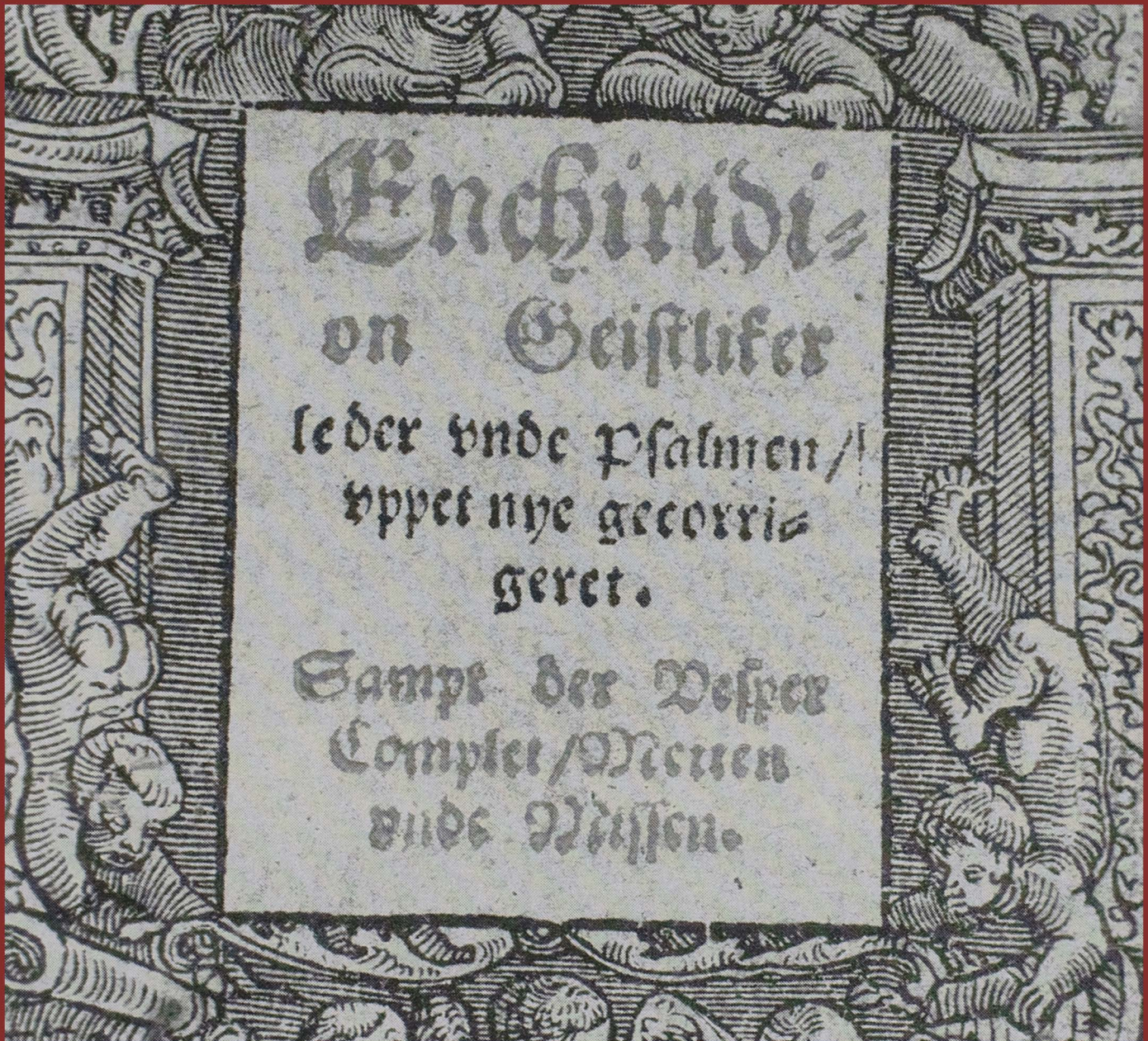


Elisabeth Creutziger, The Magdeburg Enchiridion, 1536, & Reformation Theology

The Kessler Reformation Lecture, October 18, 1994



Robin A. Leaver

A Pitts Theology Library Publication

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Editor's Preface

M. Patrick Graham

This lecture was presented as part of the seventh annual Kessler Reformation Concert. These concerts have been sponsored by the Candler School of Theology and the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection of the Pitts Theology Library and celebrate the musical holdings of the Kessler Reformation Collection. The 1994 concert was based on Elisabeth Creutziger's 1524 hymn *Herr Christ, der einig Gottes Sohn*, which was included in the Magdeburg *Enchiridion* of 1536. The copy of this hymnal that is part of the Kessler Reformation Collection has been issued in facsimile and with critical notes in Stephen A. Crist's *Enchiridion Geistlicher Leder unde Psalmen, Magdeburg 1536* (Emory Texts and Studies in Ecclesial Life 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994).

