thoughts, some birdsong experiences send their hearers into realms where the stuff of life is contemplated. Saving perhaps the most gripping and contemporary example of such engagement to the last, we turn finally to Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), French organist, composer, and teacher.

Messiaen

Messiaen's career went through several distinct stages, each touched by his love for birds and birdsong. Steadying him along the way was also his attention to students, playing the organ, and being present for performances of his compositions.

From early in his life he had been interested in nature, quoting birdsongs in some early works though not with any systematic purpose in mind. He was, however, dedicated to transcribing the songs of birds from France, carefully noting terrain, time of day, and other circumstances. By the end of his life he had filled nearly 200 notebooks with these transcriptions.

During the years 1952-1959 Messiaen set himself to using his birdsong collections for specific musical ends. Rather than aiming to be truthful to nature, as he had done in earlier compositions, he now let his inner musician take the upper hand over the ornithologist,¹⁷ creating three significant works that broke ground at the time and still significantly mark his composing life:

Reveil des oiseaux [Waking of the Birds], for piano and orchestra,
premiered in October 1953.

Oiseaux exotiques [Exotic Birds], a quasi-piano concerto, scored
for wind instruments, tuned and untuned percussion, and piano,
premiered in March of 1956.

Catalogue d'oiseaux [Catalog of Birds], for piano; an open-ended
collection of small pieces written chiefly from 1956-58,
and played in its entirety the first time in 1959.

To assist in serving up this 1959 performance Messiaen wrote an article in which he revealed his life-long investment in birdsong.

Nature, birdsong! There are my passions. They are also my refuge. In melancholy moments, when my uselessness is brutally revealed to me, when every musical language, whether classical, exotic ancient, modern or ultra-modern, seems to me reduced to being merely the praiseworthy result of patient research, without anything behind the notes to justify so much labor, what else is there to do except search for the true face of Nature, forgotten somewhere in the forest, in the fields, in the mountains, on the seashore, among the birds!

¹⁷ HILL, Peter; SIMEONE, Nigel. *Messiaen*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. p. 215.

For me, it is here that music lives: music that is free, anonymous, improvised for pleasure to work off the excessive energy born of love and *joie de vivre*, to articulate time and space and join with your neighbors in constructing rich and improvised counterpoint.¹⁸

Just how thoroughly he let those sentiments permeate his compositions becomes clear in the way he used his early research. For the *Oiseaux exotiques*, the composer drew on the songs of forty-eight birds—a staggering number—, among them the Baltimore oriole, American robin, Indian shama, song sparrow, mockingbird, purple finch and boblink.¹⁹

Messiaen's devotion to birdsong parallels that of Luther, even though the latter directed his energies towards theological concerns without the assistance of technical information about the birds he loved. Messiaen had the benefit of his own research but knowledge even more current than his additionally enriches one's grasp of songbirds.

Songbirds

Gulls, whether sea or lake gulls, and crows never show up in these lists of songbirds. Of course, we know why; there are some birds whose calls are better described as noise rather than music. Experts in the field of birdsong, a subsidiary of the emerging discipline of biomusicology, have identified certain groups of birds as "songbirds," noting that their syrinxes (vocal organs) are operated by five or more pairs of muscles.²⁰ This unique complexity enables these birds to produce two separate and harmonically unrelated sounds at the same time, a feat most associated with male birds during breeding season.²¹

The sounds, such as those of the brown thrasher, are shaped into songs, in some instances numbering nearly a thousand,²² remembered²³ but also variegated²⁴ "melodies" for purposes of mating, breeding, issuing warnings, and serenading.²⁵ Birds are among the most vocal of animals, and together with whales are among the few creatures that produce sounds that seem to be like music. Because the birds in particular appear to shape these sounds into different combinations they are of great interest to biomusicologists. Marler explains: "The more accomplished songbirds create huge vocal repertoires, making extensive use of the same basic process of syntactical recombination or phonocoding that we use to create words."²⁶

Yet ornithologist Heinz Tiessen cautions against reading too much into what ardent observers report about birdsong, simply because what the bird is experiencing cannot be known, at least for the time being. Nevertheless, the extraordinary features of songbirds, their extensive repertoires, their ability to recall and reuse, and their seeming purposefulness in delivery continue

¹⁸ HILL; SIMEONE, 2005, p. 226-27.

¹⁹ HILL; SIMEONE, 2005, p. 115-116. It should come as no surprise that in 1983, towards the end of his life, Messiaen premiered his only opera, *Saint Francois d'Assise*, a mammoth work based on the life of the saint who loved birds and other creatures.

²⁰ SLATER, Peter J. B. Birdsong Repertoires: Their Origins and Use. In: WALLIN, Nils L. et al. (Ed.). *The Origins of Music*. 2. ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001. p. 50.

²¹ SLATER, 2001, p. 50.

²² SLATER, 2001, p. 52.

²³ TIESSSEN, Heinz. *Musik der Natur*. Freiburg am Br.: Atlantis, 1953. p. 84, 87.

²⁴ SLATER, 2001, p. 54.

²⁵ TIESSSEN, 1953, p. 21.

²⁶ MARLER, Peter. Origins of Music and Speech: Insights from Animals. In: WALLIN, Nils L. et al. (Ed.). *The Origins of Music*. 2. ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001. p. 40.

to impress the beneficiaries of their songs. These birds seem to be cousins on the continuum of creation, closer to humans than what many of us are willing to concede—the relationship a matter of contention through the centuries.

Birdsong, *musicus* and *cantor*

Luther's education at the University of Erfurt was structured around the medieval pattern of the *trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and its partner the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy).²⁷ As was the case in other universities of the time and in the monasteries that birthed the universities, music education meant not conservatory-like coaching in making music but rather immersion in the theoretical treatises produced throughout the Middle Ages. The Erfurt curriculum, for instance, required of all the undergraduates a month-long engagement with the *Musica speculativa* of Johannes de Muris (c. 1290-c.1344). The subject matter of this treatise and of many like it centered in the origins of music and its anatomy. As was true for nearly every similar monograph, Johannes constructed his work by building on the knowledge and opinion accumulated by his predecessors.

Certain themes in these works achieved unusual commonality, such as the acknowledged supremacy of vocal music over instrumental music, the essential difference between vocal music and any sounds coming from nature, the relationship of music *produced* by humans to the "music" that *constitutes* a living being or the "music" of the spheres²⁸ and the importance of understanding as a determinant in the definition of music. The ability to think about music factored into Augustine's analyses²⁹ and therefore became a conscious or subconscious element in Luther's own thinking about music.

The ability to understand, to be aware of what's transpiring, came to be a major focus of attention in the opening sections of the treatises, for it was there that the authors most often addressed the dimensions of *musica*, that is, what can or cannot be considered music or the making of music. In fact, the presence or absence of understanding prompted the emergence of a musical hierarchy in the schemes of these treatises. On the one hand, advanced the ninth-century theorist, Aurelian of Reome, you have the *musicus* class—those who are involved in making music, but fully understanding what is occurring—and on the other hand there are those who belong to the class of the *cantor*—singers who make lovely sounds but lack that understanding necessary for a full appreciation of this parcel of the *quadrivium*.³⁰

Nearly a hundred years later Guido, the influential theorist from Arezzo, reduced the complexities of the hierarchy to this three-line, memorable rhyme:

Great is the difference between musicians and singers, The latter *say*, the former *know*
what music comprises. And he who does what he does not know is defined as a beast.³¹

²⁷ LEAVER, 2007, p. 27.

²⁸ "*musica instrumentalis, musica humana and musica mundane*", respectively, a three-part division of music proposed by Anicius Severinus Boethius in the sixth century and honored well into the Renaissance period.

²⁹ LEACH, 2007, p. 3.

³⁰ BOWER, Calvin M. The transmission of ancient music theory into the Middle Ages. In: CHRISTENSEN, Thomas (Ed.). *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p. 152.

³¹ BOWER, 2002, p. 163. Provides this citation: Guido, *Regulae ritmice* II, 8-10. The original Latin reads:
Musicorum et cantorum, magna est distantia
Isti dicunt, illi sciunt, quae componit musica.

Beasts, such as birds, lack the knowing that could make their happy chirping into music, asserts Guido. What separates the *musicus* from the birds is the former's ability to articulate rationally and verbally the nature and meaning of music, writes Leach, and what separates the *musicus* from the *cantor* is the former's knowledge of the art.³²

Why this fussiness? Why this generational mission to delineate and perpetuate these distinctions? Leach has no doubt that the majority of the theorists were driven by the need to guard against potential assaults on the sacredness of human rationality.³³ Challenging that assumption would not only undercut a foundational principle of medieval learning and education but it would begin to dismantle basic theological assumptions of the times, especially the notion of man being created in the image of God to administer the creation. These convictions had to be protected, even—or should one say, especially—on the musical front. Only when the Renaissance is fully in place do these careful distinctions begin to lose sway.

Above the word “man” was used intentionally, for it is no secret that those who wrote the rules about human rationality and its place in music were male in gender. To reach and maintain the high status of *musicus*, the thinking went, one had to be jealous of this trait so graciously bestowed on men, vigilantly advocating for its presence in the music process. Passivity in this respect could lead to disastrous ends. So it was that the metaphor of the siren emerged, that monstrous figure of the hybrid bird/woman with her deadly song, which, should it be heard, would seduce the listener into bestial existence. Effeminate music was thus to be avoided at all costs, for it threatened human (male) rationality, the very essence of being.³⁴ In the midst of this bleak scenario the birds continued to sing.

Concluding that “evidence for a positive valuation of birdsong in music theory writings is certainly slender,”³⁵ Leach has thus steered the last leg of a journey from Luther's exuberance over birdsong by taking us back to bird-like creatures who with their seductive song can crush what was thought to be the core of human identity. While a rehearsal of birdsong's historic and persistent connections to human music provides a broader context in which to hear Luther's observations, his sermonic illustration begs another context, specifically one that accounts for his theological vocation.

From birdsong to theological construction

So, where are we?

Luther exhorted his congregants to hear the Gospel from the throats of birds, a directive that he does not recklessly offer but rather one that resonates with other of his observations about sound, birds, and music. Taken together, these notices seem to represent a more profound theological grasp of music and its functions, perhaps not systematically formulated, but nevertheless present and worthy of articulating and probing in the present-day context. The following tentative summary helps to begin that process.

1) Among lovers of music there exists a common and distinct fondness for songbirds. This inclination crosses generations, cultures, and styles; it shows up in expressions of marvel, in

Nam qui facit quod non sapit, diffinitur bestia.

³² LEACH, 2007, p. 51.

³³ LEACH, 2007, p. 52.

³⁴ LEACH, 2007, p. 239ff.

³⁵ LEACH, 2007, p. 80.

attempts to catalog and reproduce, in compositions of various kinds, and in statements of theological import.

2) Early and medieval music theorists recognized in birdsong a challenge to their carelessly formulated definitions regarding music's essence. Desiring to protect the (male) human place in the hierarchy of creation, they resisted recognition of birdsong as music on the basis of a supposed lack of rationality among birds. In doing so, they helped to perpetuate the separation of *musicus* (one who understands music) from *cantor* (music-maker).

3) Luther viewed birdsong essentially as a feature of God's creation, hence a gift to be enjoyed if not learned from—following his exegetical thoughts on Matthew 6. As tutors, birds teach humans a basic lesson about music: musical experiences imply relationships, responsibility, and ethical commitment.

4) In this way Luther is more a *cantor* than a *musicus* since he habitually zooms into matters concerning music's use rather than fussing over its origins or its organic permeation of all things (music of the spheres). This he manages while abundantly demonstrating an awareness of the theoretical tradition, though in no way enslaved by it.³⁶

5) With his ebullient and enthusiastic praises of birds and their songs he seems to be flirting with natural theology, that is, he can be read as a supporter of nature's ability to convey and transmit God's love. After all, the birds and flowers have the Gospel written on their throats.³⁷

Birdsong and natural theology

While manifesting characteristics of both, Luther avoids using birdsong as an excuse for separating the vocations of *musicus* and *cantor*, however they continued to function at the time. As far as can be determined he showed no interest in such a Gnostic hierarchy. In the same way he refrained from using natural sounds as a determinant for establishing the preeminence of humans in the created order. Rather he understands sound itself to represent a kind of continuum on which there is a place both for a splendid five-part motet and the "whoosh" derived from a sword swung swiftly through the air.³⁸ From that posture Luther calls attention to this created continuum as a domain chosen by God to convey God's gracious will for humankind. Sound proclaims the good news, simply said.

What seemed to be so obvious for Luther presented itself to later generations as a bit confounding. We know with these observations of his that we are being drawn into the thickets of theological reflection concerning the relationship of creation and faith, and the things of faith, such as word and sacrament. Is it possible to discover a gracious God in creation? Is every meal sacramental? Does the thrush sing forgiveness? Luther seems to answer positively to those questions, apparently having thought through how they might be reconciled with his strong sense of the wrath of God—towards the whole creation.

³⁶ So Christoph Krummacher: "*Luthers Interesse am Gebrauch der Musik ist ein Interesse an Musik als Klingender Realität, es ist kein Interesse am spekulativen Nachdenken über Musik,*" (Luther's interest in the use of music is an interest in music as sounding reality; it is not a fascination with speculative reflections on music.). In: KRUMMACHER, Christoph. *Musik als praxis pietatis*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994. p. 17.

³⁷ See note 2.

³⁸ Even the air, which of itself is invisible becomes sonorous, audible, and comprehensible when it is set in motion. PREFACE, 1956, p. 322.

Later dogmaticians, Werner Elert observed, muddied the waters further: their inability “to grasp Luther’s doctrine concerning the wrath of God in a deeper sense is connected with the headway made by ‘natural theology.’”³⁹ A product of the Enlightenment with roots in medieval notions about the musical sinews that hold together all of creation, natural theology offered the attractive proposal that humans could discover a loving God in creation as a kind of warm-up to a full-scale encounter through Word and Sacrament. Close intellectual relatives, the early Romantics, bolstered by German idealism and natural theology, increasingly saw in music the way to things divine. Caught up in this effervescent faith in music Hegel, for instance, declared that the realm of romantic art is “that of divine truth.”⁴⁰ One could argue that most of the nineteenth-century European music scene was driven by such persuasions, with remnants remaining well into the next, represented by enthusiastic commentators such as Alfred Pike: “I regard music as a means of penetration to the reality behind all appearance.”⁴¹

Modern Luther studies led mid twentieth-century theologians to probe Luther anew. In a well-received and oft-quoted work on the theology of music, *Musik als Problem lutherischer Gottesdienstgestaltung* (Music as problem of Lutheran structuring of worship), Alfred Dedo Müller attempted to channel Luther by referring to music as a “kind of natural form of the Gospel.”⁴² Whether or not he represented Luther accurately, Dedo Müller’s phrase elicited profuse commentary from those interested in these things, including Lutherans Walter Blankenburg⁴³ and Oskar Söhngen,⁴⁴ but also the Roman Catholic, Winfried Kurzschinkel, who both comprehensively traces the intellectual history of the phrase and identifies the center of its contention as the old issue of natural theology.⁴⁵ Kurzschinkel himself has no issue with the phrase because it dovetails with his own distinctively Roman Catholic views of music. Christoph Krummacher, on the other hand, more recently finds the whole fuss nothing but “irritating,”⁴⁶ while directing the conversation to what he believes to be more pressing matters. They will be addressed below.

Trinitarian frameworks

By giving weight to Luther’s understanding of music as *creatura* interpreters find themselves in the midst of creedal waters, or at least within Christian teachings related to the first article. As a player in the first article world, *creatura* music automatically gets drawn into the worlds of the second and third articles as well. This Trinitarian framework has been popular. Some of the most influential twentieth-century authors who address music theologically—Alfred

³⁹ ELERT, Werner. *The Structure of Lutheranism*. Trans. Walter A. Hansen. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962. p. 50-51.

⁴⁰ BOWMAN, Wayne D. *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 101.

⁴¹ PIKE, Alfred. *A Theology of Music*. Toledo, Ohio: The Gregorian Institute of America, 1953. p. x.

⁴² MÜLLER, Alfred Dedo. *Musik als Problem lutherischer Gottesdienstgestaltung*. Berlin: Evang. Verlagsanst., 1947). p. 10.

⁴³ KURZSCHENKEL, Winfried. *Die theologische Bestimmung der Musik*. Trier: Paulinus, 1971. p. 183 and 326-351.

⁴⁴ BLANKENBURG, Walter. Luther und die Musik. BLANKENBURG, Walte; HÜBNER, Erich; STEIGER, Renate (Ed.). *Kirche und Musik: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte der gottesdienstlichen Musik*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979. p. 21-23.

⁴⁵ SÖHNGEN, Oskar. Theologische Grundlagen der Kirchenmusik. In: MUELLER, Karl Ferdinand; BLANKENBURG, Walter. *Leiturgia: Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*. v. 4. Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1961. p. 66, *passim*.

