

# Martin luther and the music of the protestant reformation

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Martin Luther was the man who was responsible for the start and growth of the Protestant Reformation. The music that he composed for his religious doctrine heavily outlined his concept of Christianity and expressed drastic differences between Lutheranism and Catholicism. These ideas are especially evident in his piece, Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, a simple, but effective Lutheran chorale. The Protestant Reformation began in Germany as a statement of dissatisfaction by Martin Luther with Catholicism, which “Mushroomed into a rebellion against the authority of the Catholic Church”. This included, but was not limited to, the amount of power that religious leaders had, how they used their wealth, and the sale of indulgences. The Lutheran doctrine was one that focused on one’s own personal connection and pure belief in God, rather than actual practice, which had been profusely developed by the Catholic Church. A major concern for Luther was the sale of indulgences.

Indulgences were “Credits for good deeds done by others, which one could purchase to reduce the punishment for sin.” This was purely a practice that would make religious leaders a sizable sum of money, but actually had nothing to do with scripture. On October 31st, 1517, Luther posted on a church door in Wittenberg, Ninety five These “Opposing indulgences and the doctrine that lay behind them and challenging the pope’s role in granting them.” He also sent a copy to his bishop, hoping for his help in reforming the church, but was ignored. Thanks to the printing press, Luther’s Ninety Five Theses were spread far and wide, making both him and his views very famous. Martin Luther was charged for heresy Liu, Kevin, in 1519, and was excommunicated in 1520. By that time, he had obtained many Germans

supported him, including both students and princes. He thus organized what was henceforth known as the Lutheran Church. Martin Luther (1483-1546), was a professor of biblical theology at the University of Wittenberg. His approach to biblical study was influenced by his “ Humanistic education, which taught him to rely on reason, on direct experience, and on his own reading of Scripture rather than on received authority.” His findings directly highlight the Renaissance lifestyle, where education in the humanities were of most importance. These studies by the public, which were already causing a strain in the strength of the Catholic Church, along with the recent invention of the printing press, which made Luther’s beliefs spread like wildfire and threatened Catholicism as a whole.

The Lutheran Church was created on the basis of giving the people a larger role in worship. By increasing the use of vernacular language, services were easier to understand and songs were able to be sung by the congregation. Luther’s music contained Catholic polyphonic music and chants in both the original latin text and in the vernacular. As a composer and musician, Luther made music play a very important role in his church. He strongly believed in the “ Educational and ethical power of music,” so singing became an activity that was shared by the entire group, rather than just the choir. The most important form of music in the Lutheran Church was the Lutheran chorale. During each service, the congregation would sing several of these chorales. They “[Fulfilled] Liu, Kevin, Luther’s aim in increasing the worshipper’s participation through music.” These chorales contained a strophic poem and had simple melodies and rhythms and were to be sung in unison without

harmony or accompaniment. These pieces were designed to be simple enough to be easily learned and sung by a congregation that had no background in music education. There were four main sources from chorales, which were: adaptations of Gregorian chant, existing German songs, secular songs given new words, and brand new compositions.

Catholic music, however, was quite different. Only those who were musically trained could partake in musical performance. Some pieces contained instrumental support, while others were sung a cappella with polyphonic texture. They contained no use of the vernacular and were only sung in Latin. The main difference between Lutheran and Catholic music was that they were designed to be digested by the audience in different ways.

Lutheran music was to be sung as a congregation, while Catholic music was to be only heard and worshipped. Martin Luther's composition *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* is the classic Lutheran Chorale. It contains a simple monophonic melody with only one line, a short, rhyming poem in strophic form in the vernacular text, and totally metrical. These features make it easier for a "mixed congregation of men and women" to sing, even if they do not have any education in music. In conclusion, Martin Luther's music explicitly highlights the style of the Protestant Reformation along with his personal views on Christianity and the Catholic Church.

The idea of the Lutheran Church was to eradicate the unnecessary rituals and practices, while focusing purely on one's personal devotion to God. It also tried to end the sale of indulgences, which was morally incorrect and only made the Catholic Church more rich. Lutheran music was also very

different than Catholic. The Lutheran Chorale was simple. Melodies were short and easy to learn and words were rhymed and put into a strophic form. This was so that anyone could easily learn the music, thus making congregational singing more realistic, as it played an important role in Luther's ideologies. An example of a Lutheran Chorale would be Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland.