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TWO PILLARS OF THE LUTHERAN CHORAL TRADITION IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MINNESOTA: FRIEDRICH OTTO REUTER AND FREDRIK MELIUS CHRISTIANSEN

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TWO PILLARS OF THE LUTHERAN CHORAL TRADITION IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MINNESOTA:
FRIEDRICH OTTO REUTER AND FREDRIK MELIUS CHRISTIANSEN

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

In the early twentieth century, Minnesota emerged as a defining center of the Lutheran choral tradition. This study places Friedrich "Fritz" Otto Reuter (1863–1924) in the foreground. It treats Fredrik Melius "F. Melius" Christiansen (1871–1955), who is often identified as the central figure in the rise of Lutheran collegiate a cappella singing, primarily as a point of comparison. This study argues that Reuter should also be recognized as a foundational figure in Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition.

Born in Saxony and trained within the German Lutheran church music tradition, Reuter studied with several well-known music teachers of the time, including Gustav Schreck in Leipzig. Unlike Christiansen, who left his home country in pursuit of vocational opportunity, Reuter left Germany after becoming increasingly troubled by the influence of rationalism in the German state church. Seeking a confessional Lutheran environment more closely aligned with his convictions, he emigrated to North America in 1905. Three years later, he accepted a call to Dr. Martin Luther College—now Martin Luther College—where he established the college's first comprehensive music curriculum, founded a mixed and a men's chorus, and composed sacred works for liturgical use. His choirs functioned not primarily as touring concert ensembles but as extensions of the liturgy and as training laboratories for future parish teachers and cantors. Where Christiansen's work projected Lutheran sacred music into the national concert sphere, Reuter's work embedded Lutheran musical identity within parish education and congregational life.

Christiansen serves as a comparative figure in this study. His work at St. Olaf College in Northfield represents a different institutional model within the same Lutheran choral tradition. He emigrated from Norway to the United States in 1888 in pursuit of musical training and professional opportunity. Influenced by his Norwegian Lutheran upbringing and his later study in Leipzig with Gustav Schreck, he developed a choral philosophy centered on disciplined rehearsal, choral blend, and the cultivation of a refined a cappella ensemble. His work led to the founding of the St. Olaf Choir in 1912 and helped establish a nationally recognized model within the Lutheran choral tradition.

By examining Reuter and Christiansen side by side, this document argues that Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition developed through two complementary models: Reuter's teacher-church musician formation at Dr. Martin Luther College and Christiansen's collegiate choral model at St. Olaf College. Although there is no evidence that Reuter and Christiansen ever met or corresponded, their work reveals parallel efforts to shape the Lutheran choral tradition in early twentieth-century Minnesota. This study reframes Lutheran choral history in Minnesota and demonstrates that Reuter, no less than Christiansen, belongs among the foundational pillars of that tradition.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: TWO PILLARS OF THE LUTHERAN CHORAL TRADITION IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MINNESOTA

INTRODUCTION

The Lutheran choral tradition that developed in early twentieth-century Minnesota did not emerge from a single institution or musical philosophy. It took shape through overlapping streams of German and Norwegian Lutheran inheritance, through the educational missions of church colleges, and through the work of musician-teachers who understood sacred music as both artistic craft and theological service. Among these figures, Fredrik Melius Christiansen has long occupied the more prominent place in American choral history because of the national visibility of the St. Olaf Choir and the influence of the a cappella choral model associated with Northfield, Minnesota. Yet a broader historical account must also recognize Friedrich Otto Reuter, whose work at Dr. Martin Luther College[1] in New Ulm formed a parallel and equally significant model of Lutheran choral development.

Reuter stands at the center of this study. His importance lies not primarily in public acclaim, touring reputation, or the creation of a nationally recognized choral

[1] Martin Luther College is located in New Ulm, Minnesota, on the campus formerly known as Dr. Martin Luther College. The institution took its present name in 1995, following the amalgamation of Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, which had served as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's ministerial training college, and Dr. Martin Luther College, the synod's teacher-training institution.

sound, but in the formation of a church-centered musical culture at Dr. Martin Luther College. His work joined German Lutheran church music, rigorous pedagogy, liturgical responsibility, and the practical preparation of future Lutheran teachers and church musicians. Christiansen's work at St. Olaf College provides a valuable comparison because it represents another Lutheran choral model within the same state and general period. Christiansen developed a disciplined collegiate ensemble whose refined a cappella sound projected Lutheran sacred music into the national concert sphere. Reuter, by contrast, embedded sacred music within the formation of teachers, parish musicians, and congregational life. These two men, therefore, represent complementary pillars in the history of Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition: one nationally visible, the other institutionally and ecclesiastically formative.

REUTER: BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION, PATH TO AMERICA, MINNESOTA, AND DR. MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE



Example 1.1 Fritz Reuter, New Ulm, MN

Friedrich Otto ("Fritz") Reuter was born on October 11, 1863, in Jahnsbach in the Erzgebirge[2] region of Saxony, to Friedrich Johann Reuter and Ida Krätzel. His childhood placed him within a household and community in which music, Lutheran schooling, and parish life were closely connected. Reuter's father, a stocking maker, encouraged artistic and musical activity among his eleven children, and Fritz's early musical aptitude soon became evident. He first learned the violin and piano, then progressed to the organ, the instrument that would become central to his later identity as a Lutheran church musician. At the age of nine, he left Jahnsbach for Langenberg, Saxony, where his older brother Karl served as a teacher and where Fritz was later confirmed. Karl, thirteen years older than Fritz, was himself skilled in organ, piano, violin, and choral direction, and he helped shape his younger brother's early musical development.[3] By the time Fritz reached adolescence, he had already advanced beyond elementary instruction, playing Kuhlau piano works and easier Mozart sonatas.[4] Even before his confirmation, Fritz was already able to play the organ for regular church services.[5] These early experiences are important because they reveal that Reuter's musicianship developed not as a separate artistic pursuit but within the integrated world of German Lutheran church culture, where home, school, congregation, the organ bench, and choral practice were all related. Long before his later

[2] The Ore Mountains along the Czech-German border separate the historical regions of Bohemia in the Czech Republic and Saxony in Germany.
[3] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 6.
[4] "Professor F. O. Reuter," *The D.M.L.C. Messenger* 15, no. 11 (December 1924): 6.
[5] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 35.

work at Dr. Martin Luther College, music for Reuter was already bound to teaching, worship, discipline, and service to the church.

Reuter's formal musical education began in 1877, shortly before his fourteenth birthday, when he entered the Lehrerseminar[6] at Waldenburg, Saxony. There, he undertook a six-year course of study that included piano, violin, organ, harmony, counterpoint, and pedagogy. His training was unusually broad, even by the standards of a nineteenth-century teacher-musician. He studied with Karl Kleemann (1842–1923), who received his training at the "Staatliche Akademische Institut für Kirchenmusik"[7] and studied violin with Johannes Schreyer (1856–1929). Most significantly, Reuter studied organ with Bernhard Reichardt, whose teaching placed Reuter within a pedagogical lineage that traced back to Johann Sebastian Bach. His teacher at Waldenburg, Bernhard Reichardt, had studied with Johann Gottfried Töpfer; Töpfer had studied with August Eberhardt Müller; Müller had studied with Johann Christian F. Bach of Bückeburg, a son and pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach.[8] Thus, "every student of Reuter…can trace his training back to J.S. Bach."[9] Such a lineage should not be treated as though it automatically made Reuter a direct stylistic heir of Bach. Nevertheless, it reveals the framework in which his musicianship was formed: organ study, counterpoint, chorale practice, and the responsibilities of the Lutheran cantor.

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[6] Lehrerseminar may be translated as "teacher-training college."
[7] "State Academic Institute for Church Music." This school became the center for the cultivation of church music in Berlin; it was founded in 1822.
[8] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.
[9] Grace A. Hennig, "The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer" (master's thesis, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, 1999), 11.

After graduating from the Waldenburg Lehrerseminar in 1884, Reuter continued to broaden his compositional and theoretical training. He pursued further study with Bernhard Reichardt and later with Theodor Schneider (1827–1909) of Chemnitz, who served as cantor at the court and city churches and also directed the Sing-Akademie.[10] Reuter's education was further strengthened through study with Gustav Schreck (1849–1918), cantor at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, and Josef Rheinberger (1839–1901) in Munich, one of the leading theorists and composition teachers of his generation. Reuter's formal training concluded in Berlin, where he spent a year at the Akademische Institut für Kirchenmusik studying Gregorian chant with Karl Thiel (1862–1939). Each of these names places Reuter within the larger German musical world of the late nineteenth century. Schreck, later significant also in Christiansen's education, linked both men to the Leipzig church music tradition. Rheinberger represented a high level of contrapuntal and compositional training, and Reuter's work with him further demonstrates the seriousness of Reuter's musical preparation. Emil Backer, Reuter's successor at Dr. Martin Luther College, later emphasized that Reuter's harmony and counterpoint training spanned over several years and that his subsequent studies with Schneider, Schreck, Rheinberger, and Thiel completed an impressive pattern of musical formation.[11] In *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music*, Benjamin Kolodziej cites the assessment of Lutheran music scholar Walter Buszin, who regarded Reuter's musical training as distinguished. Buszin

[10] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.
[11] Ibid., 4.

noted that "Reuter's pedigree was illustrious" and that Reuter "had studied under some of the best-known teachers of his day." [12]

Reuter's training shows that his musical worldview extended beyond practical school music or local parish service. He was formed by a tradition that valued historical church music, chant, organ literature, composition, and the liturgical responsibilities of the cantor. When he later came to New Ulm, he brought with him not only technical skill but also a deeply internalized understanding of church music as a disciplined, historically grounded, and theologically accountable vocation.

Before emigrating to North America, Reuter held several professional positions in Saxony. From 1884 to 1887, he served as organist and assistant teacher at Oberlungwitz near Chemnitz. In 1887, he accepted a position in Klingenthal to serve as a teacher, organist, and choir director, and then, in 1892, a similar position in Rheinsdorf near Zwickau. In 1894, he became cantor at St. Laurentius-Kirche in Lichtenstein-Callnberg, a position described as the most significant of his career before his move to America.[13] At approximately thirty-one years of age, he assumed responsibilities that extended beyond organ playing. As cantor, Reuter oversaw the musical life of the congregation, directed the boys' choir, taught selected school classes, supervised vocal and instrumental music, selected repertoire, and maintained performance standards for church services.[14] His position also placed him at the center of the city's broader musical life. In addition to his

[12] Benjamin Kolodziej, *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music, 1847–1947* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2025), 120
[13] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 9.
[14] Benjamin Kolodziej, *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music, 1847–1947* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2025), 121.

church duties, Reuter directed children's and adult choirs, worked with the city orchestra, and composed for local choral and instrumental forces.[15]

One of the most important achievements of Reuter's Lichtenstein-Callnberg years was his role in the acquisition and dedication of a new organ for St. Laurentius-Kirche. In 1902, he supervised the design, purchase, and installation of a three-manual, fifty-five-register organ built by Gebrüder Jehmlich of Dresden.[16]



Example 1.2 Gebrüder Jehmlich organ at St. Laurentius-Kirche in Lichtenstein-Callnberg

For the dedication, Reuter coordinated an ambitious program that brought together the church choir, the city orchestra, and a children's chorus of approximately

[15] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 36.
[16] Benjamin Kolodziej, *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music, 1847–1947* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2025), 120.

300 singers from the city's schools.[17] The repertoire demonstrated the breadth of his historical and stylistic training:

> The musical program included solo organ works by Bach (the *"Dorian" Toccata*) and Karl Wolfrum ("Adagio" from *Sonata No. 3*), choral works such as Bruckner's *Psalm 150*, Palestrina and Mendelssohn motets, Franz Lachner's *Psalm 150* (Lachner was Rheinberger's teacher), concluding with Richard Bartmuss's *Konzert für Orgel, Orchester und Chor*, which featured the amassed musical forces.[18]

The program demonstrates "a complete cross-section of periods and styles, from Palestrina to the contemporaries," revealing Reuter's comprehensive understanding of sacred music history and liturgical-musical practice. "A comprehensive historic and stylistic perspective on the part of the cantor is displayed."[19]

Reuter's work in Lichtenstein-Callnberg also extended beyond the regular pattern of parish worship to include large-scale musical performances. His obituary in *The New Ulm Journal* later noted that he presented Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* with a choir of more than 100 voices and a large-scale orchestra.[20] This achievement illustrates the breadth of Reuter's musical leadership before he emigrated to North America.

This period of Reuter's career reveals him functioning in the full German cantor tradition: church musician, organist, teacher, composer, and civic musical leader. The experience he gained at St. Laurentius-Kirche later proved essential for his work at Dr.

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[17] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 36.
[18] Benjamin Kolodziej, *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music, 1847–1947* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2025), 120.
[19] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 10.
[20] "Prof. Fr. Reuter Called By Death," *The New Ulm Journal*, June 13, 1924.

Martin Luther College, where he would again combine pedagogy, liturgical responsibility, choral training, organ instruction, repertoire development, and institutional musical leadership.

Reuter's decision to leave Germany was rooted in theological conviction rather than in the pursuit of greater professional opportunity. He had already held a respected position in Germany and had established himself as a capable cantor, teacher, organist, and composer. His emigration, therefore, was not prompted by professional ambition or dissatisfaction with his musical prospects. Rather, it reflected his concern over the theological direction of the *Landeskirche*, the German state church. By the early twentieth century, Reuter had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the theological condition of the state church.

> This pervasive spirit of rationalism that had supplanted the Gospel troubled Reuter's conscience, as he was subject to sermons that too often were "dissertations on economics, conservation, and agriculture," and although deeply involved in liturgical music, he felt that music had become the concern of the church to such an extent that the preaching was no longer the central part of the service.[21]

The problem was not simply doctrinal disagreement in the abstract. Reuter believed that the preaching of the Word of God was being neglected. As a church musician, he also feared that music itself could become so prominent that the proclamation of the Word was displaced. Reuter's concern was that when the liturgical

[21] Benjamin Kolodziej, *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music, 1847–1947* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2025), 121.

and musical elements of worship receive greater prominence, even closer attention must be given to the doctrine proclaimed from the pulpit.[22]

This conviction led Reuter to sever ties with the *Landeskirche* in 1904 and to align himself with the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche*, the Lutheran Free Church of Germany, where his brother Karl was already serving as a teacher. The decision came at a considerable cost. A local newspaper reportedly announced that the cantor was now without both "position and bread."[23] This costly break clarifies the theological character of Reuter's later work. He did not come to North America merely as a professionally trained musician seeking a broader field. He came as a confessional Lutheran church musician whose conscience had been troubled by a perceived separation of music from the centrality of the Word.

With the help of his brother Karl, Reuter made contact with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Pastor O. Willkomm, president of the Lutheran *Freikirche*, which was in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, then arranged for Reuter to serve at St. John's Lutheran Church in Winnipeg, Canada. In August 1905, Reuter and his family, which by this time included three children, left Germany for North America. St. John's paid for the family's relocation, a considerable commitment since Reuter brought not only his household but also his piano. In Winnipeg, he taught in the congregation's two-room school and also served as organist and choir director.[24]

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[22] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 14.
[23] Ibid., 15.
[24] Ibid., 16.

Life in Winnipeg proved difficult for the Reuter family. The city, located about 225 miles north of Fargo, North Dakota, offered conditions quite different from those they had known in Saxony. Although the confessional climate of the Missouri Synod more closely aligned with Reuter's theological convictions, the physical circumstances were difficult. The city's harsh winters, unpaved streets, inadequate sanitation, and limited housing made the family's adjustment especially trying. These hardships were compounded by personal tragedy: two of Reuter's children died, and Reuter himself suffered a prolonged illness that left him bedridden for several months with a fever.[25]

In 1907, Reuter accepted a call to serve as a teacher and church musician at First Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Chicago. Organized in 1871, only months before the Great Chicago Fire, First Bethlehem had been spared from its direct destruction and had become one of the city's significant Lutheran congregations. By 1905, it reported a membership of approximately 3,600 communicants.[26] The congregation had also distinguished itself through its early ministry to the deaf. In 1894, it began the first Lutheran worship services conducted in sign language, a development that eventually led to deaf mission work extending into five neighboring states. First Bethlehem's educational work was similarly well established. The congregation opened its elementary school in 1869, two years before its formal organization, and by 1905 it maintained schools in three locations.[27]

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[25] Benjamin Kolodziej, *Portraits in American Lutheran Sacred Music, 1847–1947* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2025), 122.
[26] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 37.
[27] Ibid., 37.

Reuter appears to have embraced the call with considerable enthusiasm and soon began shaping the congregation's musical life. Within only a few months of his arrival, he organized a children's choir composed of select students, the first ensemble of its kind in a Missouri Synod congregation in Chicago. The congregation also envisioned that Reuter's work might extend beyond First Bethlehem itself through the formation of a Lutheran children's chorus serving the wider city. Though Reuter's service in Chicago was brief, he nevertheless made a strong impression.

> One church member recalled that "the name of Fritz Reuter was a household word at First Bethlehem," and his time there seemed to be marked by happy productivity.[28]

Only a few months after arriving in Chicago, Reuter received a call to Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota. The timing was significant because the Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States had begun to recognize the need for better musical training among future Lutheran teachers. The Joint Synod's 1905 proceedings stated that "the nurture of congregational singing and church music" was chiefly the task of parochial school teachers and that, therefore, such teachers needed thorough musical instruction.[29] Dr. Martin Luther College, at that time the Joint Synod's teacher-training institution, needed a musician who could build a complete program of music instruction.

Reuter was ideally suited to this task. Biographer Edward Meyer's summary of his qualifications emphasizes keyboard and stringed instruments, choral directing, music

[28] Edwin A. Reinke, letter, May 9, 1972.
[29] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 22.

history, music theory, composition, pedagogy, and extensive experience as organist, choir director, cantor, teacher, and parish school musician. When Reuter arrived in New Ulm in April 1908, he was forty-four years old and in the productive maturity of his career. He came not as a young experimental conductor but as an experienced German cantor and teacher whose theological convictions, musical training, and practical background prepared him for the distinctive needs of Dr. Martin Luther College.

CHRISTIANSEN: BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION, PATH TO AMERICA, MINNESOTA, AND ST. OLAF COLLEGE



Example 1.3 F. Melius Christiansen, Northfield, MN

Fredrik Melius Christiansen offers a useful point of comparison because his career developed in the same state and during the same general period as Reuter's, yet followed a markedly different trajectory and resulted in a distinct institutional model. Christiansen was born in Berger, Norway, on April 1, 1871, to Anders Christiansen and

Oleana Jonsen and was baptized in the Lutheran Church in nearby Eidsvold. Music was part of his family environment from childhood. Members of both sides of his family participated in local orchestras and bands, and his father led his own band. Anton Armstrong notes that, in his youth, Christiansen studied clarinet, violin, organ, and composition.[30] After preliminary education, Christiansen established a music studio in Larvik, where he gave violin and piano lessons and copied music. Finding limited prospects for musical advancement in Norway, he emigrated to the United States in 1888.[31] His reason for leaving Europe, therefore, stands in contrast to Reuter's. Christiansen's emigration was shaped chiefly by the pursuit of musical and vocational opportunities, whereas Reuter's departure from Germany was prompted by theological concerns and his desire to serve in a more confessionally secure Lutheran environment.

Christiansen's early musical formation was shaped by Norwegian home, church, and folk traditions. Leola Bergmann describes music as a pervasive element of his early life, rooted in "the home and church life of his Norwegian boyhood" and nourished by Norway's folk songs, lullabies, dance tunes, and Lutheran chorales.[32] In this respect, Christiansen's musical imagination differed from that of the German cantor tradition. Reuter's formation centered on organ, counterpoint, chant, chorale, and liturgical responsibility. Christiansen's formation included Norwegian folk-song influence and

[30] Anton Armstrong, "The Musical Legacy of F. Melius Christiansen," *The Choral Journal* 37, no. 4 (November 1996): 9.
[31] Richard D. Hanson, "A Tribute to F. Melius Christiansen," *The Choral Journal* 12, no. 7 (March 1972): 12.
[32] Leola Nelson Bergmann, *Music Master of the Middle West: The Story of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), prologue.

instrumental color, both of which later contributed to the development of his distinctive choral sound.

Christiansen's first years in the United States were marked by movement and continued musical work. After arriving in New York, he traveled to Oakland, California, where he hoped to find work as a church organist. When that position did not materialize, he moved to Washburn, Wisconsin, to live with his brother Karl, and later to Marinette, Wisconsin, where he became director of the Scandinavian Band and served as organist and choir director at Our Savior's Lutheran Church.[33] While in Marinette, Christiansen heard a touring male quartet from Augsburg College and Seminary in Minneapolis, an encounter that introduced him to further musical opportunities in Minnesota. In 1892, he enrolled at Augsburg with the intention of becoming a concert violinist.[34] He later transferred to the Northwestern Conservatory of Music in Minneapolis, where he studied music theory and counterpoint.

In 1897, Christiansen traveled to Germany to study for two years at the Leipzig Conservatory of Music. There, he studied violin with Hans Sitt and composition, counterpoint, and choir conducting with Gustav Schreck. During this period, Christiansen also became acquainted with the boys' choir tradition associated with St. Thomas Church and the *Thomasschule* (St. Thomas School).[35] This experience reinforced his commitment to textual sensitivity and disciplined ensemble singing. Like Reuter,

[33] Robin Gehl, "Christiansen, F. Melius (1871–1955)," Minnesota Historical Society, accessed April 24, 2026, https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/person/christiansen-f-melius-1871-1955.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Richard D. Hanson, "A Tribute to F. Melius Christiansen," *The Choral Journal* 12, no. 7 (March 1972): 12.

Christiansen was connected to Schreck and to the Leipzig church music tradition. However, the results of that training took a different institutional form. Reuter's German training led to a teacher-church musician model in New Ulm. Christiansen's training contributed to a refined choral ensemble model in Northfield.

Christiansen returned to Minnesota after completing his degree in 1899 and worked in Minneapolis as a violin teacher, church organist, and chorus director. In 1903, St. Olaf College president John Kildahl invited him to Northfield to serve as head of the college's newly established music department and director of bands. After joining the St. Olaf faculty, Christiansen became connected with the parish choir at nearby St. John's Lutheran Church. In 1907, the congregation selected Christiansen to direct its choir, marking the beginning of his work in sacred choral music in a setting that was initially ecclesial rather than collegiate.

Seeking to elevate the musical standards of the St. John's parish choir, Christiansen recruited nearby college students and transformed the ensemble into an auditioned collegiate choir whose disciplined rehearsal practice, repertoire selection, and national touring became hallmarks of the St. Olaf choral tradition.[36] He carried out this transformation gradually by adding St. Olaf students to the choir, expanding it from approximately fifteen singers to more than fifty and bringing the ensemble into close relationship with the college. The church choir became the seedbed for the St. Olaf Choir, which was formally renamed in 1912 and toured Wisconsin and Illinois, including

[36] Alan Zabriskie, "Evolution of Choral Sound of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2010), 21.

Chicago, that same year. The next year, the choir toured Norway, becoming the first American collegiate choral ensemble to tour Norway and extending the reach of Christiansen's model beyond the American Midwest.[37] Rooted originally in liturgical service to elevate church music, the choir's development reflected a deliberate institutionalization of sacred choral music within the college's choral curriculum.

SHARED FOUNDATIONS

Despite their different backgrounds and institutional outcomes, Reuter and Christiansen shared several foundational convictions. Both men believed that sacred music carried theological significance. Both saw musical excellence as more than aesthetic refinement. Both understood the church musician as teacher and servant. However, the way each embodied these convictions differed according to institutional context and theological emphasis.

For Reuter, music served the Word. Emil Backer's statement that Reuter treated music as "the handmaiden of the text" summarizes his deepest conviction.[38] Reuter's art was governed by the text, and the text was governed by the Gospel. His objection to the German state church was not that it lacked music, but that he believed the Word had been displaced. This concern followed him into his work in North America. At Dr. Martin Luther College, he trained students to sing, play, accompany, conduct, and teach so that Lutheran worship and congregational song might be strengthened. Reuter's artistic

[37] Anton Armstrong, "The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music," *Word & World* 12, no. 3 (1992): 251.
[38] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.

discipline was therefore a theological responsibility. Good music mattered because the Word mattered.