⁴⁶ KRUMMACHER, 1994, p. 19.

Dedo Müller,⁴⁷ Christhard Mahrenholz,⁴⁸ Walter Blankenburg,⁴⁹ and Oskar Söhngen,⁵⁰ chose to organize their Lutheran perspectives on music along Trinitarian lines. Their more or less common line of argument proceeds along a path that moves from one article of the creed to the next. Here is how it might go.

First Article: God's plan for creation included sound, particularly music. It is to be considered a gift, and insofar that music shows mathematical characteristics it can be considered central to the organic workings of the universe.

Second Article: Because of the fall of Adam, the creation too comes under God's wrath and condemnation. From the depths of God's heart God's love for humankind and the creation moved God to send the Son, incarnate Word whose death and resurrection made such love available to all through Word and Sacrament. That same love restores the creation, a process experienced day by day. Music is thus being restored to its initial status.

Third Article: Because of that restoration, the Holy Spirit can and does use music for the Spirit's purposes. Chiefly the Spirit works to assemble through Word and Sacrament a community of the faithful who by their song and acts model what the restored creation is meant to be.

Structured this way a Trinitarian approach to music looks like a sanitized description of a typical spiritual history. "I am born into a fallen world that still bears signs of its origins, made aware of how God in Christ has responded to the world's and my condition, and through such awareness brought as a member into the community of the faithful."

In a very real sense this easy-to-come-by reconstruction skews some of Luther's most important insights and dulls their implications. Just because the articles of the creeds (Apostles and Nicene) are arranged to move from creation through redemption into matters of faith, one is not compelled to adopt that arrangement as the platform for comprehending one's own spiritual history. Nor, in the Lutheran scheme of things, should the creeds be received as a step-by-step set of directions for fully and rightly embracing nature. Elert insists that beginning with creation together with all its glories will not, according to orthodox Lutheran theology, bring one to a gracious God. Just the opposite: "'natural' man's knowledge of God leads to doubt about God, thus to unbelief, and therefore makes penitence necessary; ... in all circumstances faith presupposes a break with the natural knowledge."⁵¹

While a uniform pattern does not guide every experience, coming to faith, according to Luther's catechetical reflections, routinely takes a route that begins with third article matters and ends in the midst of a first article world. That comes clear when encountering the reformer's explanations of the creeds in reverse order.

The Third Article: On Being Made Holy

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and

⁴⁷ Dedo Müller wrote five separate tributary essays under the general subject of *Die Musik und die Trinität*, presented as a whole at the International Organ Days, Bayreuth Germany in 1954.

⁴⁸ MAHRENHOLZ, Christhard. Luther und die Kirchenmusik. MÜLLER, Karl F. (Ed.). *Musicologica et liturgica*. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960. p. 136-153.

⁴⁹ See note 43.

⁵⁰ See note 44.

⁵¹ ELERT, 1962, p. 50-51.

keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith. Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the Last Day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life.

The Second Article: On Redemption

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.

The First Article: On Creation

I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me And still preserves my body and soul: eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses: reason and all mental faculties. In addition, God daily and abundantly provides shoes and clothing, food and drink, house and farm, spouse and children, fields, live-stock, and all property—along with all the necessities and nourishment for this body and life. God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all. For all of this I owe it to God to thank and praise, serve and obey him.⁵²

By turning the well-worn catechetical presentation of the creed upside down light is cast on a sequence of believing that reflects the actual experience of many and that faithfully reflects Luther's understandings regarding the ecology of faith. Simply put, the Holy Spirit works faith through the Gospel, prompting an appetite for a fuller relationship with the Word and clarifying one's interaction with "all that exists." Elert observes in this regard, "God and world stand in a positive relationship, but to him [Luther] this was certain in the strictest manner of speaking by reason of God's promise in Christ."⁵³ In that promise creation can be understood as God's gift, albeit a gift in the process of restoration. Here echoes the declaration of the apostle Paul in Romans (8:20-22):

For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from the bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.⁵⁴

Insofar that music is part of that creation, it too *in the eyes of the believer* will be "set free from the bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." The person of faith comprehends music in all its manifestations as gift and sign of God's intents and purposes. Nature reveals its true essence when encountered by the believer who from the posture of hope truly *envisions* what the future holds. Hence Luther's assertions that point to birds as bearers of the Gospel are observations meant to be understood as proceeding from one

⁵² LUTHER, Martin. The Small Catechism. In: KOLB, Robert et al. (Ed.). *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000. p. 354-56.

⁵³ ELERT, 1962, p. 57

⁵⁴ Trans. New Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

who already believes. In the words of Elert, “For it is self-evident that what Luther teaches in the First Article of the Creed concerning the relationship of the creatures to the Creator . . . is spoken from the position of faith.”⁵⁵

From tree to assembly: thoughts for the *cantor*

Even though Luther travelled comfortably among the generations of musical theorists who preceded him, he focused less on the speculative aspects of music and more on music’s use. “The gifts of creation are given to humankind so that it uses them thankfully, freely, and responsibly,” Krummacher concludes in his summary of Luther.⁵⁶ So how can the reformer’s ruminations on songbirds guide contemporary practitioners, be they musical planners or musical doers? How do we get from the tree, the home of the bird, to the assembly, the home of the believer? Three observations come to mind.

Music and Noise

In his captivating study of music as economic and social marker Jacques Attali contends that life invariably unfolds in the presence of noise, and that noise—actual and metaphoric, like other social forces, needs to be controlled in order to keep communities together. Music can serve as a controlling factor by counteracting noise or transforming it, but wherever there is music, there also is money, and where there is money there also is power.⁵⁷ Therefore,

any organization of sounds is a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power center to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms.⁵⁸

Attali’s overall purpose is to show how the organization and control of sounds has migrated from one musical clientele to another over the centuries. His insights should move even commentators on the church musical scene to perceive how power connected to music shapes music’s use and value. In this context, however, Attali’s work counts for something different. Throughout his study he recognizes that any part of the musical enterprise—be it publishing, recording, marketing, star-power or whatever—can get out of hand. It can revert to noise, become an unbridled force that’s detrimental to the entire community, even though such “noise” might claim protection under the pretence of being music.