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Introduction

First, let me say that I am honored to be asked to give this lecture, in this place, at this time. To be able to speak about theology in the context of the performance of marvelous music like this does not happen as often as it should. To be able to speak about music in a theological seminary like this also does not happen as often as it should. This is because music is frequently misunderstood. It is thought that in a theological context music only has a propaganda or entertainment value, and therefore, compared with theology, music is of peripheral concern. But theology as an intellectual discipline becomes brittle, formal, and detached from the realities it addresses if it is not grounded in the personal, experiential, and spiritual dialogue which is the essence of true religion, the dialogue that is partly between the human soul and God, Creator and Redeemer, and partly within the corporate community of faith as it speaks and listens to God, empowered by the Sanctifying Spirit. Music, rightly understood, is the heart and soul of this spiritual dialogue, for it becomes the vehicle through which our praise and prayers to God are articulated, because it is able to move our hearts to express what is too deep for words alone. But music also teaches us our theology as we sing. Music unites our voices and hearts, expressing the reality of the doctrine of the church as the unity of believers, in a way that theological propositions on their own just cannot do.

But this is neglected rather than new information. The intertwining of music and theology runs throughout the record of Scripture, from the morning stars who sang together for joy at the beginning of creation (Job 38:4-7) to the singing of the song of Moses and the Lamb that is to take place at the end of creation (Rev. 15:3). And the understanding that music and theology belong together was one of the secrets for the success of what we call the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

When we speak about this sixteenth-century phenomenon, we tend to speak in the singular. We speak of the Reformation, because there was a commonality in what happened across Europe, after an obscure Augustinian monk and academic had nailed a notice—about a forthcoming theological debate that never took place—onto the university notice-board (that happened to be a church door), in an insignificant town in an obscure part of Germany: the action that set the whole movement in motion. But the Reformation did not manifest itself in exactly the same way in every European country that it touched. In older Reformation studies authors were content to speak of the many and varied facets of the one Reformation, but in recent literature one finds the tendency to speak in the plural: the Reformations of the sixteenth century. The value in this approach is that the concept of Reformation as a single phenomenon is an unwieldy construct to embrace the astonishingly disparate nature of what happened during the sixteenth century. So we can speak of the German Reformation, the Danish Reformation, and the English Reformation, among others, as we account for the different geographical developments of this sixteenth-century phenomenon. But this geographical analysis does not go far enough. For example, last year Christopher Haigh published a book that was called not the *English Reformation*, but the *English Reformations*.¹ His argument is that there were different Reformations occurring simultaneously in England. In particular there was a Reformation in religion, a Reformation in politics; and a Reformation in society. And in Germany the Reformation was not one unified entity. Thus one can speak of different linguistic Reformations in Germany. On the one hand, there was the *Hochdeutsch* (High German) Reformation, which by and large spoke to people in central Germany, and, on the other hand, the *Plattdeutsch* (Low German) Reformation, which generally spoke to people in northern Germany—the *Plattdeutsch* Reformation, to which the hymnal we consider tonight is an important witness.

But perhaps we need to go even further in the direction of Reformation plurality and see even more Reformations. For example, instead of seeing a Reformation of society in general, we should rather see different Reformations occurring within society—such as, the Reformation of social structure, as feudalism gave way to capitalism; or the Reformation of information technology, as oral transmission

of ideas and concepts gave way to the emergence of the new print culture, again, as is illustrated by the hymnal we are using tonight.

Thus recent Reformation scholarship has attempted to come to terms with the enormous wealth of disparate detail of what happened because of the religious upheaval of the sixteenth century. But there is another analysis that has been gaining momentum in recent decades, that is, the study of what has been called the Popular Reformation. Much Reformation research of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has concentrated on the major developments in sixteenth century theology, the ecclesiastical re-organization they precipitated, and the political ramifications of these changes. Thus the stress has been on kingdoms, countries, churches, universities, princes, politicians, theologians, and professors. But what happened among the people? This is a primary question that is now being energetically pursued in Reformation studies. In other words, how did the Reformation affect the lives of ordinary people?