Christiansen also connected sacred music to spiritual responsibility, though his language often placed stronger emphasis on art, beauty, and emotional sincerity. In a 1927 letter to the president of St. Olaf College, Christiansen wrote:

> It is important that I am in good physical and spiritual condition because the singing of the choir is so dependent on how I feel. I am not sentimental when I say that the spiritual condition is very important in this work. We must give genuine expression to those beautiful works and not merely "vain representations." May we all be true to our calling. True to our master and true in our work for the master. And may we also be true to Art! The spirit of art is very much like the Spirit of Christ. Here, too, truthfulness is essential if it is to reach the hearts of the listeners.[39]

In his essay, "What Is Sacred Music?" Christiansen defined sacred music as the expression of God's Word in hymns and spiritual songs, shaped by the atmosphere the Word creates in the hearts of believers.[40] This view differs in tone from Reuter's more text-centered and confessional orientation, but it still affirms a close relationship between sacred music and the Word.

Both men also viewed the musician as a teacher. Reuter's entire work at Dr. Martin Luther College was centered on preparing future Lutheran teachers. His classroom and rehearsal methods joined precision, discipline, and encouragement. Reuter gave students a model of musical clarity, while also instilling appreciation for what he

[39] Leola Nelson Bergmann, *Music Master of the Middle West: The Story of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 134.
[40] Anton Armstrong, "The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music," *Word & World* 12, no. 3 (1992): 252.

considered good church music. Christiansen similarly viewed the choir director as more than a technician. In one of his most striking statements, he wrote that the choirmaster is "a teacher, a seer, a prophet" and "a builder of character and of good taste."[41] For Christiansen, the conductor served the spirit of the music; for Reuter, the conductor served the Word through the disciplined handling of text and tone. In both cases, musical leadership was understood as formative service.

Taken together, the historical backgrounds of Reuter and Christiansen reveal two distinct but complementary paths by which Lutheran sacred choral music took root in early twentieth-century Minnesota. Reuter's work at Dr. Martin Luther College shows that this tradition was already taking on an organized institutional form before the St. Olaf Choir was formally created. By 1908, Reuter had established a mixed choir at Dr. Martin Luther College that sang sacred a cappella and accompanied works within a teacher-training context shaped by German Lutheran church music, liturgical responsibility, and the preparation of future parish musicians. Christiansen's later work with the St. Olaf Choir gave Lutheran choral music broader public visibility through disciplined ensemble singing, refined choral tone, and extensive touring. While Christiansen projected Lutheran choral music outward into the concert world, Reuter planted it deeply within the church's educational and worship life. This comparison demonstrates that Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition was not built on one foundation alone, but on two pillars: Reuter's church-centered formation of Lutheran teachers,

[41] Anton Armstrong, "The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music," *Word & World* 12, no. 3 (1992): 253.

musicians, and congregations, and Christiansen's nationally recognized collegiate choral model.

CHAPTER 2

CHORAL PHILOSOPHY, REPERTOIRE, AND MUSICAL PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 traced the historical formation of Friedrich Otto Reuter and Fredrik Melius Christiansen. The present chapter moves from background to practice, examining how each man understood sacred choral music, how each trained singers, and how repertoire served a broader institutional purpose.

REUTER

Reuter's significance lies in the way he brought the German cantor's vocation into a Midwestern Lutheran teacher-training college. His work was not limited to directing ensembles or providing music for campus events. It involved the formation of students who would become teachers, organists, choir directors, and leaders of congregational song. In this sense, Reuter's choral practice was inseparable from pedagogy. The choir room, the classroom, the organ bench, and the worshipping congregation belonged to one integrated musical task. Before Reuter arrived in 1908, music at Dr. Martin Luther College had an underdeveloped place within the institution's teacher-training mission.

> It was impossible with the number of members of the faculty to do justice to the musical training necessary for Lutheran teachers. Various teachers were giving organ and piano lessons, but there was a lack of a properly outlined

> course, and also a lack of correlation. Voice training was almost entirely neglected.[1]

The Joint Synod had already recognized the need for formal music instruction before Reuter's arrival. In 1905, the synodical proceedings acknowledged that, "because of the present lack of instructors," it was "impossible to offer an adequate course of study in music."[2] That same report recommended securing additional instruction and also recognized the eventual need for a full-time professor of music. At that time, Dr. Martin Luther College was still a small institution, with only ninety-one students enrolled in its high school and college departments and a faculty of eight professors. As noted above, music instruction was present, but it lacked the organization, staffing, and curricular depth necessary to support the college's teacher-training mission.

Reuter began his work at Dr. Martin Luther College with remarkable immediacy. He arrived in New Ulm by train on April 2, 1908, and was installed the following day as professor of music. At the installation, President John Schaller of Dr. Martin Luther College emphasized the tremendous work Reuter was about to begin:

> Prof. F. O. Reuter…was installed into his office. The short service was held with God's Word and prayer. The undersigned installed him and pointed out the importance of instruction in church music to which the new teacher should dedicate himself. Prof. Reuter set before the students in a short talk his wishes and hopes. A student choir participated in the service with the singing of a Psalm. [3]

[1] E.R. Bliefernicht, *A Brief History of Dr. Martin Luther College, 1884–1934* (New Ulm, MN, 1934), 48.
[2] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 38.
[3] J. Schaller, "Unsere Schulen und Anstalten," *Gemeinde-Blatt* 43, no. 8 (April 15, 1908): 118–19.

Although Reuter entered the school year near its close, he did not postpone his work until the following fall. Meyer notes that there was "no time lost" as Reuter began his duties.[4] Because the school schedule could not be fully revised during the final quarter, Reuter worked within existing structures as described in the Minnesota Synod Proceedings of 1908:

> He [Reuter] spent most of his time teaching singing and managed to give every class two periods of singing a week. In this way it was possible for him to become acquainted, in this short time, with the singing ability of the students and to plan a program for future vocal instruction. Outside of regular class periods, he practiced with a male choir, a mixed choir, and a girls' choir, and trained an orchestra for commencement.[5]

Reuter's determination was evident in a concert he presented at New Ulm's Turner Hall shortly after his arrival. When asked how he was able to present such a strong program with so little preparation, he answered, "Discipline."[6] Reuter's answer reveals more than personal temperament. Discipline became one of the foundations of Reuter's work in New Ulm. He brought to Dr. Martin Luther College a German pedagogical seriousness that treated musical training as a necessary part of church worker formation. This seriousness is reflected in the rapid and comprehensive curricular development Reuter undertook at the college.

A comparison of the 1906–07 and 1908–09 catalogues shows that his work quickly moved beyond ensemble direction to a broader reorganization of musical study.

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[4] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 24.
[5] "Minnesota Synod," in *Proceedings 1908* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1908), 90.
[6] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 38.

At the time, Dr. Martin Luther College followed a six-year structure modeled on the German *Gymnasium*. The program included two collegiate levels, A Class and B Class, followed by four preparatory levels, C through F. Under Reuter's direction, the upper college class added harmony and church music while retaining instruction in singing, organ, and violin; it also included required participation in the mixed choir and additional work in the men's choir. The lower college class continued its work in singing, organ, violin, and harmony, but added music history and required participation in the orchestra. In the preparatory department, Reuter expanded singing alongside piano instruction, and the senior preparatory year retained harmony, singing, piano, and violin while also permitting qualified students to begin organ study. The changes reveal the breadth of Reuter's educational vision. Music was no longer treated as a set of scattered lessons, but as a structured sequence of study that integrated theory, history, keyboard skills, instrumental study, choral participation, and church music. Although later catalogues show fewer dramatic changes, the course descriptions continued to be revised, gradually moving toward greater depth and scope.[7]

Reuter's vision and drive were also evident in his deliberate effort to expand the college's musical resources. He sought to acquire books, scores, and other materials that would support students preparing to serve as choir directors and church musicians. Even after a decade of such work, however, Reuter still regarded the music library as being only in its formative stage. In 1918, he argued that the college continued to need choral

[7] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 27.

books and practical musical literature suitable for the training of future teachers. His concern was not merely the quantity of available music but its quality. In Reuter's view, excellent musical training required excellent materials. Students could not be expected to cultivate sound musical judgement or lead congregations and school choirs effectively if their preparation rested on inferior repertoire. "Poor, popular fads [and] sloppy music we can find any place," Reuter lamented, "and sorry to say, in some of our churches too."[8] If future Lutheran teachers and choir directors were to raise musical standards in classrooms and worship, then the college needed to give musical books, scores, and supplies the same serious attention it gave to the resources required for other academic disciplines.

In the fall of 1908, under Reuter's direction, a mixed choir rehearsed on the campus of Dr. Martin Luther College for the first time. In addition to this new ensemble, Reuter conducted the men's choir and the school orchestra while carrying a teaching load of thirty-two hours each week. These responsibilities marked a significant expansion of the college's musical life, but they also revealed the difficulty of the task before him. Many Dr. Martin Luther College students came from rural congregations and schools where formal musical training was limited and where exposure to substantial Lutheran church music could not be assumed. One of Reuter's students later recalled the cultural and musical gap that he encountered:

> He came to this country steeped in the rich heritage of good Lutheran church music. Therefore he keenly felt the lack of background and interest for this area among students of the Middle West. In frustration, he would sometimes say, "Yes,

[8] Fritz Reuter, "College Music-Library," *The D.M.L.C. Messenger* 9, no. 1 (September 1918), unpaginated.

> John, it's much easier to walk behind the plow than to write a harmonization of a hymn."[9]

Reuter's work with the choirs, therefore, required more than rehearsing notes and rhythms. He had to cultivate musical literacy, disciplined ensemble habits, and a deeper appreciation for Lutheran sacred music among students who would soon carry that training into parish classrooms, congregations, and choirs.

Later recollections from those who knew Reuter and his students reinforce this picture of exacting but deeply personal musical formation. Esther Trettin wrote that her husband, a former student of Reuter, remembered him with deep respect:

> My husband had the highest regard for him and was very happy that he had the privilege to "sit at his feet." He often mentioned his keen musical ear and his irritation when one note of music was sung wrong.[10]

Trettin also preserved memories that place Reuter's precision within the broader pattern of his musical life. She recalled that when Reuter took "his boys," the Dr. Martin Luther College men's choir, fishing, he did not fish with them. Instead, he sat on the riverbank, "totally oblivious to his surroundings," and would "dream" about music. When he returned home, he wrote it out. Trettin summarized the memory simply: "Music was his entire life. He lived and breathed music."[11]

The same recollection also illustrates Reuter's extraordinary ear in the ordinary life of the college. Trettin reported that Reuter once heard a student practicing organ as he walked down the college hill. Hearing one wrong note through the open window, he

[9] Ada Sievert, letter, August 26, 1971.
[10] Esther Trettin, letter, July 30, 1971.
[11] Ibid.

turned back, went to the practice room, corrected the student, and played the passage correctly.[12] Such stories clarify the character of Reuter's pedagogy. His insistence on accuracy was not merely a matter of temperament; it was part of a larger conviction that sacred music required attentive, disciplined, and faithful workmanship.

This context helps explain why Reuter's choral philosophy cannot be understood merely as ensemble building. At Dr. Martin Luther College, choral singing was tied directly to the institution's purpose of preparing Lutheran teachers for service in parish schools and congregations. The mixed choir, men's choir, and orchestra gave students practical experience in disciplined rehearsal, tone production, intonation, rhythm, and sacred repertoire. Reuter's own comments about his choirs reveal his musical priorities and the practical nature of his choral pedagogy:

> Nevertheless the men's choir as well as the mixed choir are working diligently in the area of tone and voice formation and intonation, [and] in the area…of melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic assuredness.[13]

These categories show that Reuter's emphasis was not on emotional effect or public display. Instead, they demonstrate a teacher concerned with foundational musical literacy. Reuter wanted his students to develop reliable habits of tone, pitch, rhythm, harmony, and ensemble awareness.

The ensembles served a broader vocational purpose, a point essential for understanding Reuter's place in Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition. His choirs were not conceived primarily as concert organizations whose success depended on public

[12] Ibid.
[13] Fritz Reuter, "College Notes-Musical," *The D.M.L.C. Messenger* 2, no. 3 (March 1912): 57.

reputation. Rather, they functioned as part of a broader program of church worker formation. The synod had already identified congregational singing and church music as responsibilities belonging chiefly to parochial school teachers. Reuter responded to that need by training his students to become musically capable leaders who could support worship, teach congregational song, direct school choirs, and cultivate sound musical judgement in the places they would later serve. His choral philosophy, therefore, united musical skill with the pedagogical and ecclesiastical mission of the college, making the choir a practical training ground for Lutheran church musicianship.

Reuter's concern for sacred repertoire was equally strong. Emil Backer, Reuter's student and successor, later recalled that Reuter was deeply concerned about the condition of church music in America. The scarcity of good choir music and the lack of capable organists and choir directors drove him into energetic work as a teacher and composer. Backer remembered Reuter saying near the end of his life, "There is still so much work to be done."[14] This statement captures the vocational urgency behind Reuter's work. He composed because the church needed music. He taught because the church needed teachers. He organized choirs because future church workers needed to learn how sacred music should sound, function, and serve.

Backer's recollection also provides the clearest statement of Reuter's theology of music. He wrote that Reuter was often found with Scripture in hand, contemplating a text he intended to set to music. "The Bible, the hymnal, and manuscript paper were

[14] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.

inseparable at his desk."[15] Backer further explained that Reuter treated music as "the handmaiden of the text."[16] Text and music were to be fused into one unit so that the Word might be proclaimed through musical art. This statement is perhaps the most concise summary of Reuter's choral philosophy. Music did not exist to glorify the composer, conductor, institution, or choir. It existed to serve the text and, through the text, the proclamation of the Gospel.

Reuter's text-centered approach shaped his handling of intellect, emotion, and doctrine. Reuter did not reject musical emotion, but he subordinated it to textual and theological clarity. The feeling of a composition had to arise from the meaning of the words. His music was therefore expressive, but not sentimental; disciplined, but not merely mechanical; doctrinal, but not coldly didactic. It sought to proclaim the Gospel through musical means.

The 1924 obituary in *The Northwestern Lutheran* reinforces this interpretation. It states that Reuter "cared nothing for the mere imparting of mechanical skill." Music, in Reuter's view, was "a powerful means of expression" and "a language that conveyed definite thought." Nevertheless, the purpose of that language was not human glorification. Reuter's art was "to serve in every instance for the glory of God," and his compositions aimed to speak of God's gracious work for the salvation of the world.[17] These remarks show that Reuter's pedagogy, conducting, and composing are inseparable

[15] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.
[16] Ibid., 4.
[17] "Prof. F. O. Reuter," *The Northwestern Lutheran* 11, no. 14 (July 13, 1924): 221.

from his theology. Musical skill mattered, but only because it enabled clearer proclamation.

Ada Sievert's recollection of Reuter's Easter anthem "Du liebliche Ostern" ("You Lovely Easter") offers a rare and revealing glimpse into how his students understood his creative imagination. According to Sievert, Reuter once told her that portions of the anthem had come to him in a dream, in which he heard angel choirs singing. He awoke during the night and wrote down what he had heard. The anecdote should not be treated as evidence for a compositional method, but it is significant as a memory preserved by one who knew him. It suggests that, for Reuter, sacred composition was not merely a technical task or an occasional extension of his teaching duties. It belonged to the deeper life of devotion, text, and worship. Sievert's concluding observation that such zeal "Fairly consumed the slight body of their beloved teacher long before his students were ready to lose him" captures the favorable impression Reuter left on his students.[18]

Reuter's repertoire choices at Dr. Martin Luther College reveal the breadth and purpose of his musical practice. During his early years at the college, the choirs sang works by Elgar, Mendelssohn, Schütz, and J. S. Bach, alongside Reuter's own compositions, including "Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt" ("For God So Loved the World") and "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm" ("Behold the Lamb of God").[19] This repertoire indicates both historical breadth and practical intent. Reuter did not isolate students within a narrow body of choral music. He introduced them to major sacred and

[18] Ada Sievert, letter, August 26, 1971.
[19] Grace A. Hennig, "The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer" (master's thesis, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, 1999), 8.

art-music traditions while also providing new works suited to the needs of the institution and church. His German training, Bach-centered lineage, and experience as a cantor gave him a wide stylistic frame. His work at Dr. Martin Luther College required him to translate that frame into usable educational and liturgical practice.
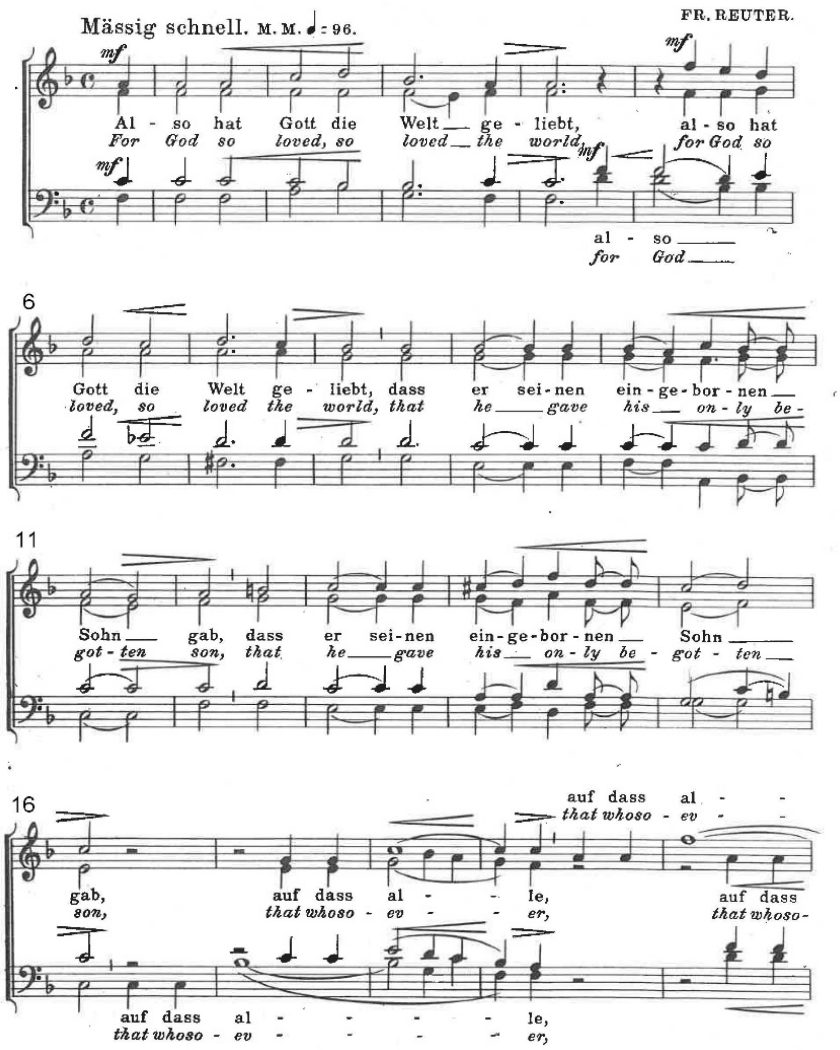
The accessibility of Reuter's sacred compositions should therefore not be understood as evidence of artistic limitation, but as an expression of vocational purpose. Backer recalled that good church music was not readily available in America at the time, and that the scarcity of able organists and choir directors drove Reuter to active work as both an instructor and a composer. Reuter "composed and composed for the church," because the church needed repertoire.[20]

The following two works provide representative examples of the functional and theological orientation that shaped much of Reuter's sacred choral writing.

"Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt" is a text-driven sacred choral work whose musical design reflects the theological progression of its three scriptural sources: John 3:16, Romans 13:12, and Luke 2:14. Scored for a cappella mixed chorus, the work begins centered in F major, a key that provides warmth and stability for the opening proclamation, "For God so loved the world." The first section unfolds in a restrained but confident homophonic texture. Its harmonic language is primarily diatonic. The opening establishes F major in measures 1–4, then moves briefly through D minor and uses a related D major chord to progress toward G major at measures 5–8. C major tonality

[20] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.
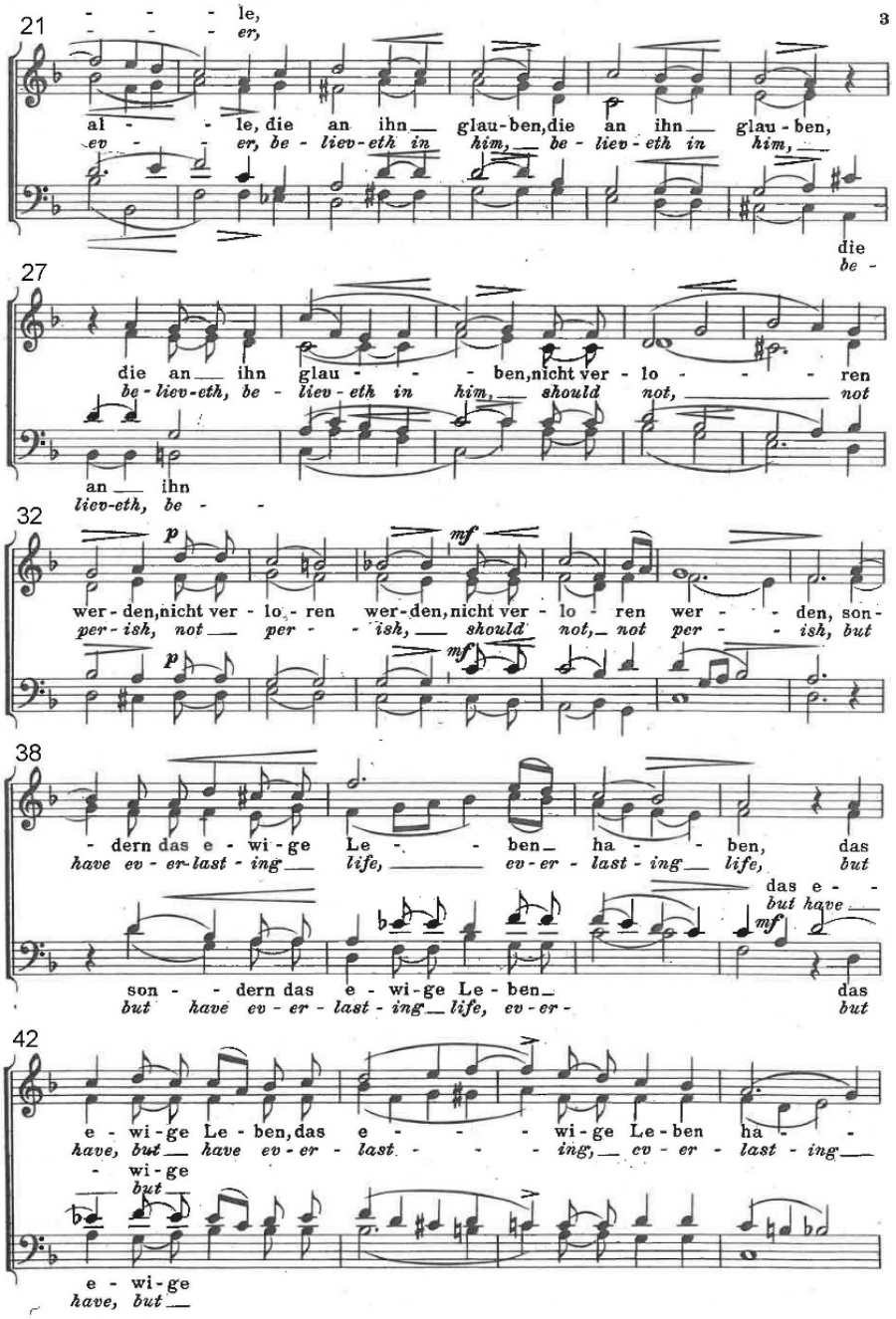
returns at measure 16 and signals a return to F major, then D minor in measures 19–20. This tonic-to-dominant, F to C, motion gives the opening text a clear declarative quality. At the same time, Reuter introduces chromatic inflection to heighten the theological significance of the gift of the Son (mm. 6–7) and to emphasize the movement from divine love to divine action in the phrase “that he gave his only begotten son” (mm. 12–16). Through balanced phrase structure, moderate tempo, and controlled dynamic shading, Reuter establishes the central Gospel statement with clarity, restraint, and theological purpose.