Here it’s not necessary to measure the merits of the book as a text on economics or sociology. However, Attali’s naming of the seemingly inseparable linkage of music/power/money begs attention. Where there is power and money there one inevitably finds corruption, suggesting that inherent to music is the likely possibility of behaviors that are hurtful and destructive to the community at large.

With all of his affirmations of music as gift and creature Luther too recognized that music, like other gifts of creation, is subject to misuse. His early harangues on Gregorian chant and the

⁵⁵ Elert, 1962, p. 50.

⁵⁶ KRUMMACHER, 1994, p. 15.

⁵⁷ ATTALI, Jacques. *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. p. 3.

⁵⁸ ATTALI, 1985, p. 6.

use of organs in worship mellowed some over the years,⁵⁹ but suspicions about abuse of the “lovely art” persisted as late as 1538, eight years before his death, when he wrote this advice to his “young friend,” an unnamed representative of many young people for whom a collection of motets had been published:

Take special care to shun perverted minds who prostitute this lovely gift of nature and of art with their erotic rantings; and be quite assured none but the devil goads them on to defy their very nature which would and should praise God its Maker with this gift, so that these bastards purloin the gift of God and use it to worship the foe of God, the enemy of nature and of this lovely art.⁶⁰

By situating music (and music enterprises) in creation, seen by the believer as gracious gift, Luther in his typically realistic way recognized that it can easily be made to serve nefarious purposes. He did not shy away from calling those out. Neither should anyone else, especially those committed to the ecology of nature and its gifts. What’s called for here is far more than opinions about style or genre, though vigilance in these areas keeps everyone asking helpful questions. More importantly, today’s believers are called to alert their communities of the silencing of songbirds through human noise, both real and metaphorical; or, to campaign for music education, now often silenced by politicians; or, to work towards fair compensation for the musicians who serve honestly and tirelessly; or, to resist the industrialization and mechanization of every aspect of music making. There is plenty of noise to go around; the birds need to be heard again.

Hierarchy of Practitioners

To some the music of the East Indian sitar sounds mechanical, while the devotee relishes every subtle nuance the performer/composer draws from the patterns within which the music evolves. To some one renaissance motet sounds like the next as if every last one of them were conceived by a computer program.

On the vast continuum of created sound, the question can be asked: is every musical moment of equal value? Are the songs of thrushes more musical than the “songs” of hawks? Are there characteristics of the musical moment that make one experience, and not another, a clearer manifestation of music’s innate identity as a gracious gift of God or even as conveyor of the Gospel?

Luther seemed to think so, even though he remained convinced of the creatureliness of all music. For him, Christoph Krummacher reminds us, there was no fundamental difference between simple singing, for instance, and the artistic presentation of a carefully crafted piece.⁶¹ Yet the reformer marveled at how “rich and manifold our glorious Creator proves himself in distributing the gifts of music.”⁶² This is particularly notable when practitioners of the art “grind

⁵⁹ “And what shall I say of the external additions of vestments, vessels, candles, and palls, of organs, and all the music, and of images. There was scarcely a craft in all the world that did not depend on the mass for a large part of its business.” LUTHER, Martin. *An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg*, 1523. In: *AE* 53, p. 22.

⁶⁰ PREFACE, 1956, p. 324.

⁶¹ KRUMMACHER, 1994, p. 23.

⁶² PREFACE, 1956, p. 324.

and polish” (*geschärfet und polieret*) natural music into artistic jewels that reflect “God’s absolute and perfect wisdom in his wondrous work of music.”⁶³

One suspects that behind his inclination to rank musical experiences there lay a firm and certain preference for a favorite composer or composition. As it turns out Luther let his ruminations on such matters be known. According to the Table Talk collections he reportedly said:

What is law [-oriented] never breaks loose from what is rigid, while what is gospel [-oriented] moves away from what is fixed. Thus God preached the gospel even through music, as is evident in Josquin [des Prez], whose every composition flows joyfully, freely, and gently, and is not forced or cramped by rules such as those by Finck [Heinrich Finck].⁶⁴

Perhaps this recollected comment from Luther needs to be received for what it is, an off-hand opinion uttered at mealtime. In that case, he certainly revealed his taste for up-to-date musical trends. But then see where he goes next. Taste, he clearly continued, emerges from the ability to recognize a difference between “natural” music and the “artistic” music of humans. Further, without hesitation he categorized “artistic” productions on the basis of technique. That merits comment. Does he imply that some practitioners are better at their craft than others? That some music and/or musicians come closer to music’s envisioned purposes than others? If so, then technique matters, quality (however that is decided) matters, talent counts, and all well lead to privileging one musical experience over another.

Of course, establishing agreeable criteria makes categorizing very difficult. Definitions of the “artistic” change from age to age, from one style period to another, from place to place. Precarious too is the search for objectivity. Anyone who ventures a critique stands to be influenced by racism, a thirst for power, misunderstanding or small mindedness. Frankly, it’s simpler to refrain from such critical exercises and declare all opinions a matter of taste.

But Luther will not condone that route forward. He tugs the church musician back to the critical task because it has theological implications. Moreover he suggests a way to think about criteria that inherently helps to resist the dark sides of hierarchical ranking.