Reformation studies have for a long time been concerned with the great literature of the period, such as Luther's Ninety-Five Theses of 1517, Erasmus's *Freedom of the Will* and Luther's response *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther's attack on Catholic sacramental theology in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and so on. These were the documents that fueled the debate in councils, colloquia, and diets of church, state, and university. But the documents that affected the lives of craftsmen, artisans, housewives, and children were such things as Luther's advice on how to pray, which he wrote for his barber, his magnificent treatise *On Christian Freedom* (1520), his German New Testament of 1522 and the complete German Bible of 1534, and the extraordinary *Small Catechism* of 1529. But perhaps more than any other kind of publication, the many hymnals of the first generation of the Reformation had the greatest impact on what ordinary people believed and practiced. And yet again, this hymnal, the *Enchiridion* published in Magdeburg in 1536, is an important example.

The heart of Reformation theology was Christology, the *solus Christus* aspect of the Christian gospel that was summarized by three further Latin formulæ: *sola scriptura*, *sola fidei*, and *sola gratia*. Together they encapsulated the Protestant understanding of the Christian gospel: that a Christian's standing before God depends not on the authority of the church but on the authority of Scripture that centers on the person and work of Christ; that salvation is offered and received as a gift by faith and not as a reward for a worthy life; and that this salvation is from beginning to end the work of God's grace in Christ. A fourth dimension was added with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which was directly antithetical to the particular priesthood of Catholicism. These four theological concepts were translated into the practical concerns of teaching the laity at large the essence of biblical theology and the substance of the Christian faith, which were to be expressed in vernacular forms of worship and in congregational song. Thus the hymnal, small enough to be carried in a pocket, assumed a particular importance for shaping and sustaining the faith of ordinary people.

Let us therefore briefly examine this Magdeburg *Enchiridion* with regard to these four dimensions of Reformation theology as they were expressed in four practical concerns: Bible, catechism, liturgy, and song.

NOTES

¹ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

1 - Bible

The *sola scriptura* principle gave rise to the explosion of vernacular Bibles published in many European languages during the first half of the sixteenth century. The essence of the faith was to be found in the words of Scripture rather than in the decrees and councils of the church. But the same *sola scriptura* principle also gave rise to hymnody. Towards the end of 1523, when Luther was actively looking for poets to write hymns, he wrote to various people encouraging them to join him in the project. In a letter to Georg Spalatin he wrote:

Following the example of the prophets and fathers of the church, I intend to make vernacular psalms for the people, that is, spiritual songs so that the Word of God even by means of song may live among the people.²

Among the first hymns to be written during this period—the end of 1523 and the beginning of 1524—were a significant number of metrical psalms, that is, hymnic versions of the biblical psalms, among them Luther's *Austiefer Not* (Psalm 130), *Es wollt uns Gott genädig sein* (Psalm 67), among others, and Agricola's *Frölich wollen wir Halleluija singen* (Psalm 117). Many of them are found in Low German versions in the Magdeburg *Enchiridion*, together with other later metrical psalms, such as Luther's *Ein feste Burg* (Psalm 46). The biblical text was put into hymnic form so that the people could sing—and at the same time learn—the substance of the teaching of Scripture.

Another approach was to include a treasury of biblical quotation and allusion within the substance of the text of a hymn. Again from the first period of Reformation hymn-writing, 1523–24, there were three hymns by Paul Speratus: *Es ist das Heil, Hilft Gott*, and *In Gott gelaub ich*. When they first appeared in print, first on broadsides and then in the so-called *Achtliederbuch*, published in Nuremberg in 1524, each of these three hymns had an appendix of Scripture proofs, where biblical chapter and paragraph of every line of every stanza was given in full. There could be no doubt that what was being sung was the Word of God in hymnic form. These appendixes of Scripture proofs were generally omitted from later hymnals, and therefore they are not to be found in the Magdeburg *Enchiridion*. Nevertheless, the scriptural roots cannot be forgotten, since the headings to these hymns contain references to the effect that they were created “out of the text of the Old and New Testaments” or “out of the Word of God.”

As with all the hymns found in Reformation hymnals, the hymns in this Magdeburg hymnal are all expressions of biblical theology—they could not be anything else!

NOTES

² *Liturgy and Hymns*, vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 36.