Example 2.1 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Also hat Gott die Welt," mm. 1–20

As the John 3:16 text unfolds, Reuter allows the music to expand so that the harmony appears to respond directly to the meaning of the text. The central clause, "auf dass alle, die an ihn glauben," introduces a more imitative and sequential texture. Here, the voices enter and overlap in a way that suggests the widening scope of the text: "that whoever believes in him." Harmonically, this passage (mm. 16–46) becomes more
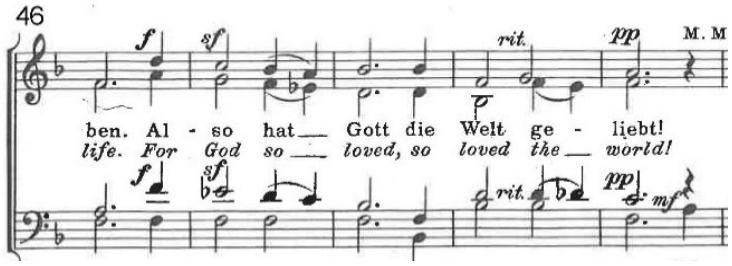
mobile, relying on suspensions and chromatic color to move away from the stability of the opening section. Reuter's treatment of "nicht verloren werden" ("shall not perish") is especially expressive at measures 29–37. The dynamic level softens, and the harmonic language darkens through chromatic inflection and delayed resolution. The repetition of the phrase "nicht verloren werden" does not sound merely declarative; it carries the tension implied by the possibility of perishing. Dissonance and suspension create a sense of instability, which is then answered by the more affirmative continuation, "sondern das ewige Leben haben" ("but have everlasting life"). At this point, the harmonic direction turns toward renewed brightness, and the repeated emphasis on "ewige Leben" ("everlasting life") allows the music to regain confidence and tonal fullness.



Example 2.2 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Also hat Gott die Welt," mm. 21–45
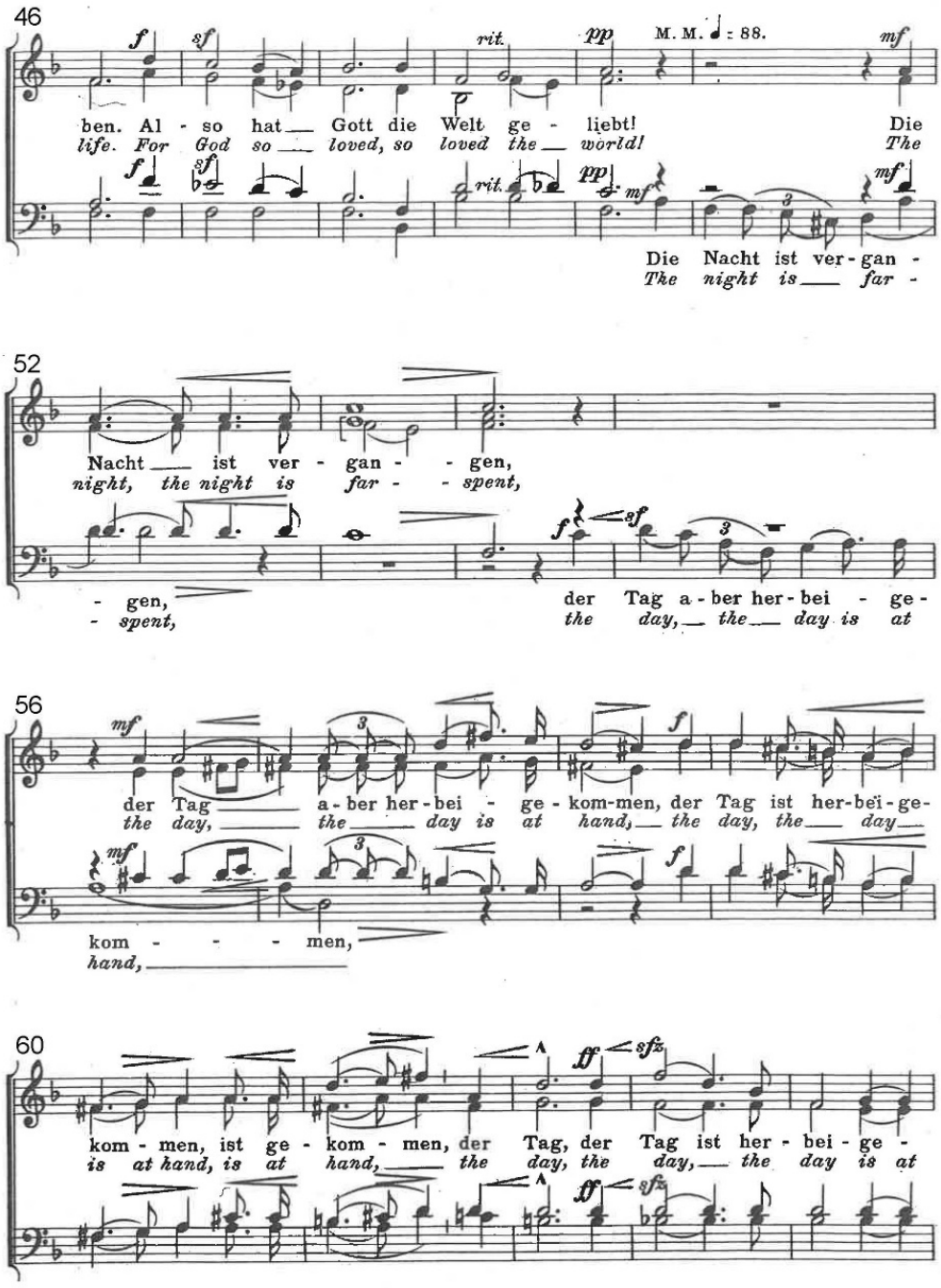
The return of "Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt" near the end of the first large section (mm. 46–50) functions as a theological and musical recapitulation. Reuter brings

back the work's central idea with stronger dynamics, marked accents, and a broader cadence. The ritardando and subsequent softening do not weaken the statement but allow it to settle reflectively before the next scriptural section begins. In this way, the opening Gospel text is not simply stated and abandoned; it becomes the foundation for the entire composition.
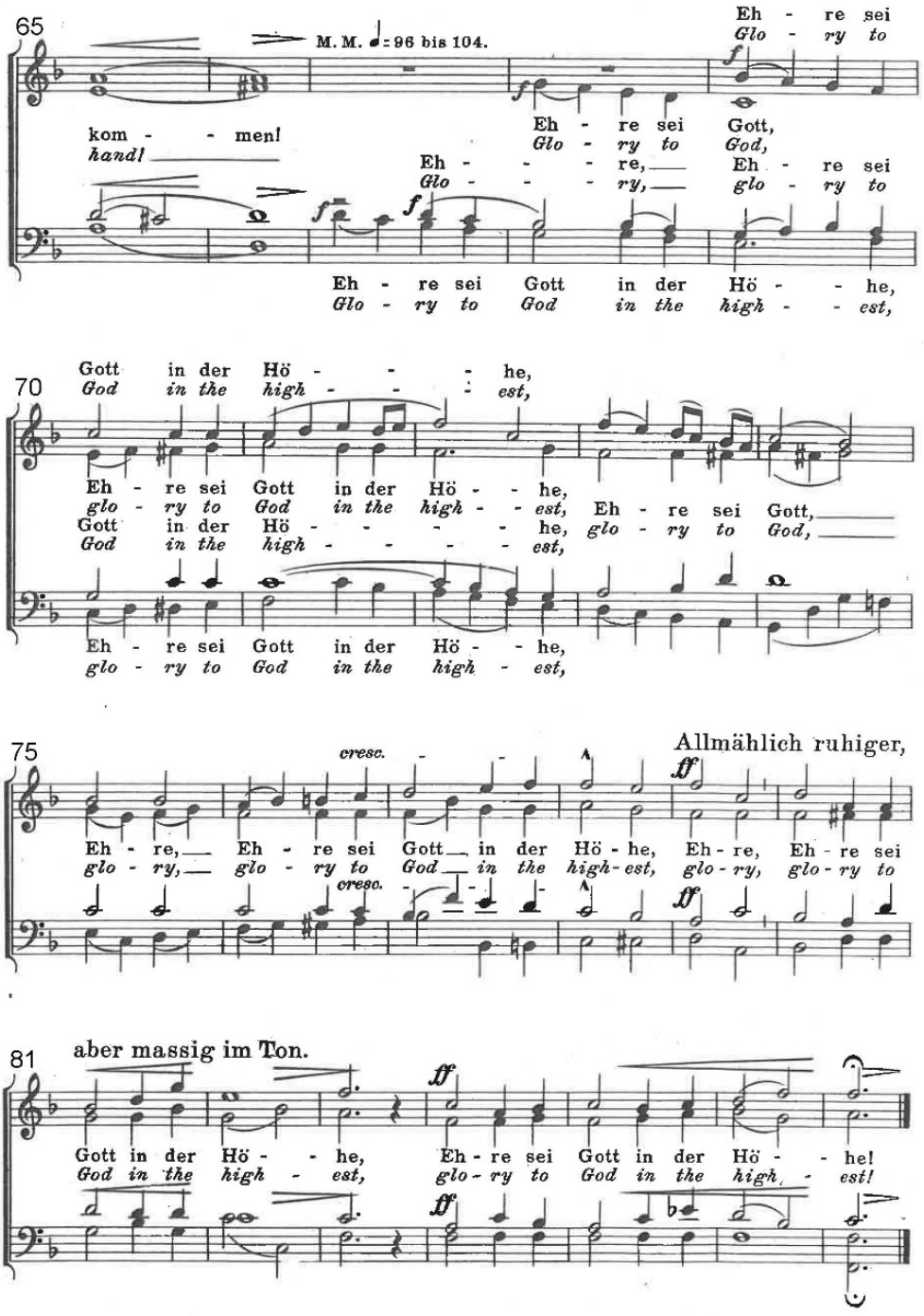


Example 2.3 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Also hat Gott die Welt," mm. 46–50

The second major section, beginning with "Die Nacht ist vergangen" ("the night is farspent") at measure 50, changes both the affect and musical direction of the work. The tempo shifts to a slightly slower pulse, and the lower-register writing and quieter dynamic level correspond to the image of night passing away. As the text turns to "der Tag aber herbeigekommen" ("the day is at hand"), the music becomes more animated. Reuter responds to the imagery of approaching day with rising melodic figures, increased rhythmic energy, and intensifying dynamics. The music presses forward with a growing sense of arrival and expectation. This passage demonstrates Reuter's ability to use harmonic colors and musical motion as a form of text interpretation: night recedes through softer, darker sonorities, while the coming day is announced through ascending lines, greater rhythmic activity, and heightened harmonic urgency.



Example 2.4 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Also hat Gott die Welt," mm. 46–64

The final section, “Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe” (“Glory to God in the highest”), moves the work toward a doxological conclusion. The tempo returns to a more vigorous marking, and the texture expands from staggered entrances into fuller choral declamation. Harmonically, this section reasserts the tonal center of the opening section with greater confidence. The overlapping and repeated acclamations of “Ehre sei Gott” evoke the angelic host proclaiming “Glory to God” at Christ’s birth. Reuter builds the final measures through repetition, crescendo, and rhythmic augmentation, evidenced through the broadening effect of half-note motion. The marking *Allmählich ruhiger, aber massig im Ton* calls for the music to become gradually calmer while retaining a full tone. Reuter shapes the conclusion accordingly, first through a diminuendo–crescendo gesture and then through a final fortissimo cadence that returns firmly to the tonic.
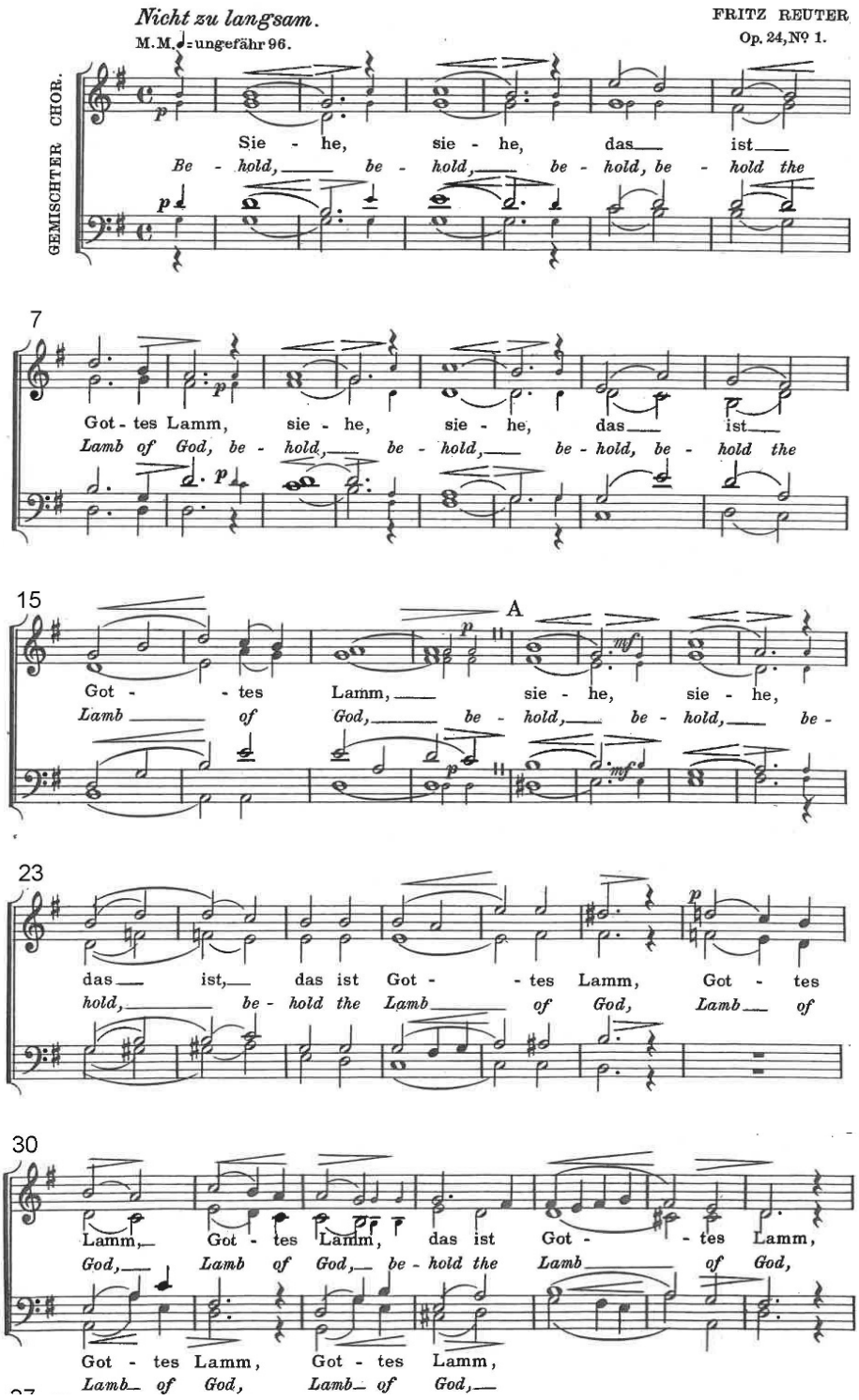


Example 2.5 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Also hat Gott die Welt," mm. 65–87

"Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt" reflects Reuter's characteristic concern for the union of text and music. Its harmonic design follows the theological movement of the selected biblical passages: the stable proclamation of divine love, the tension and release of salvation from death to life, the contrast between night and day, and the final doxology of glory to God. The piece is not harmonically experimental in a late-Romantic sense, but it is expressive and purposeful. Reuter's use of chromatic inflection, suspension, and cadential delay serves the meaning of the words rather than calling attention to itself. The result is a work in which harmonic movement functions as theological interpretation, reinforcing Reuter's broader understanding of sacred music as a servant of the Word.

Reuter demonstrates a similar text-centered approach in "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm," a compact yet expressive sacred choral work whose musical design closely follows the theological movement of its text. Scored as an a cappella motet for mixed voices, the work draws on John 1:29 and 1 Peter 2:24, joining the proclamation "Behold the Lamb of God" with the redemptive statement that Christ bears the sin of the world and that by his wounds believers are healed. Reuter sets the work in G major and begins with a restrained, homophonic presentation of the title text. The opening measures establish tonal stability through clear tonic and dominant relationships, allowing the words "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm" to sound as a direct proclamation. The repeated statements of "Siehe" create a meditative insistence, while the harmonic movement gradually broadens to the solemn words "Gottes Lamm." Although the opening section (mm. 1–36) is not harmonically adventurous, it provides the theological and tonal

foundation for the entire work: Christ is first identified, and the remainder of the piece unfolds the meaning of that identification.
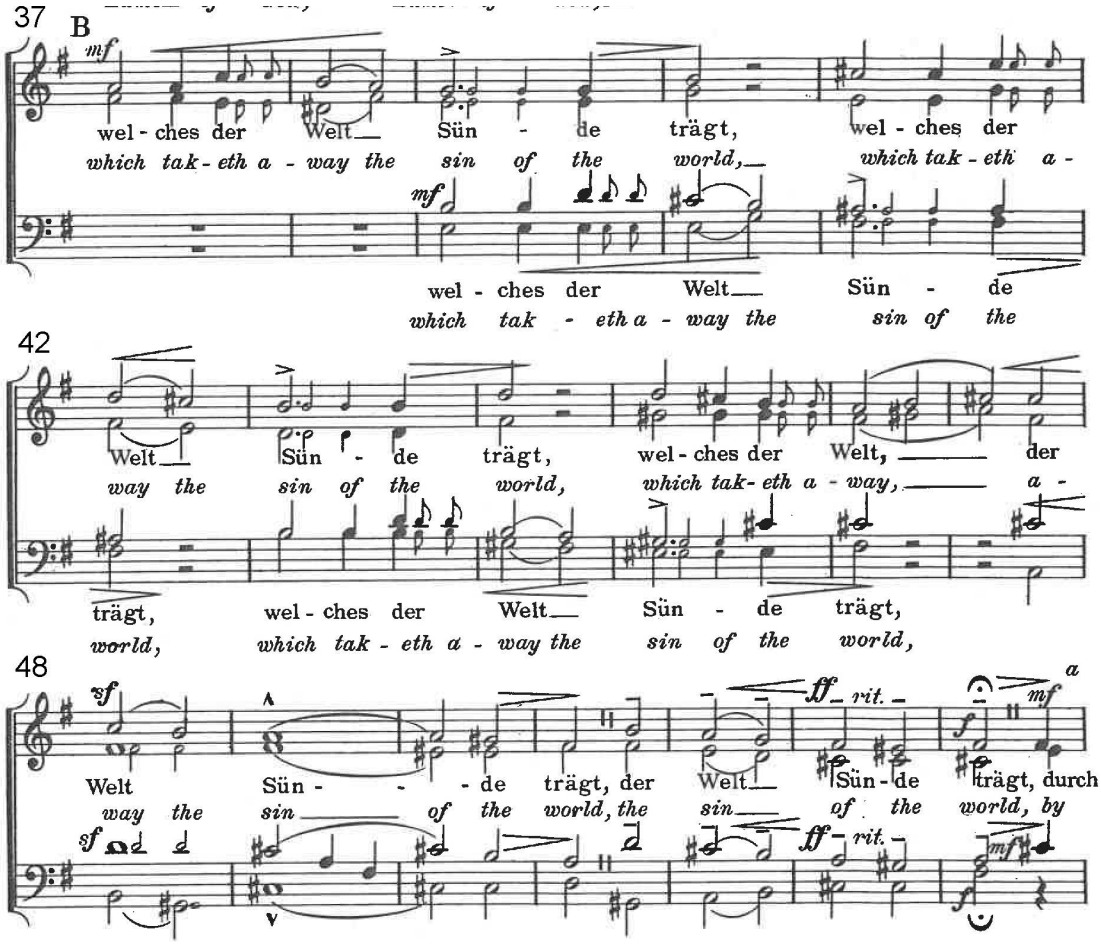
At rehearsal A (m. 19), Reuter intensifies the opening material. The texture remains largely chordal, but the harmonic language becomes more active as the chromatic coloring increases. The repetition of "das ist Gottes Lamm" gains weight through stronger movement and fuller sonorities. This passage serves as an enlargement of the opening proclamation. Rather than turning immediately to a new affect, Reuter deepens the initial statement. The accumulating harmonic pressure, which culminates in a sense of resolution on the dominant in measure 36, makes the identification of Christ as the Lamb of God more emphatic.



Example 2.6 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm," mm. 1–36

The most striking harmonic movement begins at rehearsal B (m. 37), where the text turns to “welches der Welt Sünde trägt” (“which taketh away the sin of the world”). Here, Reuter moves away from the relative stability of the opening section and turns toward a more chromatic harmonic language. The increase in harmonic tension corresponds directly to the theological weight of the text. On several occasions, the word “Sünde” receives particular emphasis through a more urgent harmonic drive. Reuter’s treatment suggests that the bearing of sin is not merely stated as doctrine; it is musically burdened through tension and intensified voice leading.

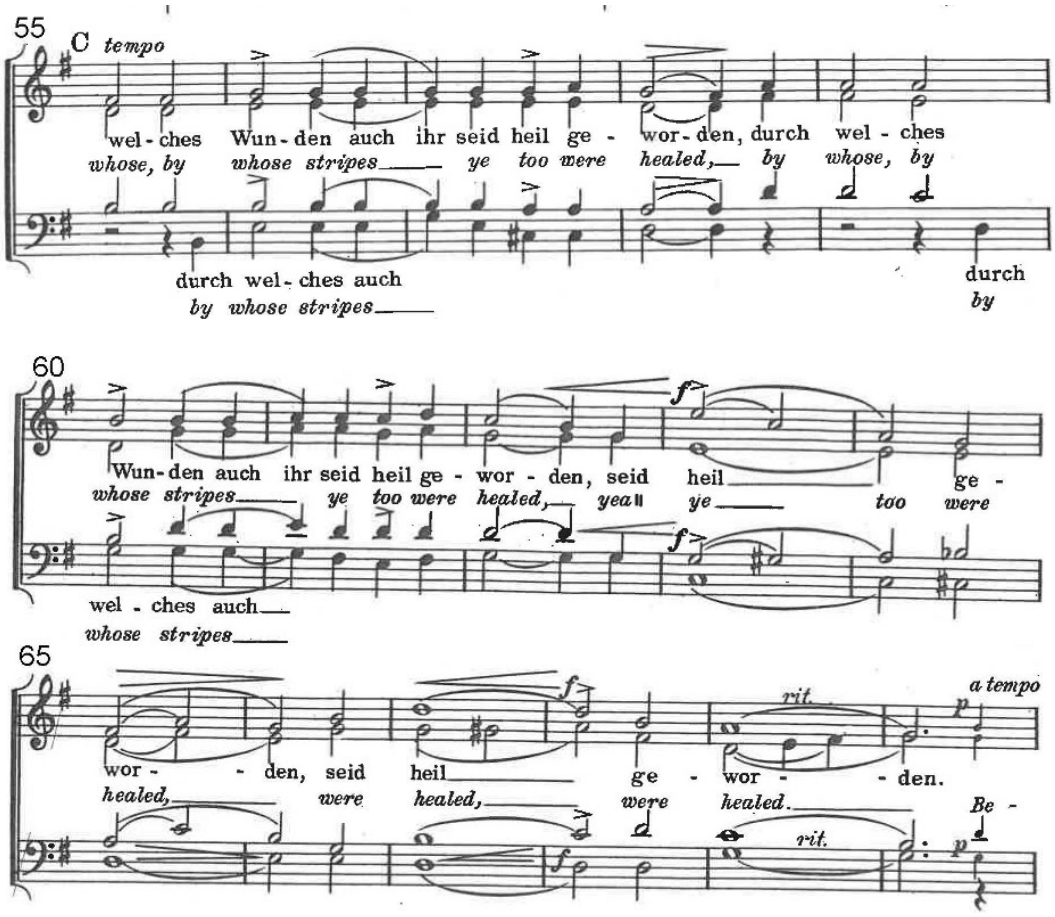
The culmination of this section presses toward a forceful cadence, strengthened by increased dynamics and a ritardando (mm. 51–54). This moment gives “der Welt Sünde trägt” its fullest musical weight, reflecting the movement from the burden of sin toward Christ’s redemptive action.