Josquin places higher on Luther’s list than Heinrich Finck because in Luther’s mind Josquin transcended the established rules of composition. Not in an iconoclastic fashion. Rather, Josquin seemed to extract from the old rules of counterpoint a new way, a transformation of what was, in order to breathe fresh life into human musical rhetoric. Because of this tendency, Luther avers, Josquin’s music communicates the Gospel.

His love for and admiration of Josquin’s music resonates with following generations. Some years after the composer’s death the famous music theorist, Glareanus (Heinrich Loriti),

⁶³ PREFACE, 1956, p. 324.

⁶⁴ *Was lex ist, gett nicht von stad; was evangelium ist das gett von stad. Sic Deus praedicavit evangelium etiam per musicam, ut videtur in Josquin, es alles composition frolich, willig, milde heraus fleust, ist nit zwungen und gnedigt per regulas sicut des fincken gesang. Tischreden I, (WA), no. 1258, as cited in Söhngen, “Theologische Grundlagen,” p. 74. Trans. by author. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music*, 51 and 368, n. 199, follows the lead of Walter Buszin who translated *fincken gesang* as the “song of the finch,” contrasting the music of Josquin to what is taken to be much inferior birdsong. The “finch” shows up also in the translation contained in AE, 54:129-130. While the “finch version” might seem a more friendly translation/interpretation in the present context, Söhngen’s argument, taken up by Krummacher, *op. cit.*, 23, is more compelling. Söhngen cites Hans Albrecht, who suggests that *fincken gesang* refers to the motets of Heinrich Finck (1444-1527); his music was well known in the Wittenberg area, yet later prompted his great nephew, Hermann Finck (1527-1558) to describe his relative as spiritual and learned but with hard edges. LEAVER, 2007, p. 368, traces additional information concerning this interesting phrase.*

declared upon hearing a work of Josquin's that "finer music cannot be created."⁶⁵ Undoubtedly, Josquin Des Prez (1440-1521) stands out among those dozens of Flemish musicians who migrated to Italy to imbibe the latest trends there, completing their careers in central Europe, Josquin himself in France. Particularly in his settings of French popular *chansons* but also in the church music Josquin managed to explore successfully untried versions of imitation and canon, expand the ranges of voice parts, and introduce a variety of symbolisms, all of which resulted in a very expressive style that poignantly served the declamation and meaning of text.

Perhaps that ability is what attracted Luther to Josquin but even so he heard and saw in the music a trait far more significant. Compared with other composers such as Heinrich Finck, Josquin, Luther observed, manifestly composed into his music an incarnation of Christian freedom from the law. Josquin's style apparently had for Luther an ebullience, a gleefulness that he associated with the Pauline dictum, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1) Hence God preaches the Gospel even through music.

In one sense the history of Western art music privileges those composers and musicians over the years who consistently and creatively break away from the rules set by previous generations. Both Heinrich Schuetz and Johann Sebastian Bach come to mind in the domain of worship music; Beethoven and Stravinsky star in other domains. Each of them, and of course many others, manifested a kind of improvisatory, no-holds exploration of the edges of the musical disciplines they inherited, thereby expanding the playing field for all those with less pioneering spirits. Luther saw still more in the resulting hierarchy of practitioners by recognizing in their products veritable signs of the Gospel. Believers, he might say, should easily detect the Holy Spirit at work, blowing these vanguards past stultifying rigidities. No doubt he would have been just as excited by jazz had it been available.⁶⁶

Much goes unsaid here. To effect transcendence of the rules, for instance, means that one needs to know the rules. The way to avoid anarchy in such a project is not given us. Perhaps it is sufficient to urge current managers of assembly music to remember that musicians with their music serve best when they induce in the faithful a sense of freedom that accompanies God's invasion from the future. Such freedom transforms Christian life into improvisation. Set the believers free through music. Teach them to *be* as wind instruments blown by the Holy Spirit eager to have her new tunes sounded.

Sacred and secular in a new acoustic

In some areas of the church the old arguments against instrumental music in the worship assembly still have sway. Even though they may lack official sanction and enforced adherence, stances against non-texted music still show up here and there in a conscious preference for vocal music or in a practice that avoids music without text or program.

First glances into Martin Luther's sixteenth-century musical world seem to support these biases. For instance, we have come to know him well as hymn writer--poet and composer alike.

⁶⁵ REESE, Gustav. *Music in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1959. p. 244.

⁶⁶ The essential place for improvisation in music, even for the listener is provocatively argued by BENSON, Bruce Ellis. *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Its religious dimensions are considered by LOVE, Andrew Cyprian. *Musical Improvisation, Heidegger, and the Liturgy*. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003.

We are aware that he advocated for the excision of certain music from the then current version of the mass because of textual concerns. Most published music of his age was vocal, to a large extent with sacred text, probably because the market for texted worship music was more expansive. So it would seem that when he addresses the subject of music he is referencing music with text. Indeed, one of his most extensive writings on music served as a preface to a collection of vocal music, *Symphoniae Jucundae*, motets, mostly with sacred text, to be used by young singers.⁶⁷ In that context we read exuberant comments about music such as this from his sketch, *Concerning Music*: “After theology I accord to music the highest place and the greatest honor. We note that David and all the saints used verse, rhymes, and songs to express their godly thoughts; for music reigns in days of peace.”⁶⁸ How easy it is to assume that Luther gives preference to vocal church music and intends for those of like mind to do the same.

While it is true that vocal music made up the largest part of the printed musical repertoire at that time--instrumental music just beginning to come into its own, it is useful to recall that Luther himself was skilled with the lute and did not hesitate to send his friend Matthew Weller to the keyboard when doldrums overwhelmed his spirit.⁶⁹ Further, when he speaks and writes about music Luther rarely differentiates repertoires, and resists privileging one musical occasion over another. Hymns, his too, were meant as much for the home as for the church. Around the table in his own home Luther sang and probably played motets and other vocal music,⁷⁰ including motets with non-churchly texts. Identifying with the *cantor* tradition he conceived of music as an event that graced moments of life. Without exception the musical experiences on which he reflected were live.