2 - Catechism

The *sola fidei* principle led to the formulation of catechisms in which the basic tenets of Reformation faith were expounded. In the *Deutsche Messe* of 1526, Luther had registered the need for a basic catechism and three years later published his *Large Catechism* for pastors and *Small Catechism* for laity, especially children (both were published in Wittenberg, 1529). The five main sections of the catechism were: the Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and Lord's Supper. Early Lutheran hymnals included hymns on these five parts of the catechism, though it took a little time before they were gathered together into one catechism section. The Magdeburg *Enchiridion* includes hymns on four of the five main parts of the catechism that are spread throughout its contents. There are three hymns on the Ten Commandments, two by Luther, including *Dies sind die heiligen Zehn Gebot*, and one by Agricola. There are two hymns on the Creed, Luther's *Wir glauben all an einen Gott* and Speratus's *In Gott glaub ich*. There are three different hymns on the Lord's Prayer, two by Moibanus and one by Pollio (Luther's *Vater unser im Himmelreich* was not written until 1539, three years after the publication of the *Enchiridion*). There was no baptismal hymn in the hymnal itself, but it is highly significant indeed that the first of the manuscript hymns, added on the blank leaves at the front and back of the volume, was a Low German version of Luther's baptismal hymn, *Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*. For the fifth section of the catechism, the Lord's Supper, there were a number of appropriate hymns, including Luther's reworking of the hymn by Jan Hus, *Jesus Christus unser Heiland*, and Michael Stiefel's German and evangelical version of the Latin *Pange lingua*.

But there is another hymn that has important catechetical implications, in the sense that its subject matter deals with the question of fundamental Reformation theology: *Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt*, by Lazarus Spengler of Nuremberg, probably written at the request of Luther sometime towards the end of 1523. This hymn was so important to Lutheran theology that it was later specifically cited in its confessional documents—the only hymn to be accorded such an honor. In the Formula of Concord (1577), Solid Declaration, Article 1, on original sin, there is this extraordinary statement (para. 23):

Likewise, we also reject and condemn those who teach that, though man's nature has been weakened and corrupted through the Fall, it nevertheless not entirely lost all the goodness that belongs to spiritual and divine matters, or the situation is not the way the hymn which we sing in our churches describes it, "Through Adam's fall human nature and being are wholly corrupted" ["Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt/menschlich Natur und Wesen"].³

The citation here is the opening couplet of Spengler's classic chorale on original sin, first published in Wittenberg in 1524 and included in the Magdeburg *Enchiridion* of 1536. What is remarkable is that the Formula of Concord cites the hymn as a classic statement and summary of the fundamental doctrine, and it underscores the Lutheran concern to teach the substance of the Christian faith through congregational song.

NOTES

³ *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 512.

3 - Liturgy

The *sola gratia* principle led to a re-evaluation of the theological presuppositions undergirding worship in general and the Mass in particular. Traditional Catholic teaching referred to the Mass in terms of *sacrificium*, *opus bonum*, and *meritum* (sacrifice, good work, and merit), concepts that focused on human activity, the offering of the Mass to God by the priest on behalf of the church. In contrast, the *sola gratia* principle meant that the Eucharist was seen, especially by Luther, in terms of *beneficium*, *testamentum*, and *donum* (favor, bequest, and gift), concepts that express divine activity, God's gracious gift of forgiveness offered and given to God's gathered people.

It was necessary to reform existing orders of worship, especially the Mass, so that they were consistent with evangelical theology. Luther laid the groundwork for this reform in his two primary liturgical documents, the *Formula missae* (1523) and the *Deutsche Messe* (1526). The Magdeburg *Enchiridion* therefore includes not only hymns but also the liturgical forms for weekday and Sunday worship: the orders for Vespers, Compline, Matins, and the Mass. The order of the Mass is a slightly modified version of Luther's *Deutsche Messe*. As was the case with Luther's High German Mass, this Low German Mass calls for hymnic versions of most of the Ordinary, except that some of the hymns are different from those suggested by Luther. The Kyrie follows Luther's *Deutsche Messe* and is given in a simple three-fold form. The Gloria is Nikolaus Decius's *Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr*, which became the classic Gloria-hymn of the Lutheran church—and, indeed, still is. Instead of giving the text of the credal hymn, the *Enchiridion* has a cross-reference to Luther's *Wir glauben all an einen Gott*, which appears elsewhere in the hymnal. In place of Luther's German version of the Sanctus, *Jesiah dem Propheten*, the *Enchiridion* has Nikolaus Decius's hymnic Sanctus, *Heilig ist Gott der Vater*. Similarly, instead of Luther's German Agnus Dei, *Christe, du Lamm Gottes*, Decius's version is preferred: *O Lamm Gottes unschuldig*. Here is a clear indication of the liturgical differences between High German and Low German liturgies. Both use hymnic versions of the ordinary, but whereas High German Lutheran churches employed Luther's texts, Low German Lutheran churches used those of Decius. The other hymns sung at the evangelical Mass follow the provisions of Luther's *Deutsche Messe*—after the Alleluia, in between the Epistle and Gospel (Speratus's *Es ist das Heil* is suggested)—and distribution hymns referred to by Luther in the *Deutsche Messe* are also noted here (e .g., *Jesus Christus unser Heiland*).

4 - Song

Vernacular religious song was not the invention of the Reformation era. There was a long European history of such songs, including English carols, Dutch *geestelijeli ederen*, Italian *lauda spirituales*, and German *leisen*. Luther knew of and utilized the single-stanza, para-liturgical German *leisen* that were closely associated with the liturgy and the festivals of the church year. Examples include the fifteenth-century *Wir glauben all an einen Gott*, based on the Creed, the fourteenth-century *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (Christmas Day), the twelfth-century *Christ ist erstanden* (Easter Day), textually and musically related to the Easter sequence *Victimæ paschali laudes*, and the thirteenth-century *Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist* (Feast of Pentecost). All of these and others were revised and expanded by Luther and are found in Low German forms in the Magdeburg *Enchiridion*. But whereas previous generations had sung these *leisen* extra-liturgically, after Mass on the respective festivals, Luther directed that the new evangelical hymns—whether they were re-workings of older material or newly created—should be sung intra-liturgically, that is, within the reformed Mass by the congregation at large.

This brings us to the hymn that is the focus of our attention tonight : the Christological hymn, *Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn*, written in 1524 by the first Protestant woman hymn writer, Elisabeth Creutziger. One of the things that is beginning to emerge from the study of the Popular Reformation is the extremely important role that some women played in the dissemination of Reformation faith among the general populace. In connection with hymnody there are two women of particular importance: Elisabeth Creutziger of Wittenberg, the author of this hymn, and Katharina Schiltz Zell of Strassburg, who brought out a hymnal in pamphlet form.

Elisabeth Creutziger originally came from East Pomerania, that is, northeastern Germany bordering on Poland. She was a nun who came to evangelical faith through the influence of Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's colleague and pastor of the town church in Wittenberg, who also came from Pomerania. On renouncing her vows, she married Caspar Creutziger, a theological student in Wittenberg, who became a pastor in Magdeburg (1525-1528) before returning to Wittenberg to become pastor of the castle church and professor at the university.

Elisabeth's hymn, written during the winter of 1523-1524, has a number of unique features that later became distinctive traits of the Lutheran chorale tradition. First, the hymn has the distinction of being the first "Jesuslied," a Christological hymn of the Reformation era. Later, such hymns became a particular feature of Lutheran Epiphany hymns, which explains why later hymnals include it under the Epiphany heading. But since the heart of Reformation theology involved what was then a "new" understanding of the person and work of Christ, the importance of this first Lutheran Christological hymn can hardly be overestimated.

Second, the new hymn grew out of an old one . The first stanza is virtually a free translation of the first stanza of the Christmas Latin office hymn, *Corde natus ex parentis*, which we sing as "Of the Father's love begotten."

Third, the hymn combines objectivity with subjectivity. The first two stanzas deal objectively with the doctrines of Incarnation and Atonement, that Christ was born and died for us. The remainder of the hymn is a subjective response to those doctrines, especially the third stanza:

*O let us in thy knowledge
and in thy love increase,
that we in faith be steadfast
and know thy Spirit's peace;
that thy sweetness may be known
to these cold hearts, and teach them
to thirst for thee alone.*

Since Lutheran Christology is primarily expressed in its eucharistic theology, the imagery of “thirsting after Christ” here almost certainly has eucharistic overtones—something that is picked up in Bach’s chorale cantata⁴, especially movement 3, which, of course, was first heard in a eucharistic context.

That Elisabeth Creutziger intended her hymn to have popular appeal is seen in its associated melody—a variant of a German folk song melody that appears in the Locheimer *Liederbuch* of ca. 1450. Therefore the new hymn was introduced with a tune that would have already been familiar to the people: what was new was carried along by what was already known.

The hymn quickly entered the basic repertory of Lutheran chorales so that by the time of Bach it was very much an old hymn. But it was given new life and new meaning by the new music that was composed to address its basic message in a new way. The Christological theology was expounded in the anamnesis of the music, for it is the nature of true liturgical music to bring the past into the present and to make theological propositions personal. That was Bach’s particular gift. But it could not have happened without the insights of the Reformation; it could not have happened without the theological and musical insights of Luther; it could not have happened without the Christological hymn of Elisabeth Creutziger; and it could not have happened without these small hymnals, such as the Magdeburg *Enchiridion*, which allowed the ordinary people, the salt of the earth, to sing of their faith.

NOTES

⁴ *Herr Christ, der Einge Gottessohn* (BWV 96), composed in 1724.

Notes

¹ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

² *Liturgy and Hymns*, vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 36.

³ *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 512.

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