Example 2.7 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm," mm. 37–54

At rehearsal C (m. 55), Reuter introduces the text from 1 Peter, "durch welches Wunden auch ihr seid heil geworden" ("by his stripes, ye too were healed"). In contrast to the urgent chromaticism of the preceding section, this passage adopts a broader and more sustained character. The harmony remains expressive, but the movement is more consoling than burdened. Reuter continues the homophonic declamation in order to give clarity and weight to the healing promise of the text. Tension remains, especially where the words refer to Christ's wounds (*Wunden*), but the phrase "seid heil geworden" moves

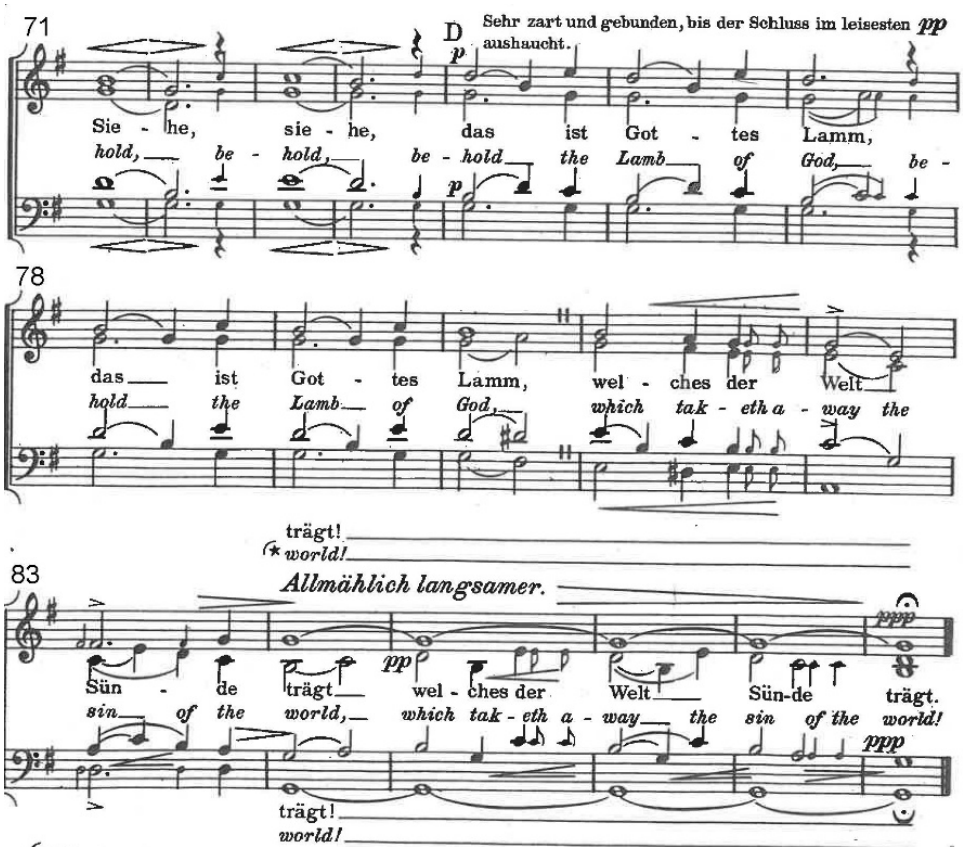
toward a more settled sonority. In this way, the music interprets the text as a movement from suffering to healing.



Example 2.8 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm," mm. 55–70

Reuter returns to the opening "Siehe" material in the final section, beginning at measure 71, but its effect is transformed. What first appeared as a direct proclamation now reenters with a tender, legato character, and the score leads singers toward an increasingly subdued conclusion. Reuter makes this intention explicit through the performance instruction, "Very delicate and restrained until the very end fades away."
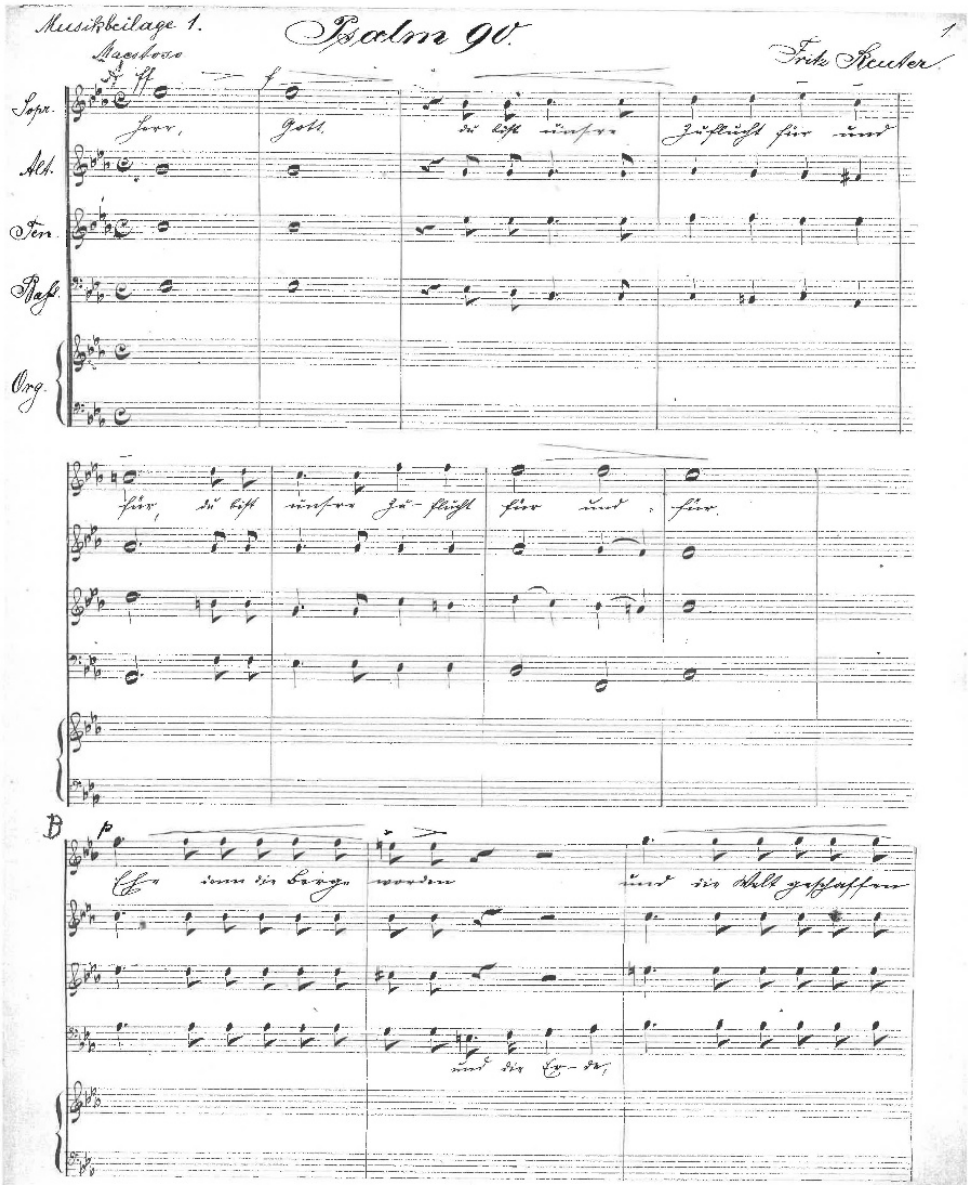
The final return of "welches der Welt Sünde trägt" is especially significant. The same text that previously carried heightened harmonic tension now dissolves into quiet resolution, further encouraged by the instruction "Allmählich langsamer," which calls for a gradual slowing of the tempo. The final G-major sonority does not triumph outwardly but breathes away in reverent stillness, marked by *ppp*.



Example 2.9 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm," mm. 71–88
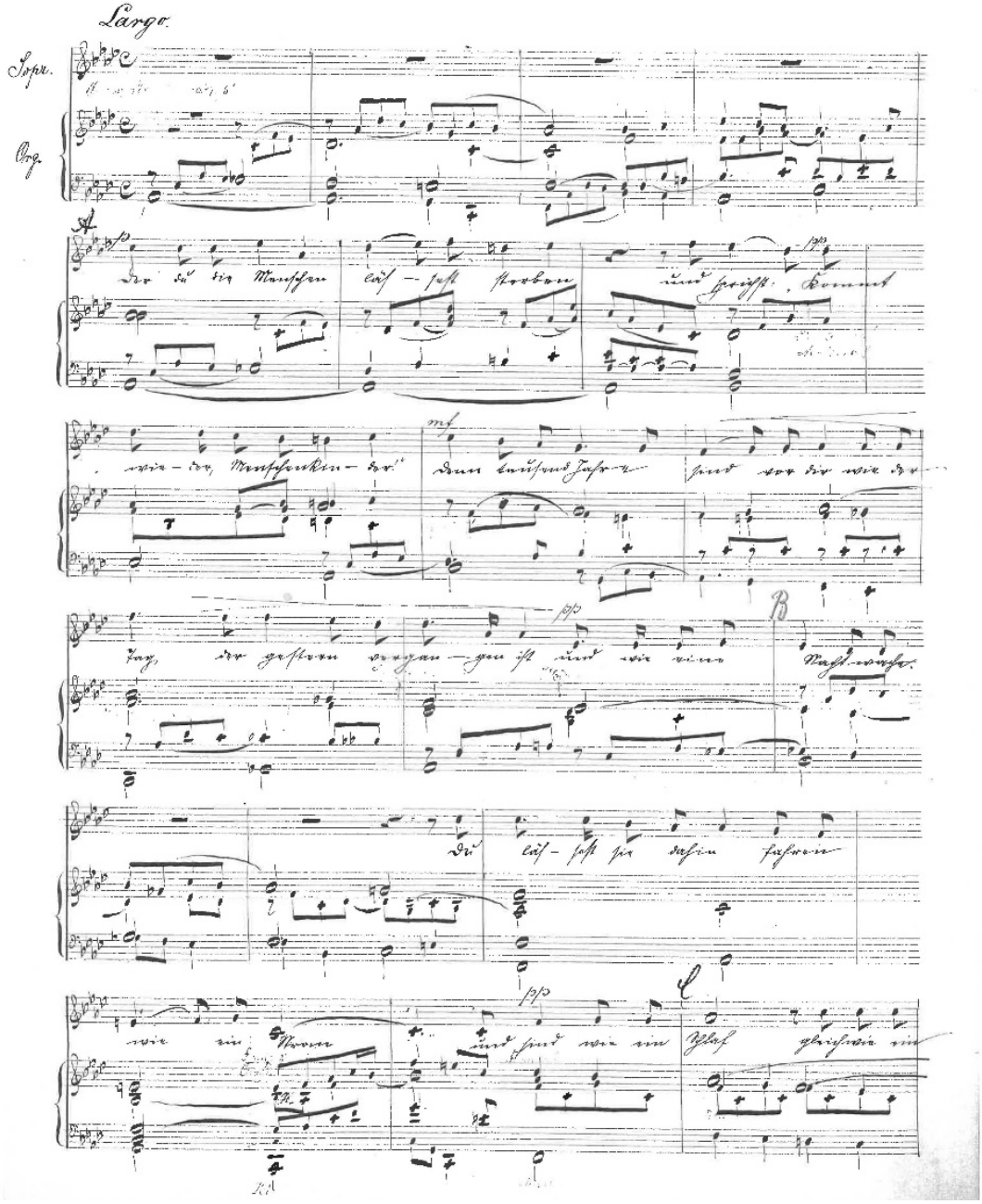
Reuter's setting of Psalm 90 shows that his sacred choral writing was not limited to the a cappella motet. Preserved in manuscript form, the work employs a multi-part design and demonstrates his creative use of varied choral combinations with organ accompaniment.

The work opens with an unaccompanied mixed chorus in a homophonic texture.
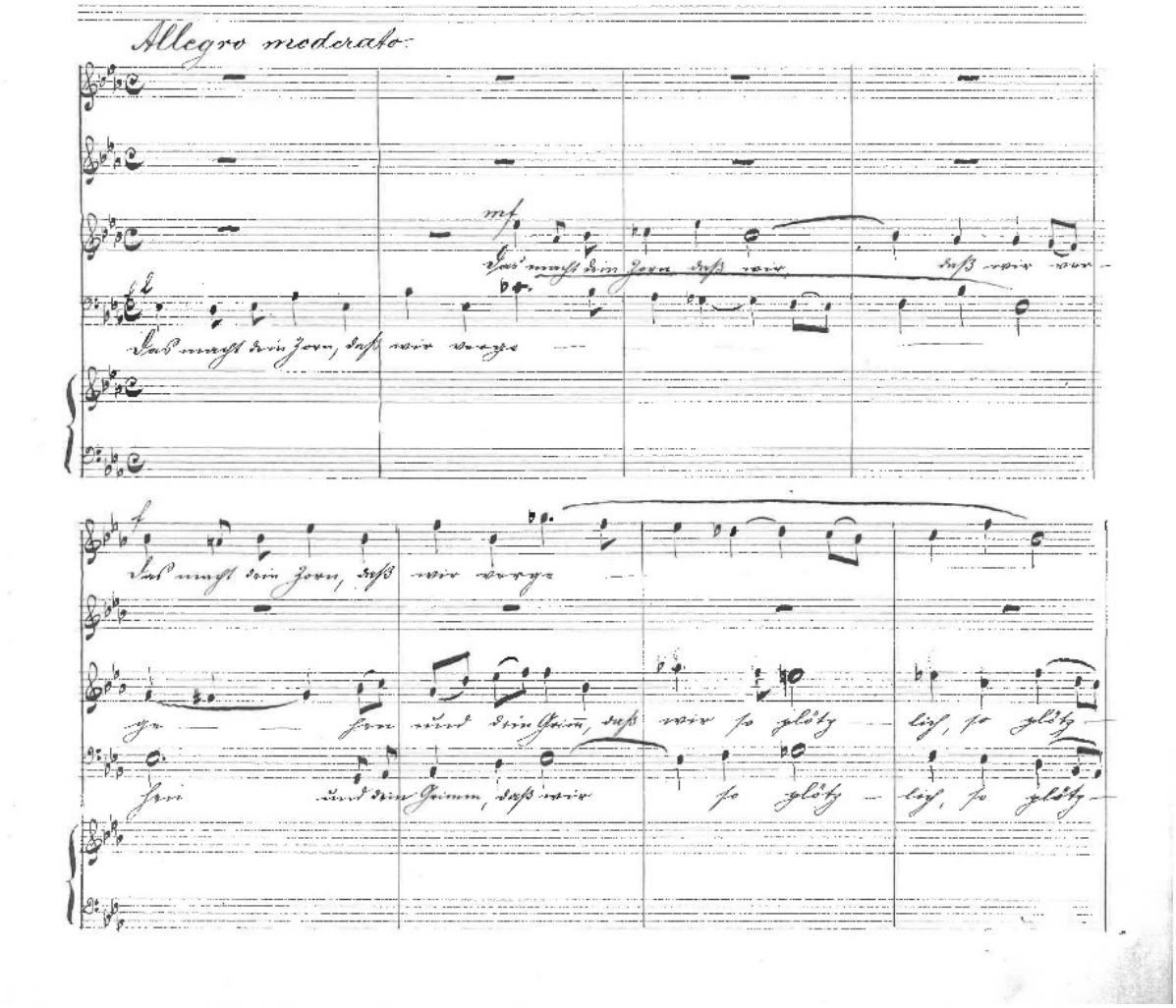


Example 2.10 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Psalm 90," mm. 1–11
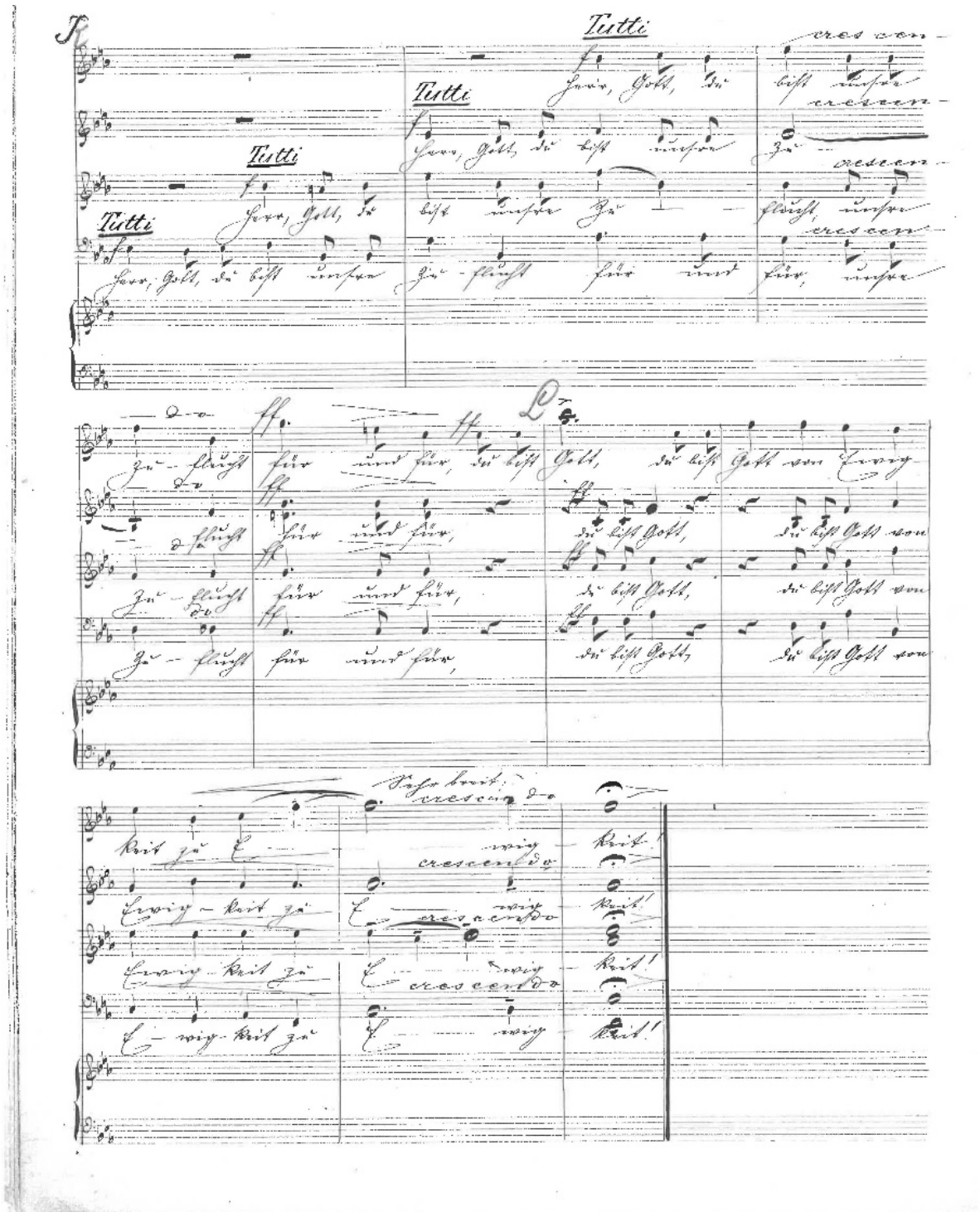
This opening chorus is followed by an organ-accompanied soprano solo, marked "Largo," that introduces a more fluid, lyrical character.
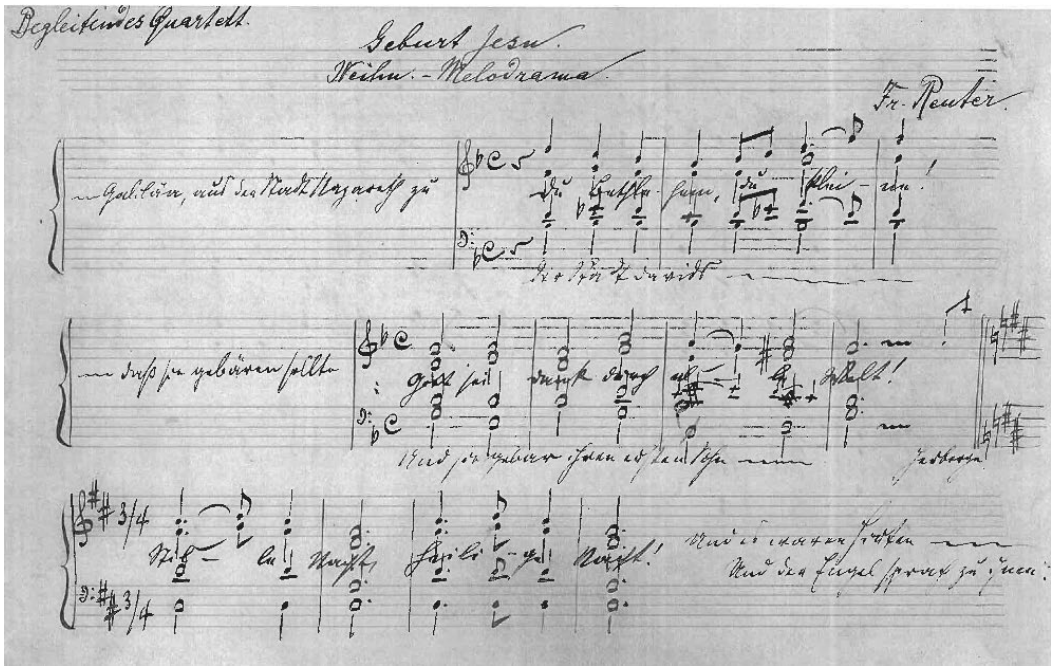


Example 2.11 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's "Psalm 90," mm. 49–66

Following the soprano solo, the work moves into a new section marked "Allegro moderato," beginning with an unaccompanied mixed chorus. Reuter then reduces the texture to an a cappella quartet, which is followed by a brief organ interlude. The section culminates in another unaccompanied choral passage that alternates between the quartet and the full mixed chorus, creating contrast in both texture and performing forces.


Allegro moderato
mf
f
f
Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen,
Herr, lehre uns bedenken, daß wir sterben müssen,
daß wir sterben müssen,
daß wir sterben müssen,


Tutti
Tutti
Tutti
Tutti
Herr, Gott, du bist unser
Herr, Gott, du bist unser
Herr, Gott, du bist unser
Herr, Gott, du bist unser
du bist Gott
du bist Gott
du bist Gott
du bist Gott
Herr
Herr
Herr

Reuter's *Weihnachtsgeschichte (The Christmas Story)* further demonstrates his practical sacred-musical imagination. Written for mixed choir, organ, and narrator, the work was performed regularly at Dr. Martin Luther College concerts for decades after Reuter's death.[21] His early manuscript shows that the piece was originally titled *Die Geburt Jesu: Weihnachts-Melodrama* (The birth of Jesus, Christmas melodrama), though it later became known more simply as *Weihnachtsgeschichte*.