What emerges from that picture is a certain leveling of the playing field, musical moments equalized because of the circumstances surrounding their production. It's worth remembering, consequently, that for music to occur at all among the citizenry meant that *people* had to bring the sounds into existence-- in church, at home, in the field, in the school or in the party hall. It was from the totality of those experiences that he spoke and wrote about music.

Hence his fondness for Josquin des Prez was a response to all of the composer's music, for Josquin was famous at the time, perhaps even more famous, for his settings of *chansons*, and it's likely that Luther knew those as well. More significantly, his comments about Josquin have to do not with specific repertoires but with the composer's abilities for Josquin's “*every* [emphasis mine] composition flows freely... and is not cramped by rules.”⁷¹

Admiration for Josquin's talents shows up in another music inspired conversation at table, this time reported by Johann Mathesius, friend of the reformer. Having just sung a motet by Josquin, Luther commented: “Josquin . . . is the master of the notes, which must express what he desires; the other masters of singing must do what the notes dictate.”⁷²

⁶⁷ See note 6. This collection of 52 motets apparently had two purposes, didactic and liturgical. It was intended for use by the congregational choir (Kantorei) and for educational purposes in the city schools.

⁶⁸ *Peri tees mousikees*, WA, 30/2, p. 696. Translation from BUSZIN, Walter. *Luther on Music*. St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1958. p. 11.

⁶⁹ “Darumb, wenn Ihr traurig seid, und will uberhand nehmen, so sprecht: Auf! Ich muss unserm Herrn Christo ein Lied schlagen auf dem Regal (es sei *Te Deum laudamus* oder *Benedictus*, etc).” (Therefore when you are sad and want to prevail, then say: Up! I have to play a song to our Lord Christ on the regal, [whether it be the *Te Deum laudamus* or the *Benedictus*, etc.]), “Luther an Matthais Weller, 7 Oktober 1534,” WA, Ser. 4, VII, n. 2139, 105.

⁷⁰ LEAVER, 2007, p. 91-92.

⁷¹ See note 63.

⁷² LEAVER, 2007, p. 56.

To be fair, moved by the miraculous sound of air when set in motion, by the songs of birds, and by human laughter and weeping, Luther in his preface to *Symphoniae Jucundae* declares:

Thus it was not without reason that the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated as closely with the Word of God as 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.⁷³

In the end it seems vocal music, particularly vocal worship music, drives Luther's high regard for music and it is to be regarded as the prompt for his many reflections on music. Most subsequent commentators have assumed that interpretation. Typical among them is Carl Schalk who in his helpful presentation of Luther on music introduces the reformer's ruminations on Josquin with these words: "It has been noted earlier that Josquin des Prez was a particularly favorite composer of Luther. But Luther especially pointed to Josquin's use of music as a *medium* [emphasis mine] for the proclamation of the Gospel."⁷⁴ As noted earlier, what Luther actually said was that "God preached the Gospel even through music,"⁷⁵ going on then to laud Josquin's expertise as composer—a musical focus apart from text, even though it was texted music that prompted the observation.

A clearer instance comes from Marion Lars Hendrickson who proposes this summary of Luther's views on music:

If the answer to the question "What is Lutheran?" is limited to the insights of Martin Luther, that answer means an understanding of music that is united with the Word of God, expressed in the careful compositional craft of melody and text as one.⁷⁶

Or this from Oskar Söhngen:

If therefore music as such is grounded not only in beliefs about creation but also in faith in Jesus Christ as the "Word," in whom all things are enclosed, so music finds its single fullness of meaning first there where it works in service to the Gospel.⁷⁷

Seeking, sometimes desperately, to demonstrate the essential bonds of their callings to the church's mission in and for the Word, church musicians often claim this view of Luther and music as their rightful vocational charter—an understandable and often fruitful move. But perhaps, even with such an expansive landscape, there is more to receive from Luther. One author seems to think so and has proposed that Luther's view of music is still more generous.

After reviewing the efforts of Söhngen and other vintage authors Christoph Krummacher concludes that when considering Luther's thoughts on music they all tend to reduce the referent.

⁷³ AE 53, p. 323.

⁷⁴ SCHALK, Carl. *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988. p. 38.

⁷⁵ See note 63 and the discussion there.

⁷⁶ HENDRICKSON, Marion Lars. *Musica Christi: A Lutheran Aesthetic*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. p. 50.

⁷⁷ *Wenn auch schon die Musik als solche nicht nur im Schöpfungsglauben, sondern auch im Glauben an Jesus Christus als das "Wort" in dem alle Dinge beschlossen sind, begründet ist, so findet sie ihre eigentliche Sinnerfüllung doch erst dort, wo sie in den Dienst des Evangeliums tritt*. SÖHNGEN, 1961, p. 73.

For them, he thinks, music always means texted music for worship.⁷⁸ While readily acknowledging the strong connection between music and worship in Luther's view Krummacher nevertheless offers this poignant observation: "a proclamatory function of music [by itself] likewise appears to me to be unmistakably derivable from Luther's conception of music."⁷⁹ Justification for music's presence in the worship assembly comes neither from God's command nor from its partnership with the Word, Krummacher insists, because "God preached the Gospel even through music."⁸⁰

One ought not dilute the centuries-old linkage of music and text, especially as it unfolds within Luther's high view of preaching and the Word of God. In fact, passionate acknowledgement of that very partnership inspired generations of composers, such as Schütz, Buxtehude, Bach and Distler whose music is recognized as artistically outstanding and as ideal specimens of how music should serve the Christian assembly.