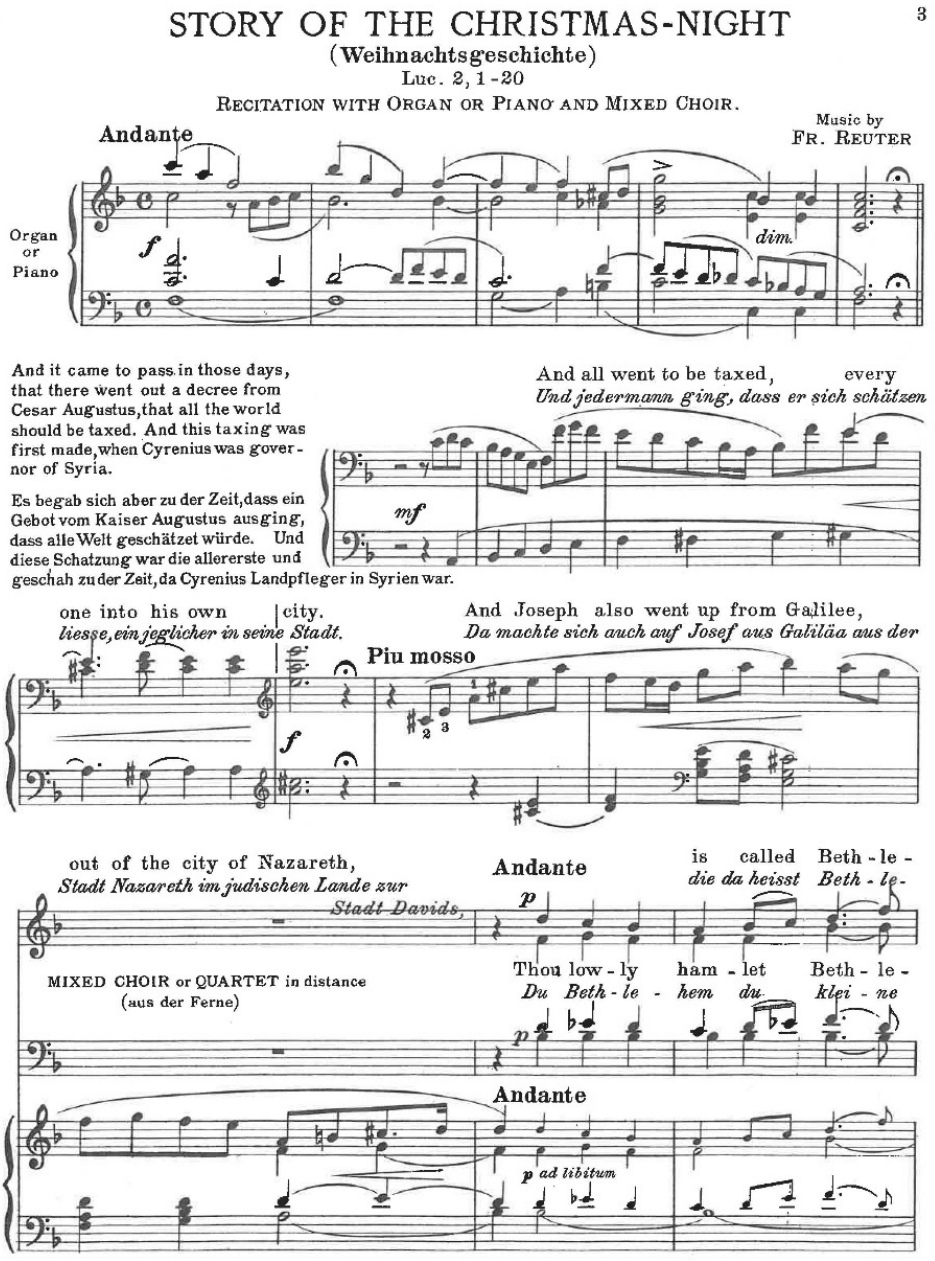


Example 2.14 First manuscript page of the choral score version of Fritz Reuter's *Die Geburt Jesu: Weihnachts-Melodrama,* later known as *Weihnachtsgeschichte*

The scoring is significant. A work for choir, organ, and narrator would have been far more adaptable to the resources of Lutheran schools and congregations than a large

[21] Margo Martens, "Friedrich 'Fritz' Otto Reuter," speech delivered at The Minnesota Music Hall of Fame 35th Annual Induction Ceremony and Banquet, Best Western, New Ulm, Minnesota, Friday, April 19, 2024.

choral-orchestral composition. Structurally, the piece functions as a through-composed sacred narrative, following the Christmas account from Luke 2 through a sequence of narrated biblical passages, organ or piano interludes, and choral responses.



Example 2.15 First page of the full score of Fritz Reuter's *Weihnachtsgeschichte*

Reuter's practical approach to composition is evident in several features of the work. First, the scoring is deliberately adaptable: it may be performed with organ or piano, making it usable in both church and school settings. Second, the use of recitation allows the biblical narrative to remain central while limiting the amount of choral material required of the singers. Third, the score permits a mixed choir or quartet to sing from a distance, creating a dramatic effect without requiring elaborate staging. Fourth, the bilingual English and German text reflects the practical realities of Lutheran communities gradually moving from German-language worship to English-language worship. By combining Scripture, spoken narration, Christmas carol references, and original choral writing, Reuter created a work that was both accessible and effective, suited to the educational and worship life of the church.

Reuter's larger festival works show that his compositional activity could extend beyond smaller motets and church choir pieces. Among the most significant of these works is *Jubelgesang zum Reformations-Jubiläum 1917 (Jubilation at the Reformation Anniversary, 1917).* Reuter wrote it to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Conceived on a larger scale than many of his practical church compositions, the work is a festival piece scored for mixed choir, children's choir, solo trio or small choir, and organ. Its performing forces demonstrate both the institutional resources Reuter had developed at Dr. Martin Luther College and his connection to the broader congregational life of New Ulm. The *New Ulm Journal* later reported that for the 1917 Reformation jubilee, Reuter trained a mass choir of approximately 200 voices,

along with a large children's chorus, to present the work.[22] In scale and design, *Jubelgesang* illustrates Reuter's ability to combine biblical proclamation, Lutheran chorale tradition, and practical festival writing.

Jubelgesang unfolds in several large sections. The opening chorus, marked "Moderato Maestoso*,"* draws on Psalm 100 and Isaiah 52, and it begins with an organ introduction that establishes a broad, processional character. The choir then enters with the acclamation "Jauchzet dem Herrn, alle Welt" ("Praise ye the Lord, all ye lands"), giving this opening section the character of a public summons to praise. Reuter's choral writing is largely homophonic, allowing the text to project clearly, while the organ supplies rhythmic vitality and harmonic development.

[22] "Prof. Fr. Reuter Called By Death," *The New Ulm Journal*, June 13, 1924.

Jubelgesang

zum
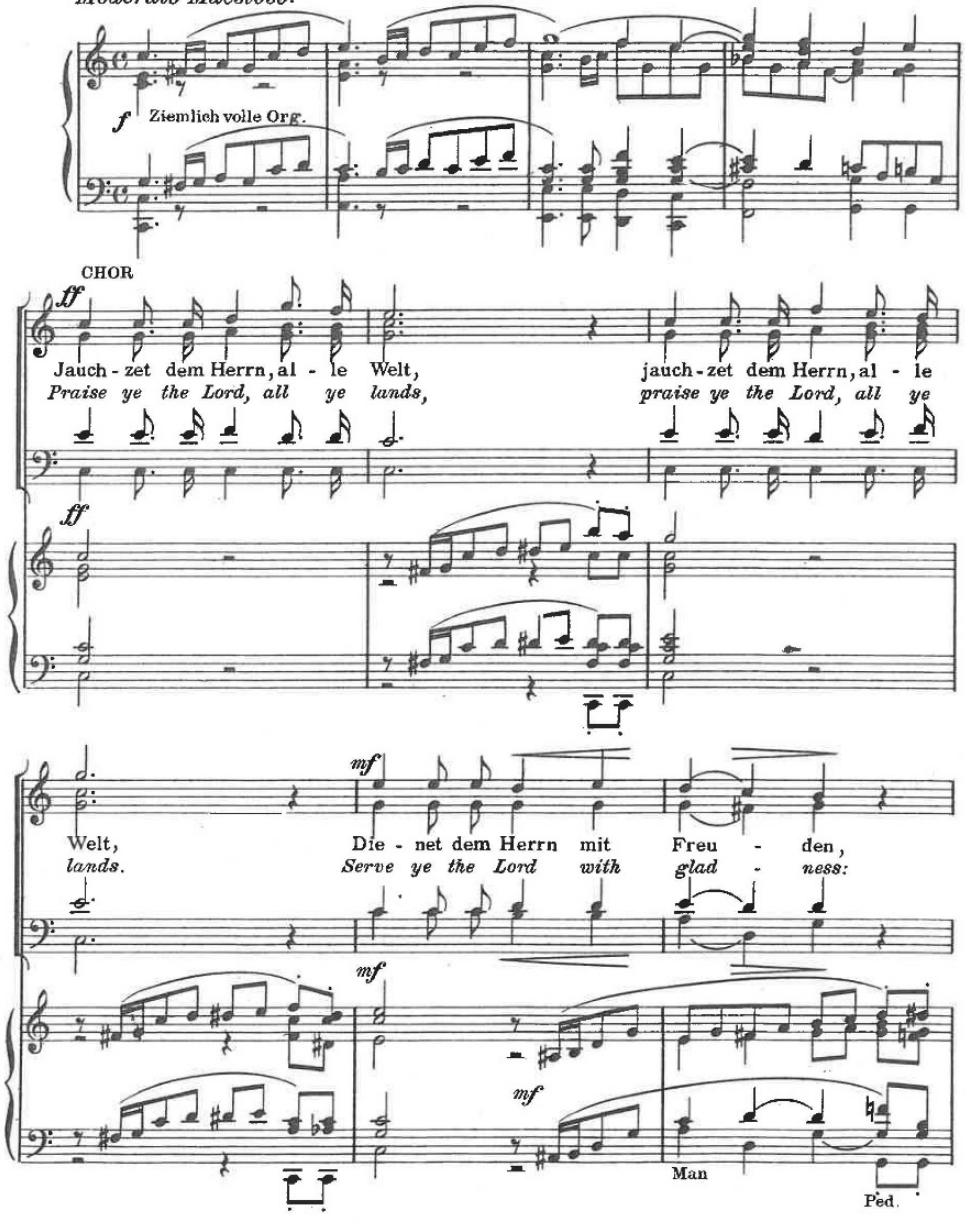
Reformations-Jubilaum 1917
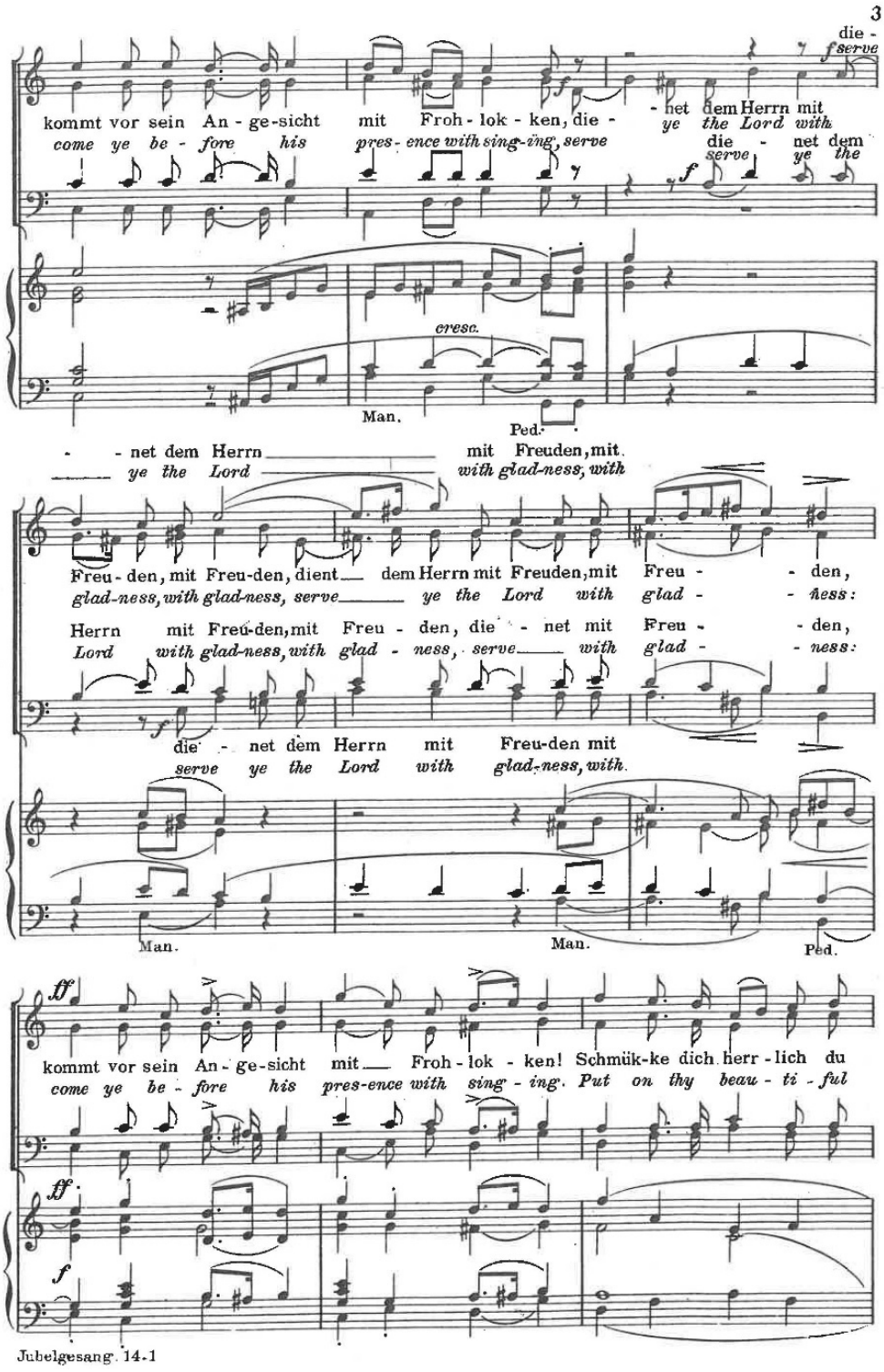
nach Worten Heiliger Schrift mit Hinzufügung des Luther-Chorals „Ein feste Burg."

Für gemischten Chor, Terzett oder kleinen Chor und Kinderstimmen mit Orgel.

Chor.
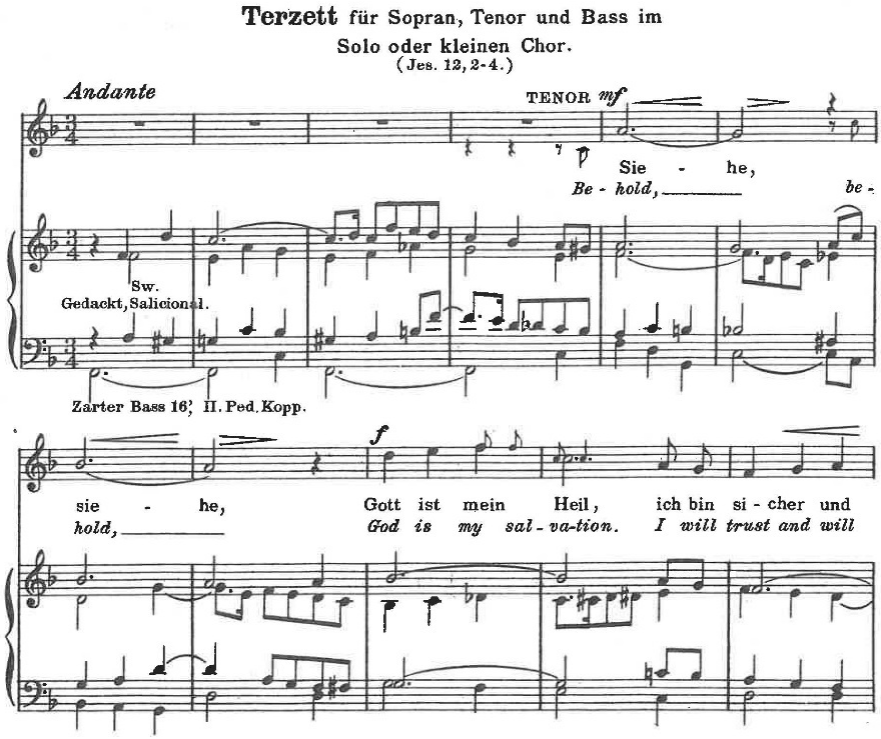
Moderato Maestoso. (Ps. 100, 1. 2 - Jes 52.1.) FR. REUTER.
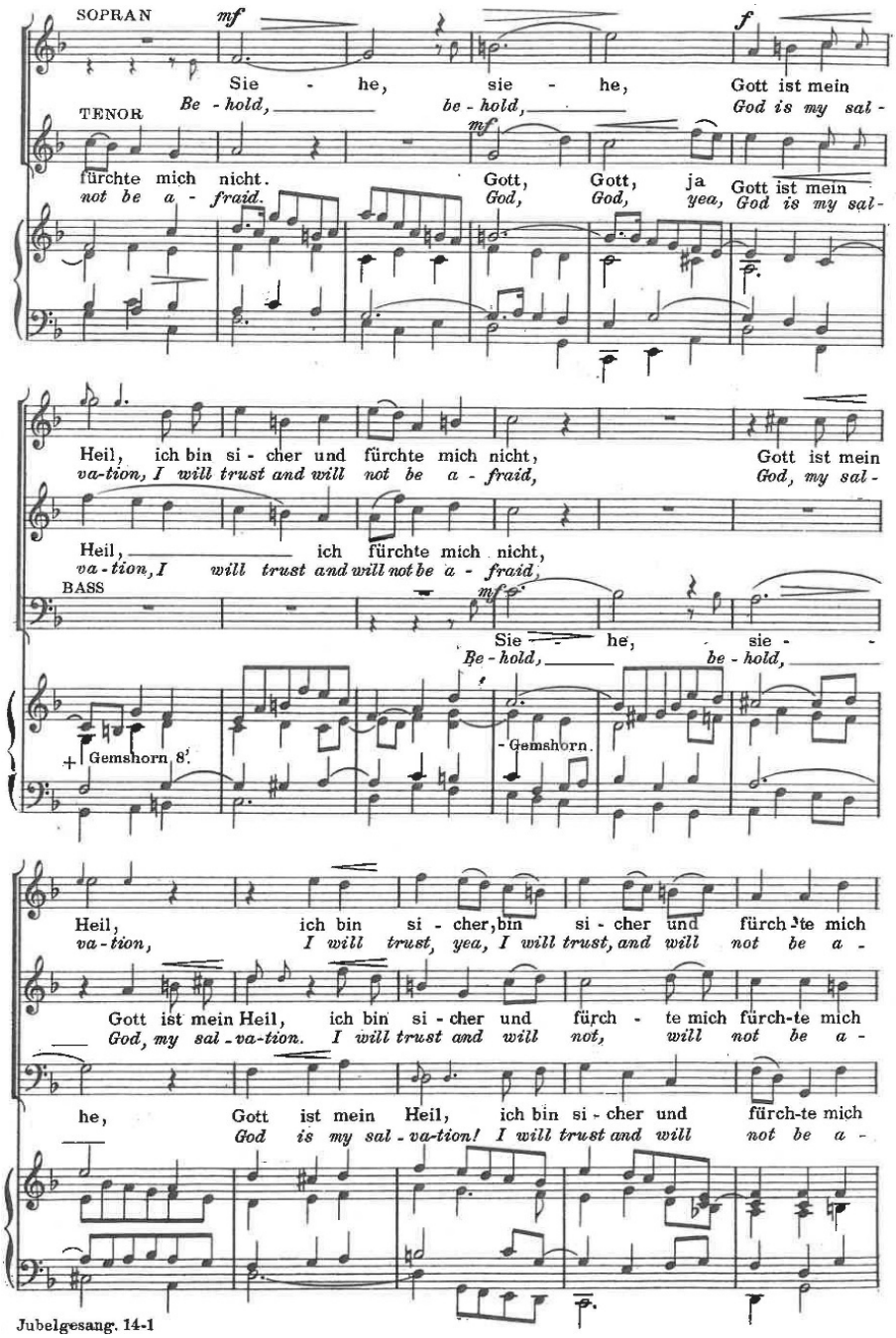




Example 2.16 First two pages of Fritz Reuter's *Jubelgesang*

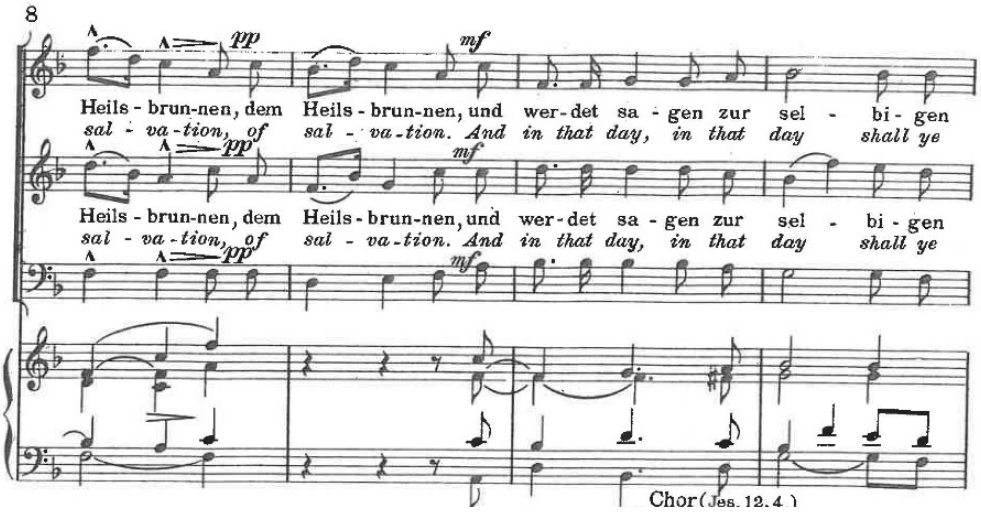
A major contrast occurs with the *Andante* terzett, based on Isaiah 12:2–4. Here, Reuter shifts from the public grandeur of the opening chorus to a more inward and devotional musical character. The scoring for soprano, tenor, and bass soloists, or for a small choir, changes both the texture and the theological affect. The text "Siehe, Gott ist mein Heil" ("God is my salvation") moves from collective praise to personal confidence in God's salvation, and the harmonic movement supports this change. Reuter turns toward a warmer tonal region, reinforced by the organ registration of Gedackt and Salicional. The brilliance of the opening is softened, creating a more meditative atmosphere. As in many of his other sacred works, Reuter uses chromatic inflection, suspensions, and gently moving polyphonic texture to illustrate the meaning of the text. These features are especially evident in the phrase "ich bin sicher und fürchte mich nicht," where the music underscores the themes of trust, assurance, and consolation.
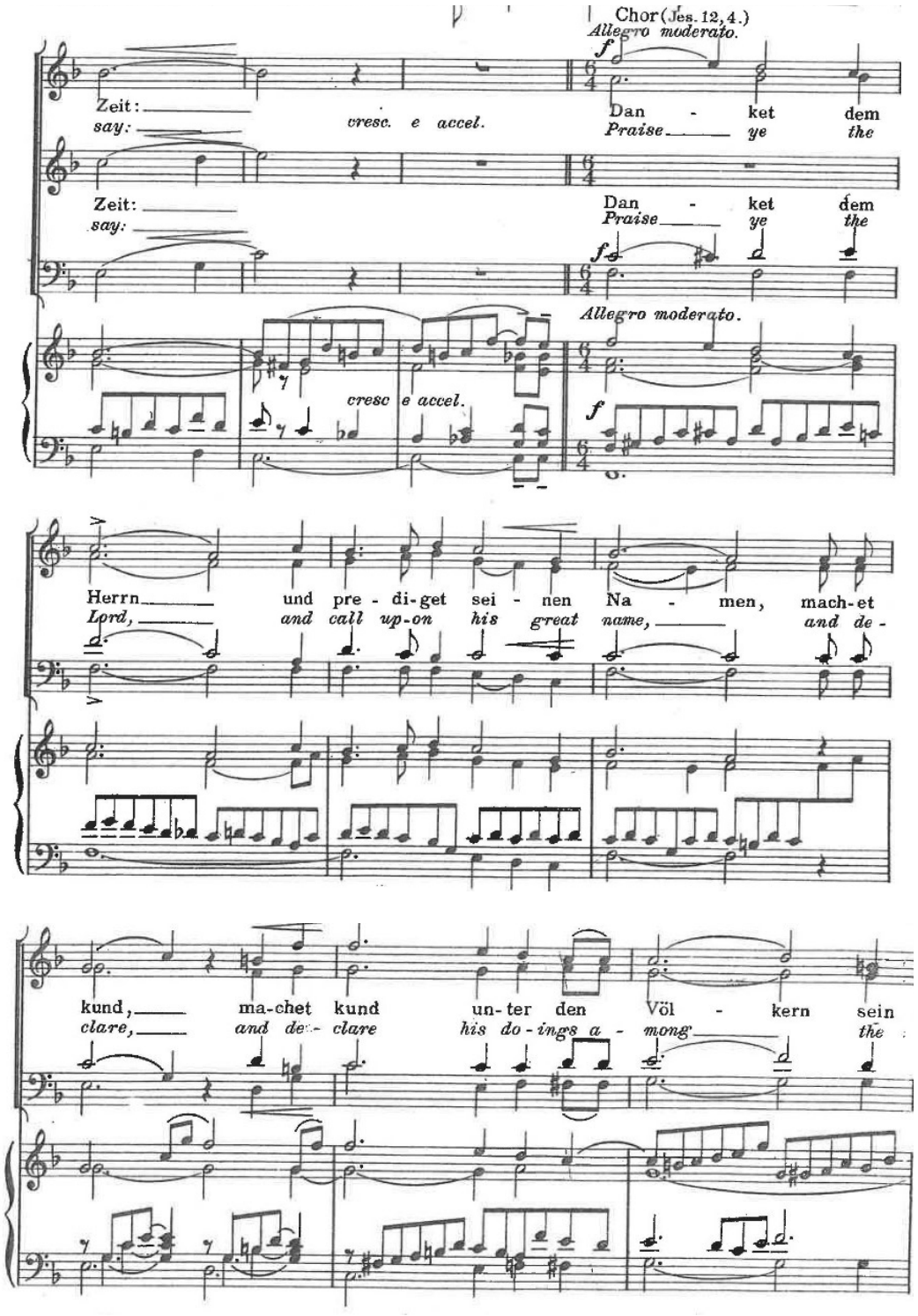




Example 2.17 Excerpt from the terzett section of Fritz Reuter's *Jubelgesang*
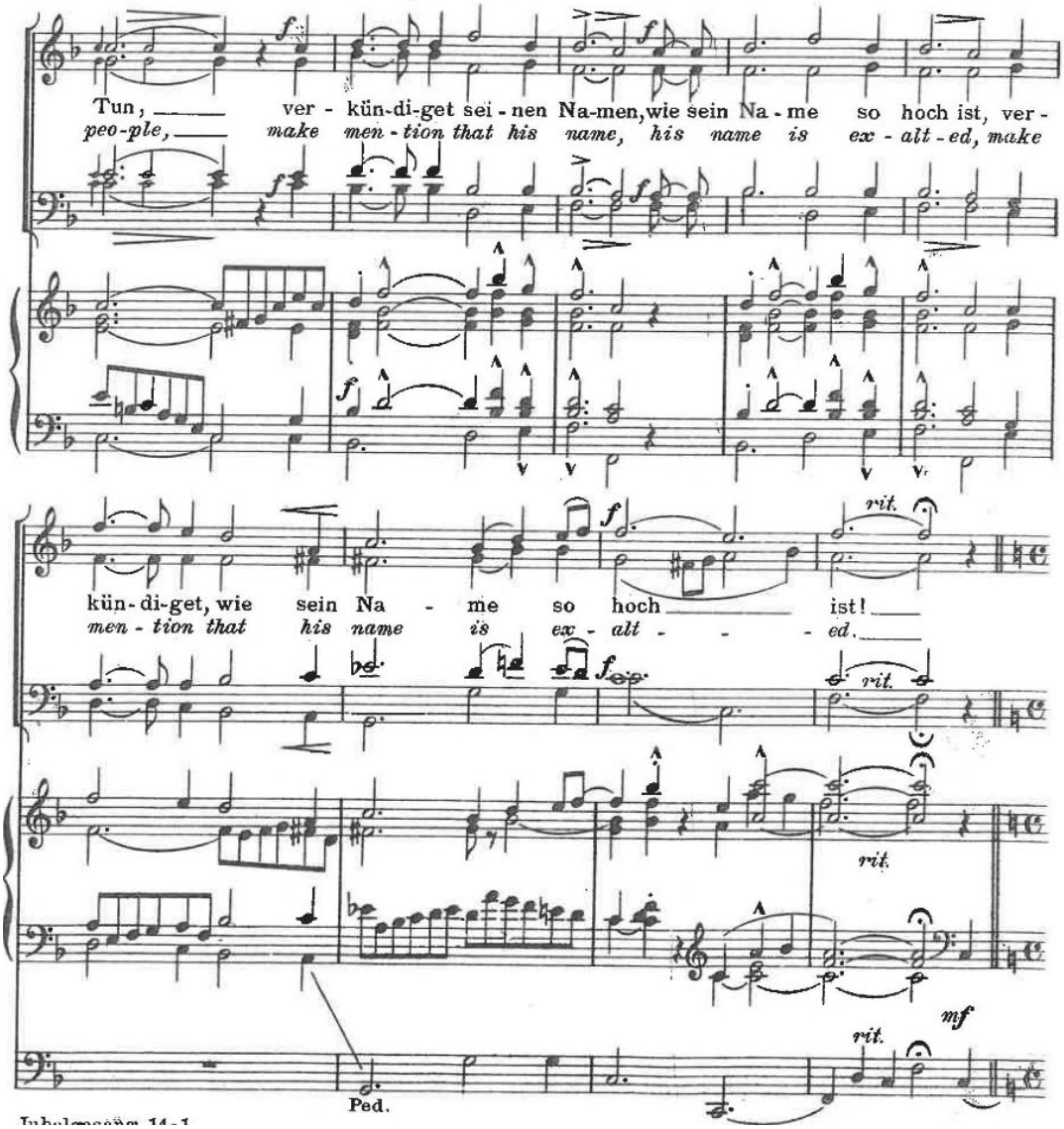
As the terzett continues, the text turns to the image of drawing water from the wells of salvation. Reuter responds with broader melodic motion and repeated statements of "Heilsbrunnen" ("wells of salvation"), allowing the listener to ponder the scriptural image while building expectation for the next major section when the full chorus returns.



Example 2.18 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's *Jubelgesang,* "wells of salvation"

The full mixed choir returns in an *Allegro moderato* setting of the next verse from Isaiah, as the work moves into a faster tempo and a more imitative contrapuntal texture. The section beginning "Danket dem Herrn" restores a public character, moving from the inward confession of the terzett to renewed communal proclamation. The text calls the people to thank the Lord, proclaim his name, and make his deeds known, and Reuter responds with increased rhythmic energy and fuller choral writing. The salvation confessed personally in the terzett now becomes a proclamation before the world.


Chor (Jes. 12, 4.)
Allegro moderato.
Zeit:
say:
cresc. e accel.
Dan - ket dem
Praise ye the
Zeit:
say:
Dan - ket dem
Praise ye the
Allegro moderato.
cresc e accel.
Herrn und pre - di - get sei - nen Na - men, mach - et
Lord, and call up - on his great name, and de -
kund, ma - chet kund un - ter den Völ - kern sein
clare, and de - clare his do - ings a - mong the



Example 2.19 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's *Jubelgesang*
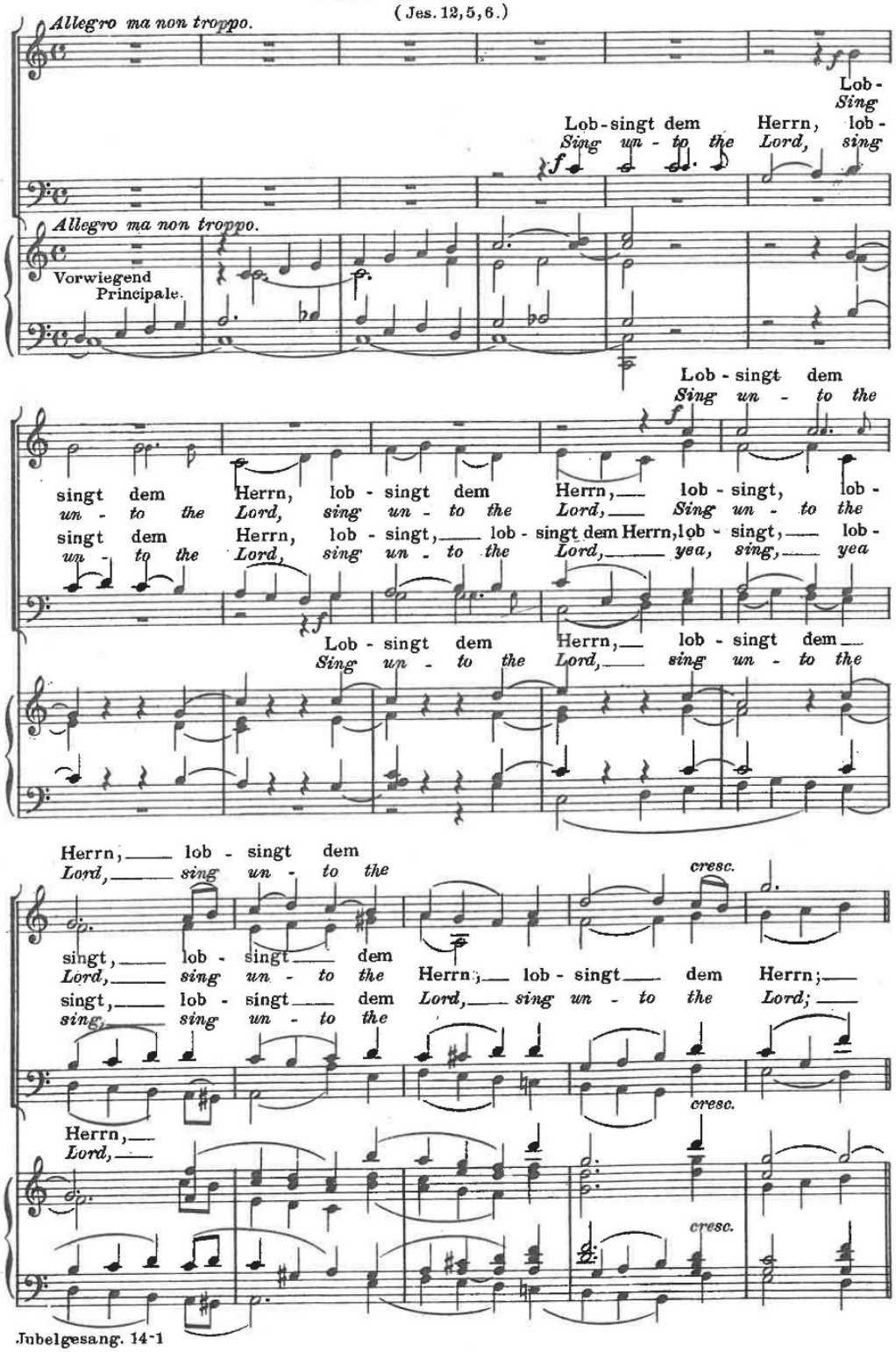
One of the most distinctive features of this work appears in the section marked *Allegro ma non troppo,* where Reuter introduces imitative contrapuntal texture. Here, the adult choir continues the scriptural praise from Isaiah 12, while the children sing Martin Luther's "Ein feste Burg" in chorale tempo. This moment forms the theological and

confessional center of the composition. The chorale does not appear as a decorative quotation, but as a structural anchor. By assigning Luther's Reformation hymn to the children's voices, Reuter joins scriptural praise to Lutheran confession and places that confession in the mouths of the young. The harmonic writing supports this layered design by allowing the chorale to remain clearly recognizable, while the surrounding mixed-chorus material provides motion, expansion, and a sense of festival breadth.

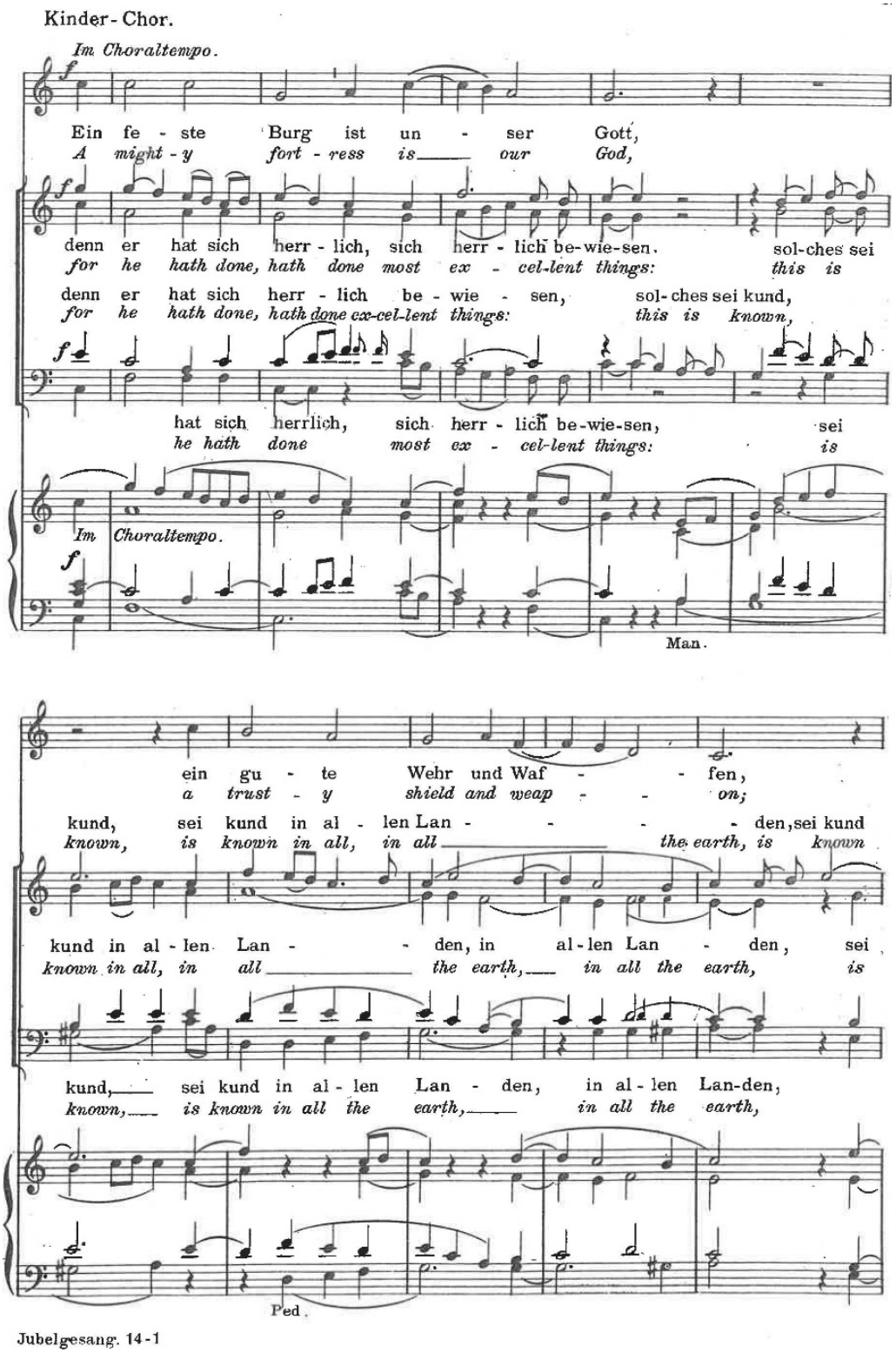
This section also demonstrates Reuter's practical command of festival form. The chorale melody gives the children a familiar and stable musical role, while the adult choir and organ supply the larger harmonic frame. The result is musically effective without becoming impractical. Through accessible means, Reuter achieves a complex symbolic effect: Scripture, chorale, children, congregation, and festival choir sound together in a way that would be usable in a church and school setting.

Chor mit Kinderstimmen.

(Jes. 12, 5, 6.)
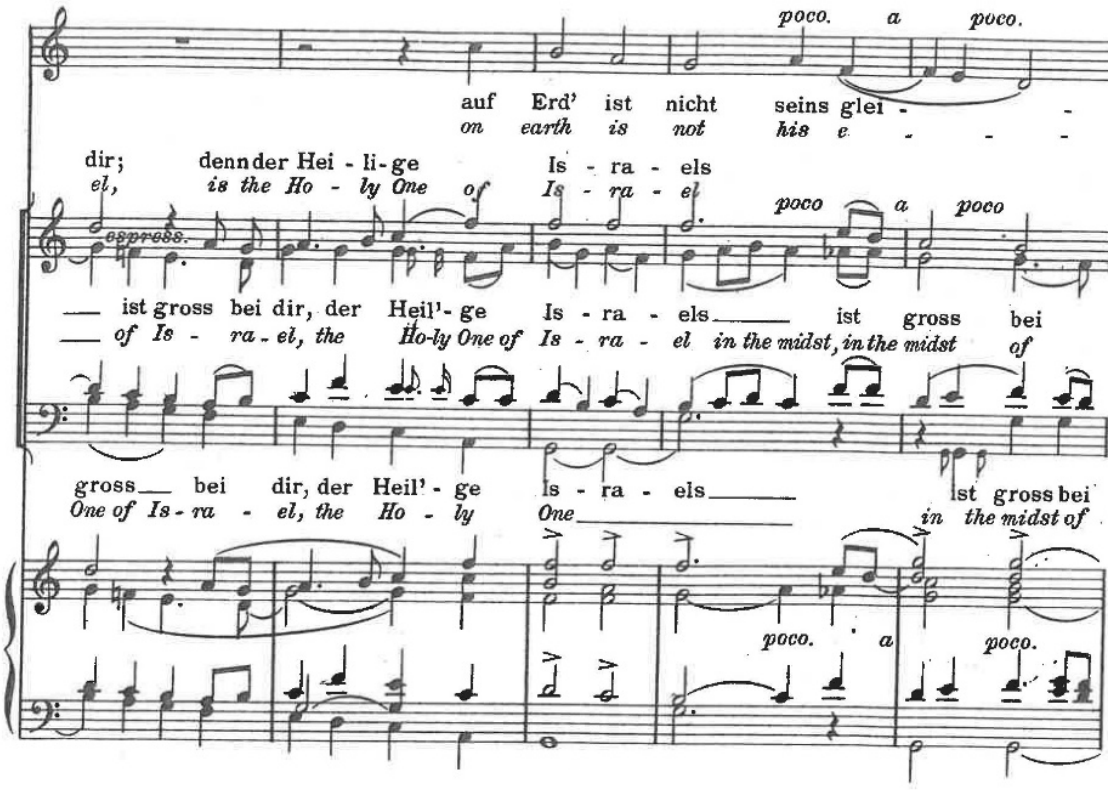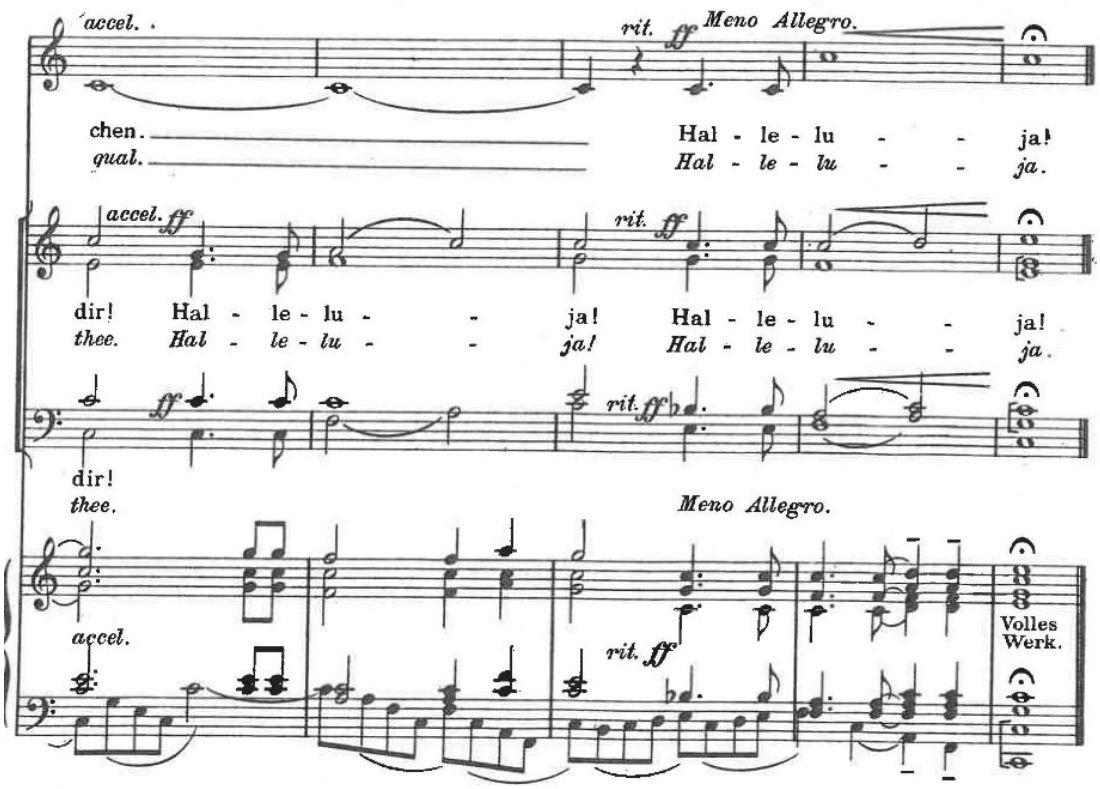


Jubelgesang. 14-1



Example 2.20 Excerpt from Fritz Reuter's *Jubelgesang*

The final portion of the work gathers the preceding materials into a climactic conclusion. The text from Isaiah 12:6, "Jauchzet und rühme, du Einwohnerin Zion," moves toward the affirmation that the Holy One of Israel is great in the midst of his people. Reuter intensifies the choral texture and organ accompaniment, using crescendo, acceleration, and stronger harmonic motion to propel the work toward its final "Halleluja!" This design reveals his practical imagination as a church composer. He did not write a festival piece solely for expert singers or for concert display. Instead, he created a work in which different musical groups could participate according to their function and ability.





Example 2.21 Concluding page from Fritz Reuter's *Jubelgesang*
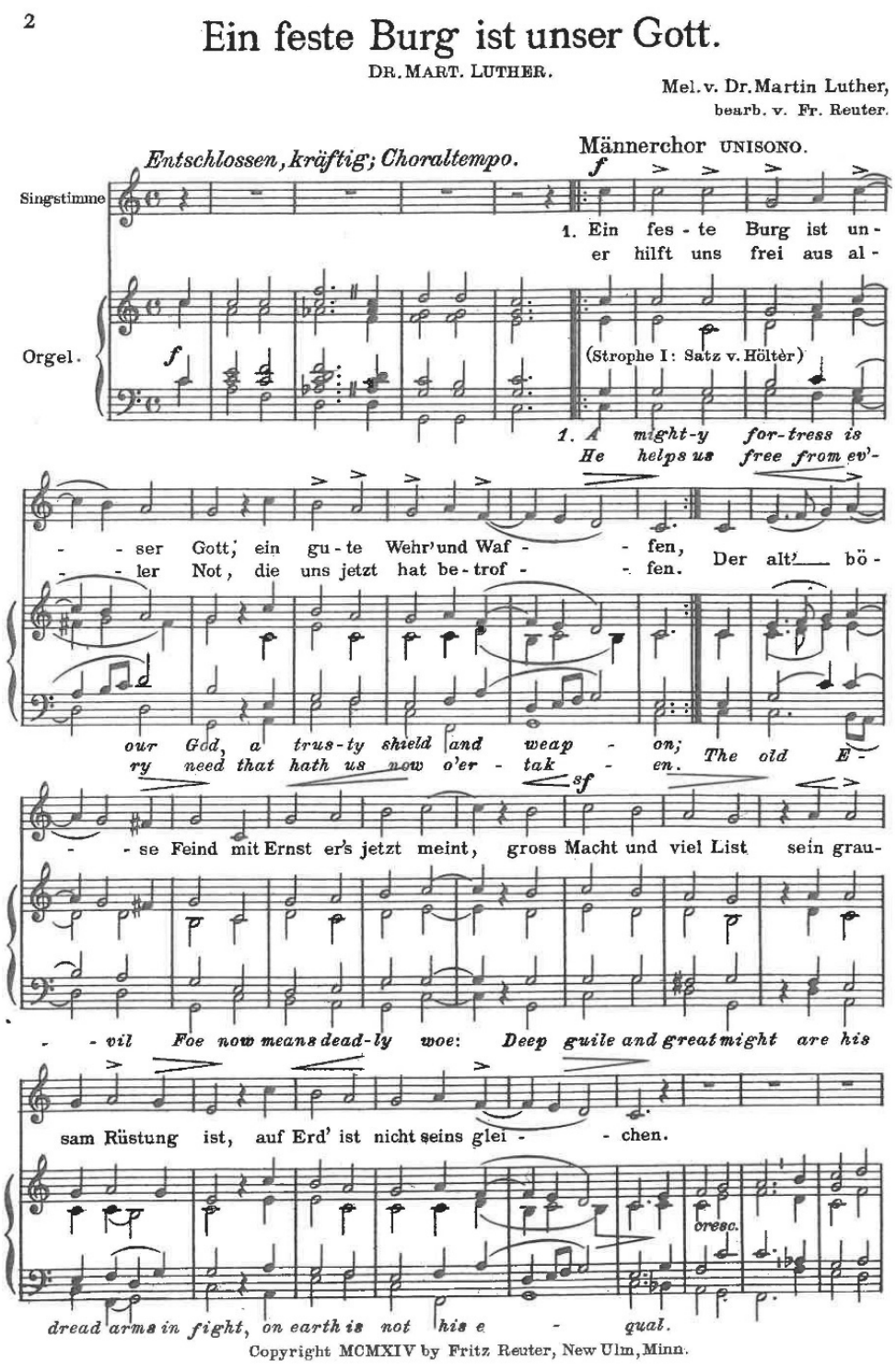
The prominent role given to the children's choir is especially significant. As Appendix A shows, several of Reuter's sacred compositions include SSA writing for children's voices, suggesting that he understood the importance of involving children in the church's music from an early age. In *Jubelgesang*, this concern becomes part of the musical structure itself. By placing children's voices within a larger festival work, Reuter not only gave them a meaningful role in Lutheran worship but also modeled for his college students the value of training young singers for participation in the church's song.

The 1917 public performance also reveals Reuter's relationship to his singers and to the New Ulm community. The children in the chorus were from nearby St. Paul's

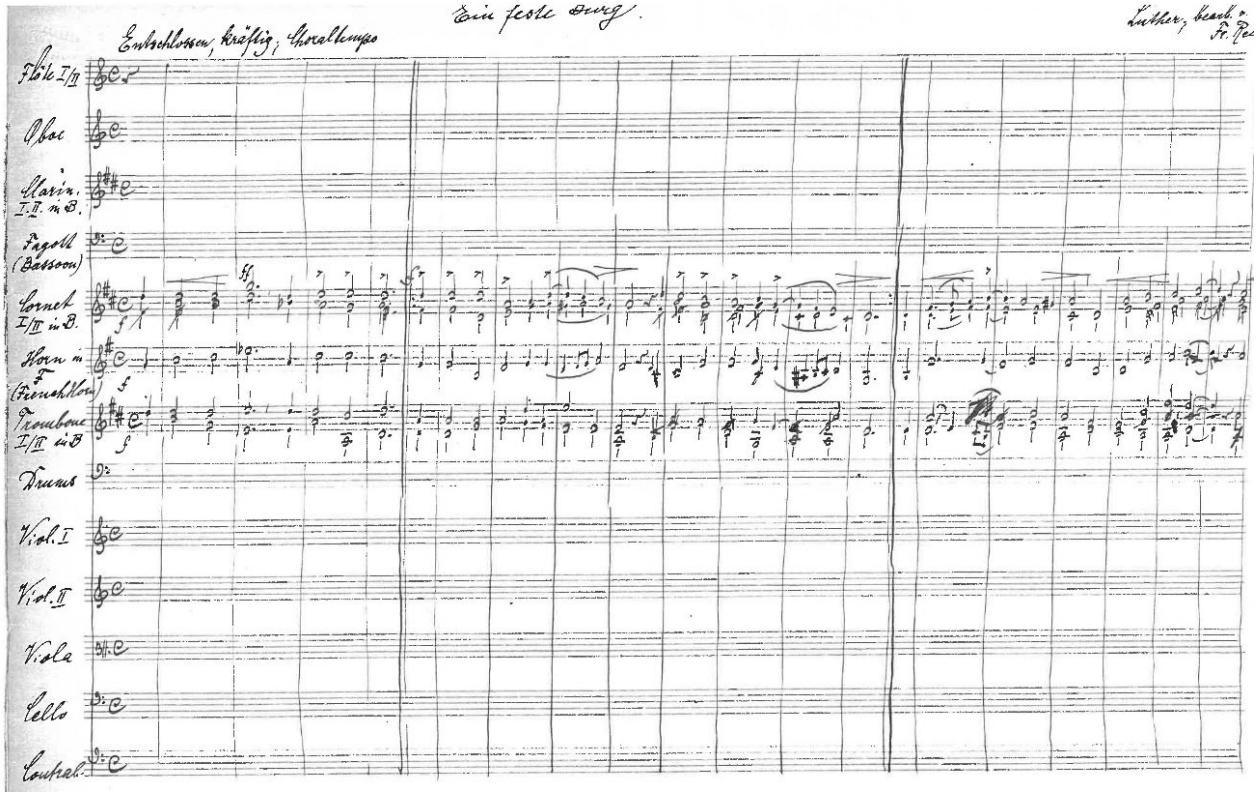
congregation, and the audience responded with a standing ovation. Reuter, however, immediately redirected the applause toward the children, a gesture one student remembered as making him "extremely popular with the local people."[23] This anecdote is significant because it shows Reuter in a different light from accounts that emphasize his exacting rehearsal standards. *Jubelgesang* demanded disciplined preparation, but its public effect was communal rather than self-promoting. The work placed children, students, and congregation at the center of Lutheran worship, while Reuter's role remained that of cantor-teacher: composer, organizer, conductor, and servant of the church's confession.

Reuter's earlier experience in Germany with choral and orchestral forces continued to shape his work in New Ulm. Hymnody held a central place in his sacred-music practice, and in 1914, he arranged "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" for men's choir, women's choir, and mixed choir with organ accompaniment. A Reuter manuscript based on the same choral octavo, however, reveals an orchestral scoring as well. Although the orchestral version remains closely aligned with the choral-organ setting, its existence suggests Reuter's interest in adapting hymn-based repertoire for the broader musical forces he had cultivated at Dr. Martin Luther College. In this way, the arrangement demonstrates both his commitment to the Lutheran chorale tradition and his practical ability to combine voice, organ, and instruments in service of congregational and institutional worship.

[23] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 41.



Example 2.22 Excerpt from Reuter's choral/organ setting of the chorale "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott"



Example 2.23 Excerpt from the orchestration of Reuter's choral/organ setting of "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott"
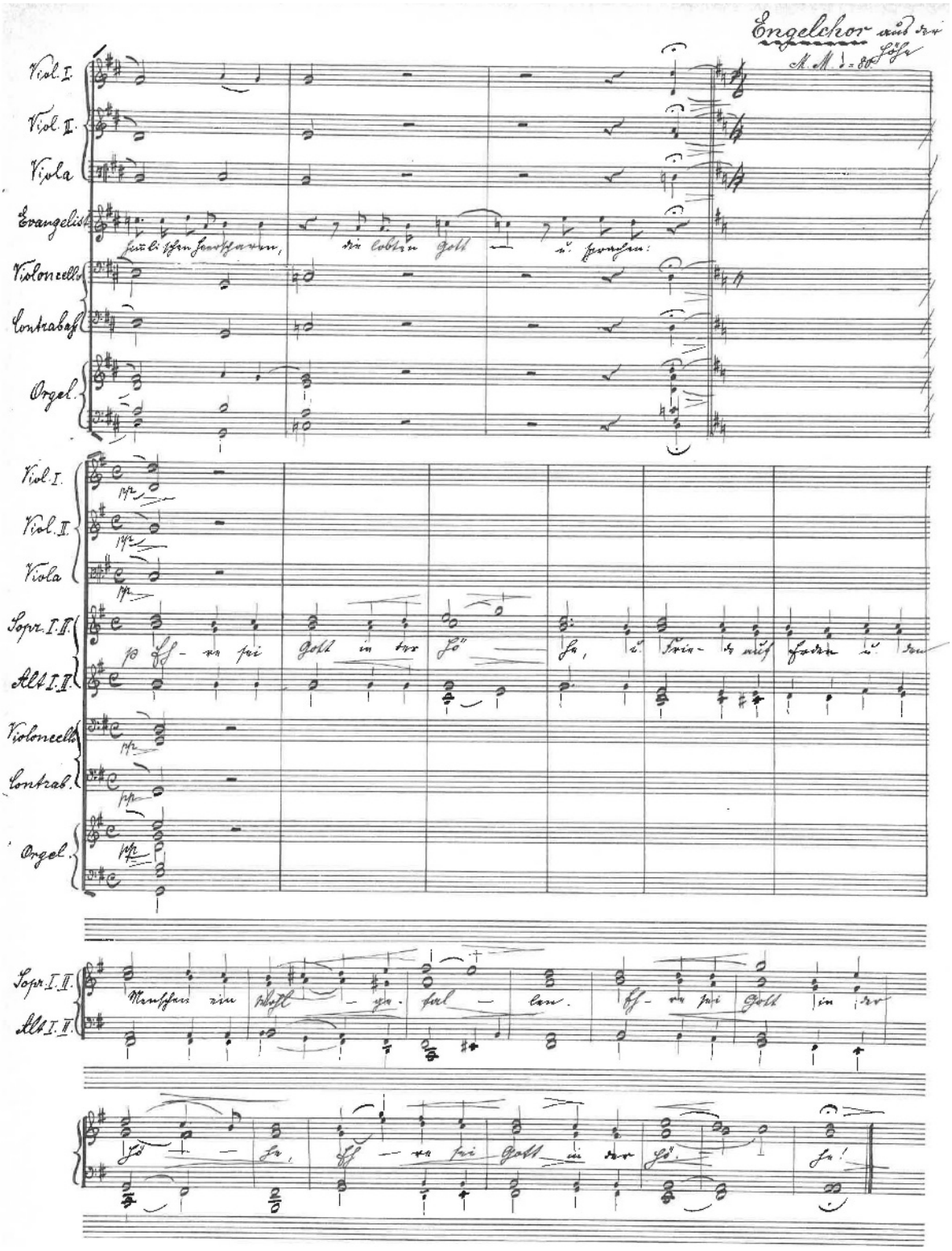
Reuter's manuscript *Weihnachtskantate* demonstrates a level of compositional ambition beyond many of his smaller practical works. Two manuscript drafts survive in the Reuter manuscript collection preserved by his granddaughter, Margo Martens. One appears to be an earlier version, stamped "Fritz Reuter – Kantor – Lichtenstein," while the other is a more polished draft bearing Reuter's Winnipeg, Canada, address. These two versions suggest that the work was conceived and developed over several years, beginning during Reuter's German career and continuing after his emigration to North America. No record of performance has been identified, which suggests that the work

may never have been realized in its full form. Even so, the surviving manuscripts reveal Reuter's capacity for large-scale sacred composition and show his creative imagination extended well beyond brief motets and practical choral settings.
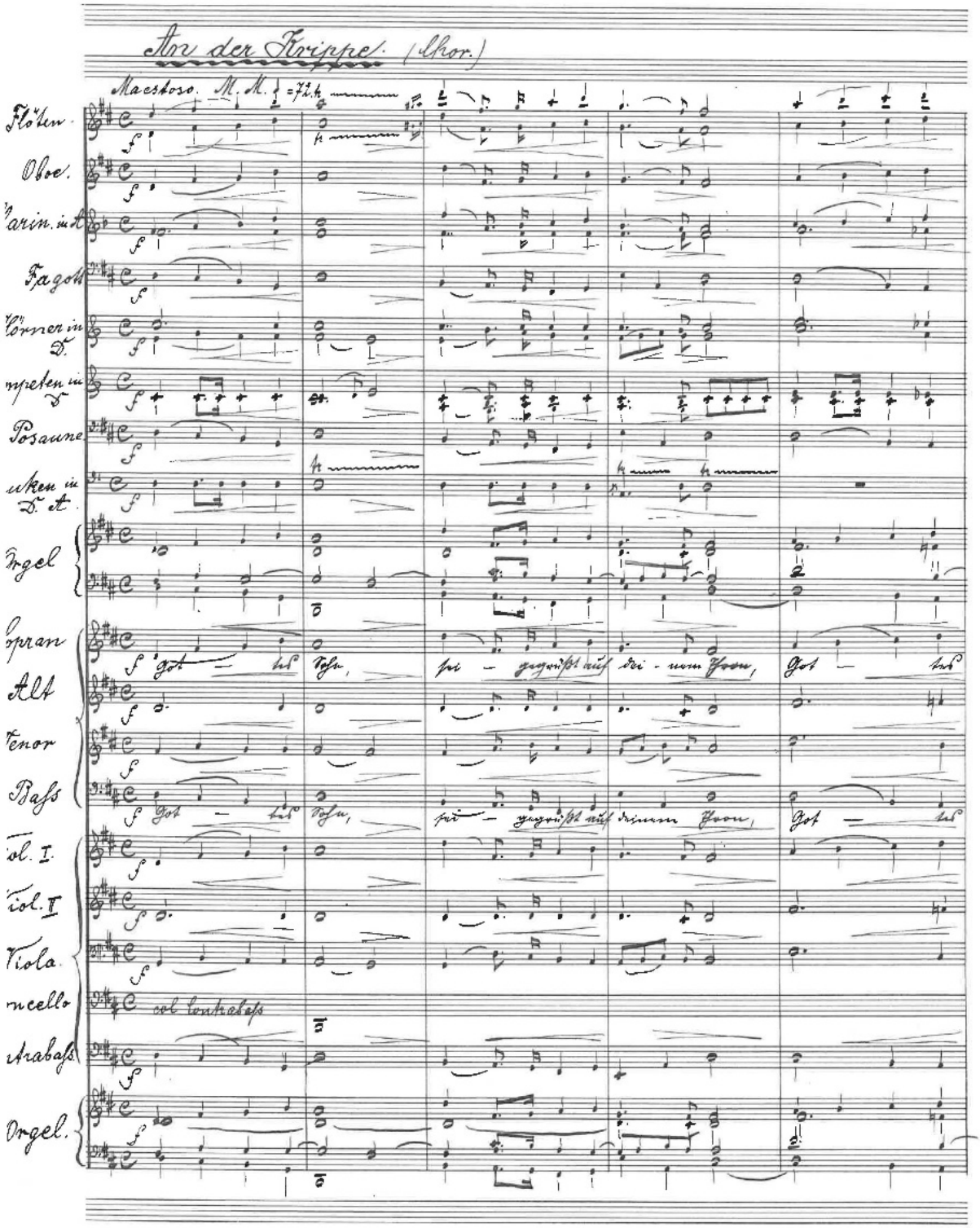
The title page identifies the piece as a Christmas cantata for choir, soloists, orchestra, and organ. Its form follows a multi-movement cantata design, beginning with a brief instrumental introduction that may be understood as a sinfonia. The introduction is followed by a recitative assigned to a vocal soloist labeled "Evangelist," written in either a soprano or tenor range. The recitative begins in a secco-like style, but it soon expands into recitative accompagnato as independent instrumental lines are introduced and the texture gradually grows into fuller orchestral accompaniment.

The manuscript includes distinct dramatic roles, including "Der Engel" ("the angel") for soprano solo and "Der Hirte" ("the shepherd") for baritone solo. These contrasting vocal assignments suggest that Reuter shaped the Christmas narrative not only through text and form, but also through differences in vocal timbre. In this respect, the *Weihnachtskantate* reveals a dramatic and narrative dimension of Reuter's sacred writing that is less apparent in his shorter a cappella works.

In addition, the manuscript includes several passages with varied choral textures, each marked by a distinct title. "Engelchor" ("angel choir") is scored for women's chorus, SSAA. Another movement marked, "An der Krippe" ("at the manger"), is written for a divided mixed chorus, SSAATTBB, with additional moments assigned to a "Halbchor" ("semichorus").



Example 2.24 “Engelchor” (“angel choir”)



Example 2.25 “An der Krippe” (“at the manger”)

The score also reveals his command of extended forces: independent string and wind lines, organ support, multiple choral textures, solo writing, and changes of tempo, dynamics, and texture. In this respect, *Weihnachtskantate* shows Reuter not merely as a practical church musician but as a composer capable of handling large-scale sacred form.

CHRISTIANSEN

Christiansen's work at St. Olaf College offers a useful comparison because it began with concerns similar to Reuter's but developed into a different model of Lutheran choral practice. The emergence of the "St. Olaf sound" rested on a distinctive choral ideal. His exposure in Leipzig to the German boys' choir tradition, in which boys sang the soprano and alto parts, influenced his concept of choral tone. He sought clarity, straight tone, pure intonation, and blend. His background as an instrumentalist also shaped his approach to ensemble sound. Christiansen compared vocal timbres to orchestral colors, identifying voices as reeds, strings, or brass and placing singers according to these tonal qualities.[24] His rehearsal method required individual voices to yield to the choir's collective sonority. Blend became the defining feature of the St. Olaf sound and singers were expected to modify their individual tone to conform to that unified ensemble sound.[25]

[24]Alan Zabriskie, "Evolution of Choral Sound of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2010), 21.
[25] Howard Swan, "The Development of a Choral Instrument," in *Choral Conducting: A Symposium,* ed. Harold A. Decker and Julius Herford (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 12.

Christiansen's sacred repertoire served this tonal and philosophical purpose. He programmed almost exclusively unaccompanied music for both practical and artistic reasons:

1. The small city of Northfield lacked skilled instrument players.
2. It was difficult to travel with instruments during the lengthy tours.
3. Christiansen felt that the immature voices he worked with were not capable of penetrating large instrumental forces.[26]

These limitations helped shape the identity of the choir itself. Its repertoire centered on a cappella sacred music, including German and Russian works, Lutheran chorale settings, and folk-influenced arrangements, many of which Christiansen prepared himself. His stated purpose was, "to sing as beautifully as possible the great choral music of the world, with special emphasis on music from the Christian tradition."[27]

Christiansen's contribution was also substantial in the area of repertoire. He helped establish unaccompanied sacred choral music as suitable concert literature and, through the St. Olaf Choir's programming, set a new standard for choral performance in the early twentieth century. His settings of familiar hymns and chorales carried Lutheran hymnody into the concert sphere. These settings were an important achievement because Christiansen gave Lutheran sacred music national visibility and helped reshape American choral expectations.

[26] Alan Zabriskie, "Evolution of Choral Sound of the St. Olaf Choir and the Westminster Choir" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2010), 19.
[27] Joseph M. Shaw, *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative* (Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College, 1997), 6.

Christiansen's concern for congregational singing also shaped his choice of repertoire. His desire to revitalize congregational song in Norwegian Lutheran churches led him to arrange settings of hymns and Lutheran chorales. After a second brief period of study with Schreck in Leipzig, Christiansen examined the relationship between folk music and church music and arranged approximately seventy chorales in contrapuntal settings.[28] His work with the St. John's Church choir in Northfield further strengthened his commitment. Recognizing that many college students did not know the hymns of their Lutheran heritage, Christiansen arranged chorales for choral use.[29] One prominent example is "Beautiful Savior," now regarded as a signature piece of the St. Olaf Choir. Christiansen's arrangement demonstrates the transformation of a familiar hymn melody into a refined a cappella choral meditation.

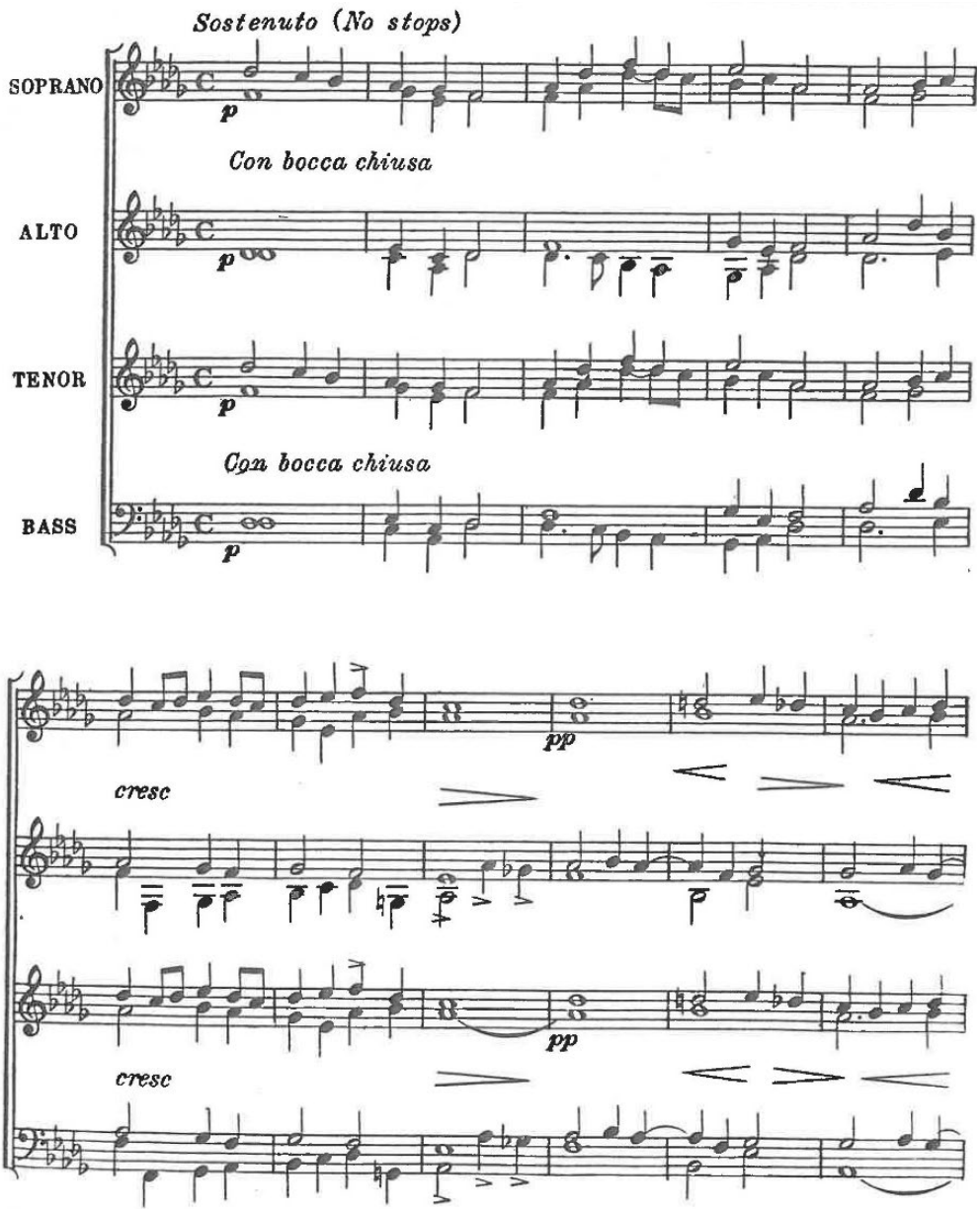
"Beautiful Savior" is based on a folk tune from the Glaz district of Silesia dating from the nineteenth century or earlier.[30] The opening marking, *Sostenuto*, immediately establishes the work's sustained and contemplative character. Rather than presenting the hymn text at once, Christiansen begins with a wordless choral texture marked *con bocca chiusa*. The hummed opening functions as an atmospheric prelude, allowing the hymn melody to be heard first as pure sonority. The effect is characteristic of Christiansen's choral ideal: tone, blend, vowel unity, dynamic control, and harmonic color are foregrounded before the text itself appears.