On the other hand, Krummacher's promising corrective urges those who follow in the path of Luther to marginalize those old, pesky and troublesome words "sacred" and "secular," embracing instead the freedoms that come from living in the Gospel.

For the believer, then, all music can preach the Gospel. That may be easy to affirm when listening to one of the French Suites by Bach, for instance, though most of us stumble a bit when going from "I like that piece," to "Herein lies the Gospel." Luther would have us hear the Gospel also in the symphonies of Franz Joseph Haydn or Gustav Mahler, in the piano concertos of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, in a Beatles song, in the jazz of the Dave Brubeck Quartet, or in the song of the robin. And, by the way, we should not forget the music of Josquin des Prez! The amount of good news out there is staggering and is muted only by the ranters and rantings—the noise that invariably pollutes our sound domains but cannot muffle the new song.

As this is written, the snow outside is melting. This morning a cardinal complained that the signs of spring are not coming soon enough. The robins are there in waiting. It won't be long till their throats will sing the Gospel. They have much to tell.

References

1FM BRAZILIAN BIRDS RADIO. Disponível em: <tunein.com/radio/1FM---Brazilian-Birds-Radio-s214680>. Acesso em: 18 ago. 2015.

ALASKA JIM'S MUSIC CHART. Disponível em: <http://www.alaskajim.com/lists/bird_songs.htm>. Acesso em: 18 ago. 2015.

ATTALI, Jacques. *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

⁷⁸ KRUMMACHER, 1994, p. 32.

⁷⁹ *Eine Verkündigungsaufgabe auch der Musik scheint mir aus Luthers Musikanschauung unmißverständlich ableitbar zu sein*. KRUMMACHER, 1994, p. 33.

⁸⁰ KRUMMACHER, 1994, p. 51-52. Krummacher writes: *Kirchenmusik ist nicht da, weil sie von Gott gefordert wäre, sondern weil der Glaube an Artikulationsmöglichkeiten verlöre, wenn er sich nicht auch der Musik bediente. Der Glaube hat in und mit der Musik spezifische Erfahrungen zu machen und zum Ausdruck zu bringen, denn: Deus praedicavit evangelium etiam per musicam*. See note 63.

BLANKENBURG, Walter. Luther und die Musik. BLANKENBURG, Walte; HÜBNER, Erich; STEIGER, Renate (Ed.). *Kirche und Musik: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte der gottesdienstlichen Musik*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979.

BOWER, Calvin M. The transmission of ancient music theory into the Middle Ages. In: CHRISTENSEN, Thomas (Ed.). *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

BOWMAN, Wayne D. *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

BUSZIN, Walter. *Luther on Music*. St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1958.

ELERT, Werner. *The Structure of Lutheranism*. Trans. Walter A. Hansen. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962.

FELD, Steven. *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

HENDRICKSON, Marion Lars. *Musica Christi: A Lutheran Aesthetic*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

HILL, Peter; SIMEONE, Nigel. *Messiaen*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

KRUMMACHER, Christopf. *Musik als praxis pietatis*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994.

KURZSCHENKEL, Winfried. *Die theologische Bestimmung der Musik*. Trier: Paulinus, 1971.

LEACH, Elizabeth Eva. *Sung Birds: Music, Nature and Poetry in the Later Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

LEAVER, Robin. *Luther's Liturgical Music*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

LOVE, Andrew Cyprian. *Musical Improvisation, Heidegger, and the Liturgy*. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003.

LUTHER, Martin. An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523. In: LUTHER, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. v. 53. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1993.

_____. Predigt Nr. 64 (5. September). In: LUTHER, Martin. *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. v. 29. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883-1993. 550ff.

_____. The Sermon on the Mount. In: LUTHER, Martin; PELIKAN, Jaroslav; OSWALD, Hilton C.; GRIMM, Harold J. (Ed.). *Luther's Works: American ed.* v. 21. St. Louis: Concordia, 1956.

_____. The Small Catechism. In: KOLB, Robert et al. (Ed.). *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

MAHRENHOLZ, Christhard. Luther und die Kirchenmusik. MÜLLER, Karl F. (Ed.). *Musicologica et liturgica*. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960.

MARLER, Peter. Origins of Music and Speech: Insights from Animals. In: WALLIN, Nils L. et al. (Ed.). *The Origins of Music*. 2. ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001.

MÜLLER, Alfred Dedo. *Musik als Problem lutherischer Gottesdienstgestaltung*. Berlin: Evang. Verlagsanst., 1947).

PIKE, Alfred. *A Theology of Music*. Toledo, Ohio: The Gregorian Institute of America, 1953.

PREFACE to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae. Liturgy and Hymns*. In: LUTERO, Martin; PELIKAN, Jaroslav; OSWALD, Hilton C.; GRIMM, Harold J. (Ed.). *Luther's Works: American ed.* v. 53. St. Louis: Concordia, 1956.

REESE, Gustav. *Music in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. New York: W W Norton & Company, 1959.

SCHALK, Carl. *Luther on Music: Paradigms of Praise*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988.

SLATER, Peter J. B. Birdsong Repertoires: Their Origins and Use. In: WALLIN, Nils L. et al. (Ed.). *The Origins of Music*. 2. ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001.

SÖHNGEN, Oskar. Theologische Grundlagen der Kirchenmusik. In: MUELLER, Karl Ferdinand; BLANKENBURG, Walter. *Leiturgia: Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*. v. 4. Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1961.

TIESSEN, Heinz. *Musik der Natur*. Freiburg am Br.: Atlantis, 1953.

See bsos.bso.internapcdn.net/bsos/images/program_notes/RESPIGHIPinesofRome.pdf.

See tunein.com/radio/1FM---Brazilian-Birds-Radio-s214680/.

See http://www.alaskajim.com/lists/bird_songs.htm