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[28] Anton Armstrong, "The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music," *Word & World* 12, no. 3 (1992): 251.
[29] Ibid., 251.
[30] C.T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship: Handbook* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 384.
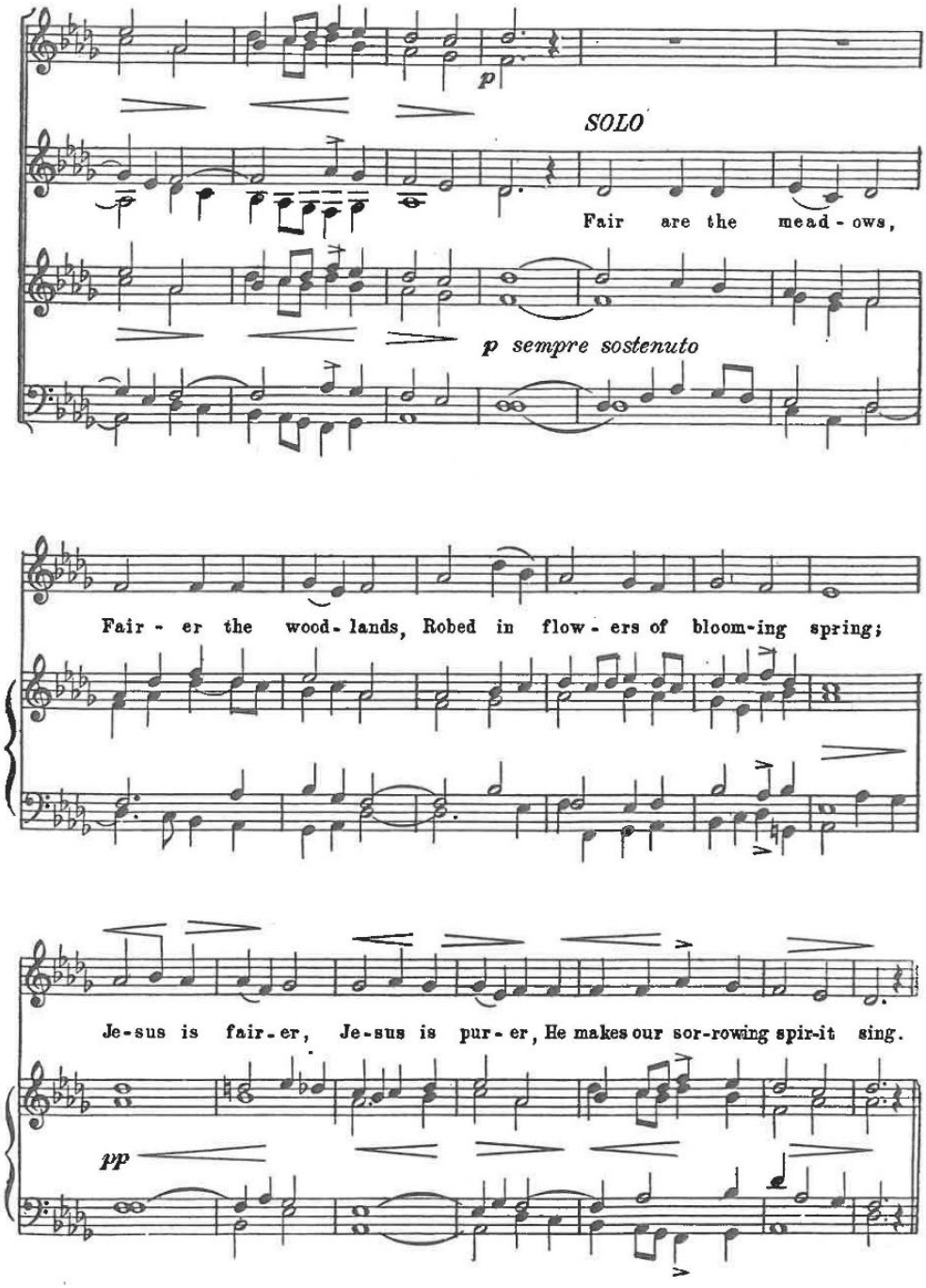
The overall form is a through-arranged hymn setting in three broad sections. As noted above, the first section presents the tune wordlessly, allowing the choir to establish the tonal center and contemplative atmosphere before the text appears. The second section introduces the text through a solo line, “Fair are the meadows,” supported by sustained choral harmonies. This solo-with-choral-accompaniment texture also gives the hymn a reflective feel. The final section expands into antiphonal and full-choral writing, beginning with “Beautiful Savior! Lord of the nations!” and culminating in the doxological close, “Glory and honor, praise, adoration, now and forevermore be Thine.” The form, therefore, moves from contemplation to soloistic proclamation to corporate praise.

Harmonically, the setting is grounded in the warm, richly colored tonal world of D-flat major and shaped by smooth voice leading. Christiansen does not alter the basic identity of the hymn tune. Instead, he surrounds it with harmonies that deepen and support its devotional character.
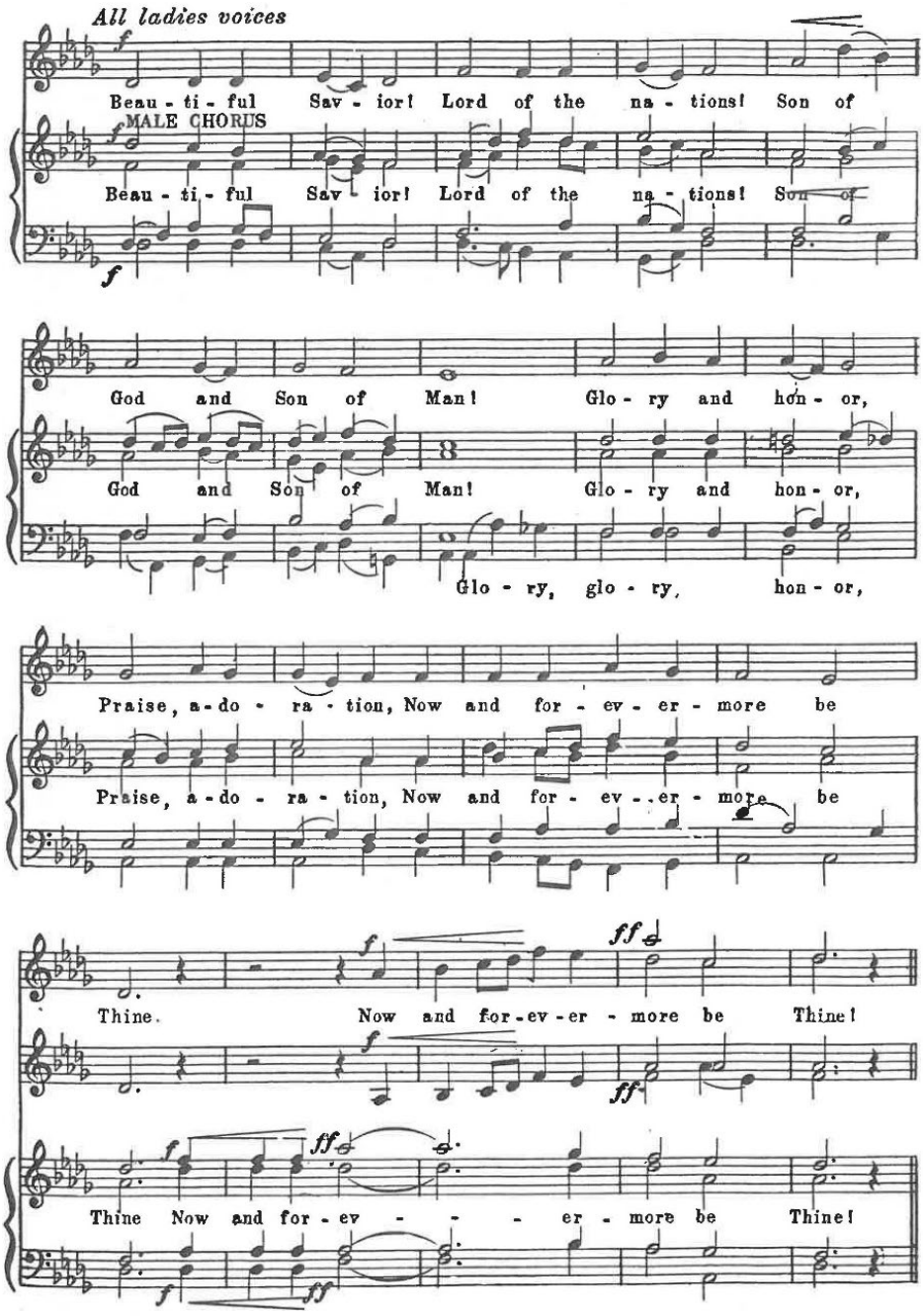


Example 2.26 Opening section of F. Melius Christiansen's "Beautiful Savior"

The entrance of the solo line clarifies the tune while the surrounding voices provide harmonic depth and reinforce the meditative atmosphere established in the opening section.



Example 2.27 Solo section of F. Melius Christiansen's "Beautiful Savior"

The final section broadens the arrangement into a doxological climax. Christiansen expands the texture by combining all the women's voices with a four-part men's chorus, producing a rich and expansive ensemble sonority.

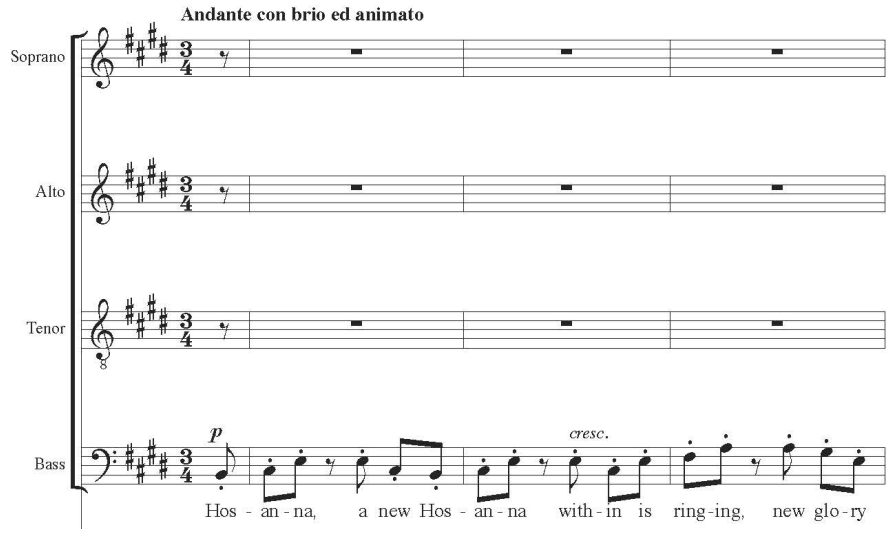


Example 2.28 Conclusion of F. Melius Christiansen's "Beautiful Savior"

A more complex example of Christiansen's a cappella writing appears in "Glorification," the final movement of *Celestial Spring*, a four-movement motet cycle. The cycle celebrates both divine glory and the fleeting beauty of nature, connecting the renewal of spring with themes of spiritual rejuvenation. "Glorification" opens fugally and continues in imitative counterpoint, proclaiming the image of the spirit continually singing "a new Hosanna" to God. Its scoring for unaccompanied SATB divisi voices places the work firmly within Christiansen's preferred concert medium, in which the choir itself functions as the complete musical instrument.
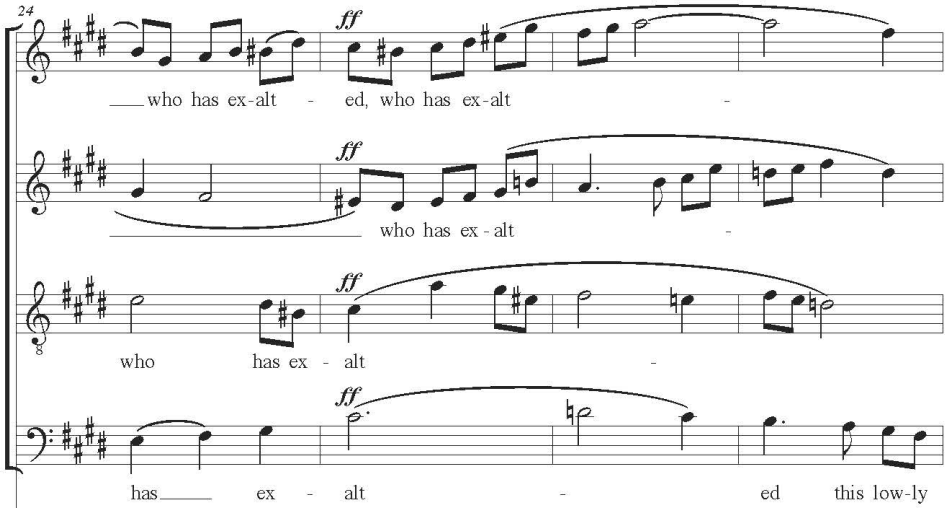
Unlike Christiansen's hymn-based arrangements, which begin with familiar congregational melodies, "Glorification" unfolds as an original, through-composed choral work. Its wide dynamic range, contrapuntal writing, and expressive choral technique demonstrate Christiansen's strength as a composer. The work also reflects the mature St. Olaf choral idiom, requiring a disciplined ensemble capable of sustaining pitch, balance, and tonal intensity without instrumental support.

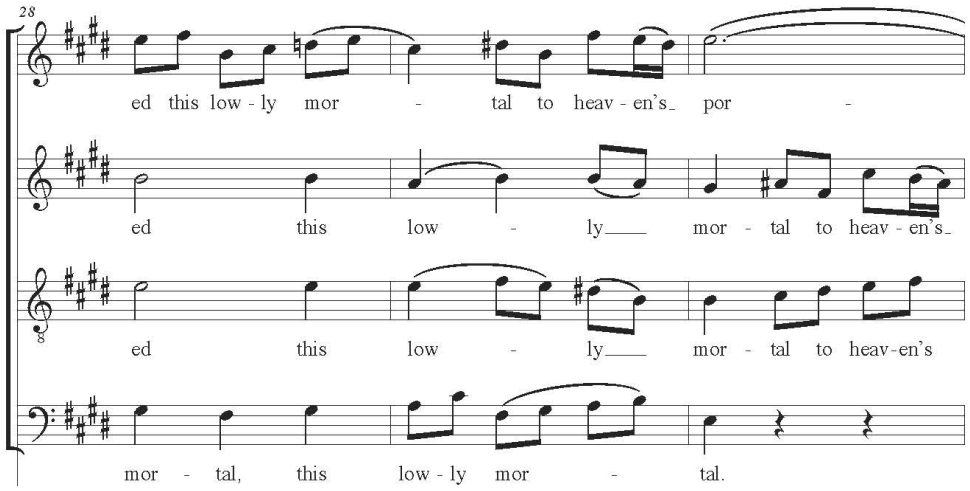
The form is continuous with several climactic moments built from the recurring "Hosanna" motives. The opening section, marked *Andante con brio ed animato*, begins with the basses alone, introducing the principal rhythmic and melodic idea: "Hosanna, a new hosanna within is ringing." This initial entry is soon answered by other voices, producing a layered imitative texture. Christiansen gradually expands the sound upward and outward, allowing the praise motive to pass through the ensemble as the harmony gathers energy and momentum.



Example 2.29 Opening melodic motive from F. Melius Christiansen's "Glorification"
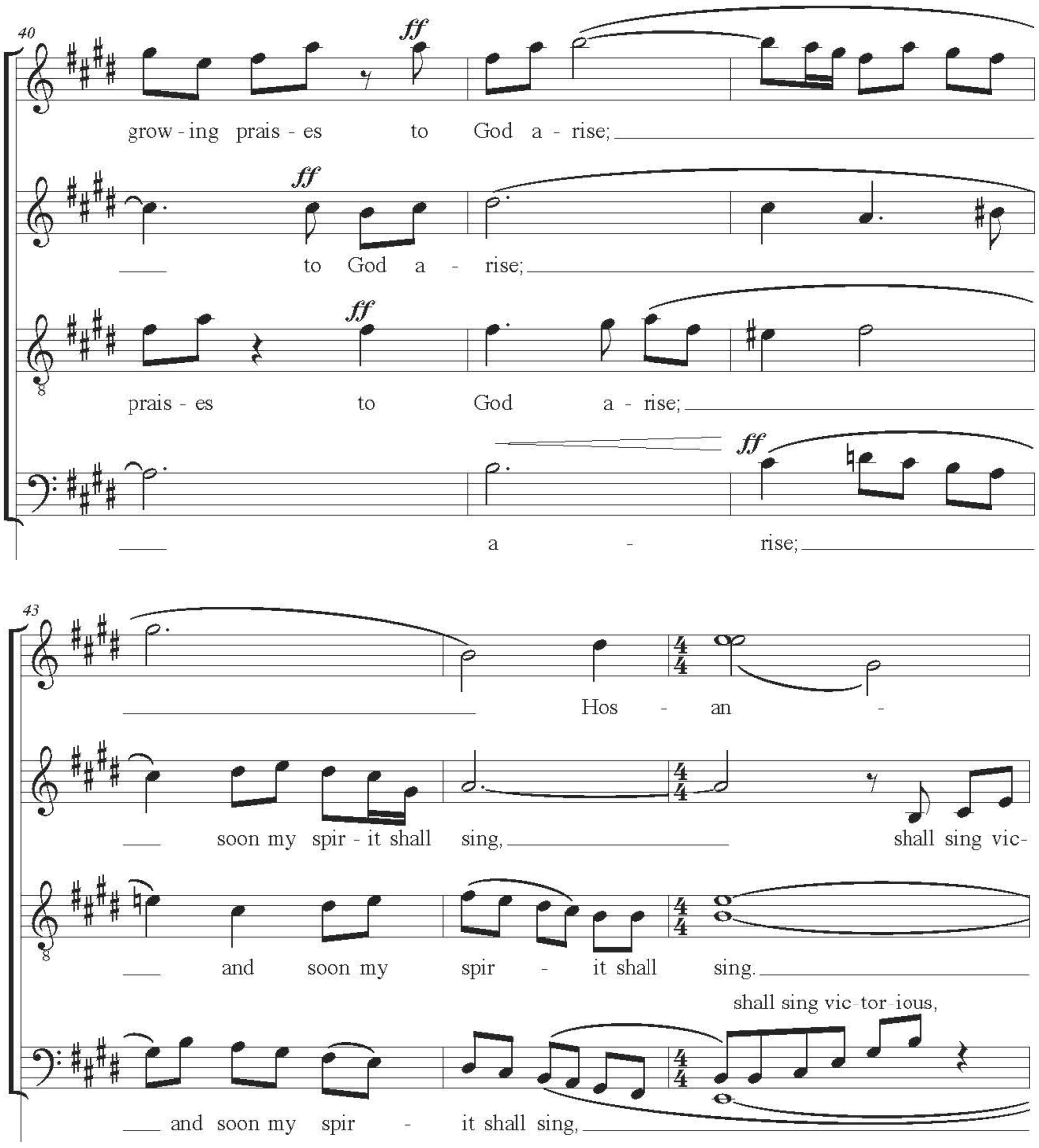
The first major point of intensification occurs in measures 25–30. Here, Christiansen heightens the musical expression not only through increased dynamic level, but also through an expansion of the vocal ranges. This passage demonstrates his ability to make harmonic motion and registral growth serve the poetic imagery of exaltation and ascent.





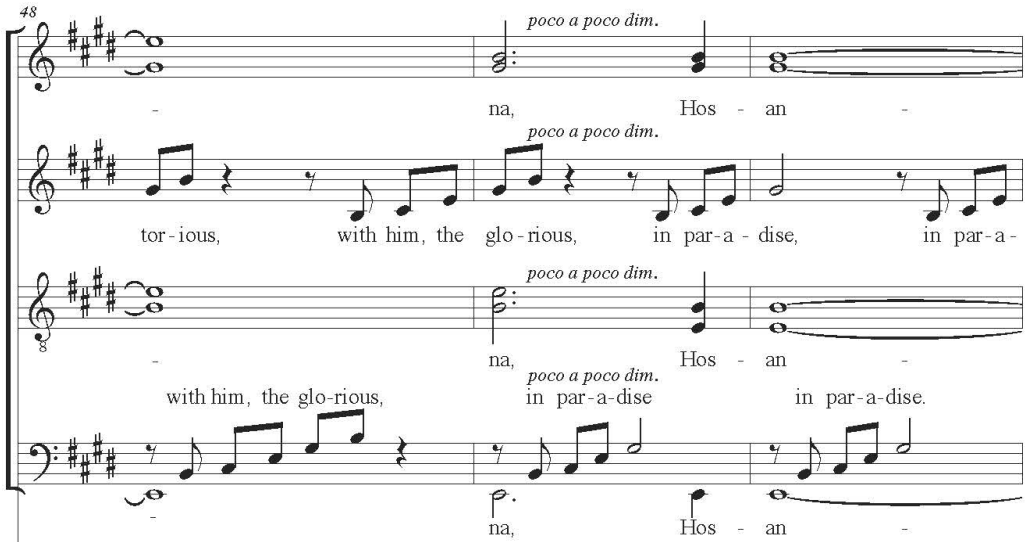
Example 2.30 Excerpt from F. Melius Christiansen's "Glorification," mm. 24–30

At measure 31, Christiansen introduces a diminuendo while recalling the opening rhythmic and melodic material. This return does not simply repeat the initial idea; rather, it initiates another process of growth that culminates in a second intensification in measures 41–45. From there, the music shifts into common time at the text "soon my spirit shall sing victorious, with him, the glorious," marking both a formal and expressive turning point. The animated triple meter of the opening gives way to broader, more sustained motion.



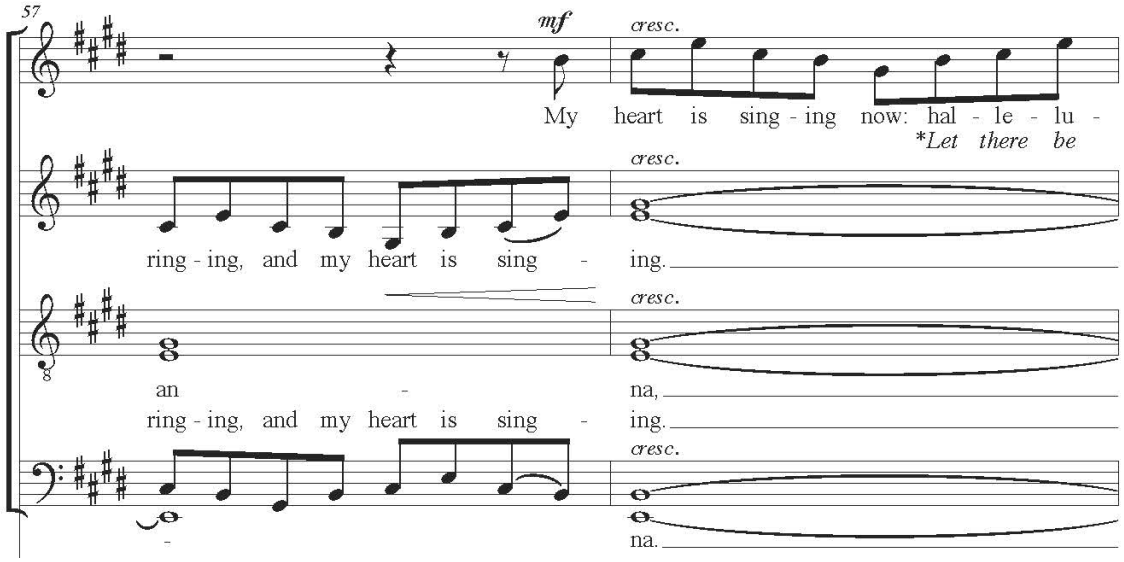
Example 2.31 Excerpt from F. Melius Christiansen's "Glorification," mm. 40–45

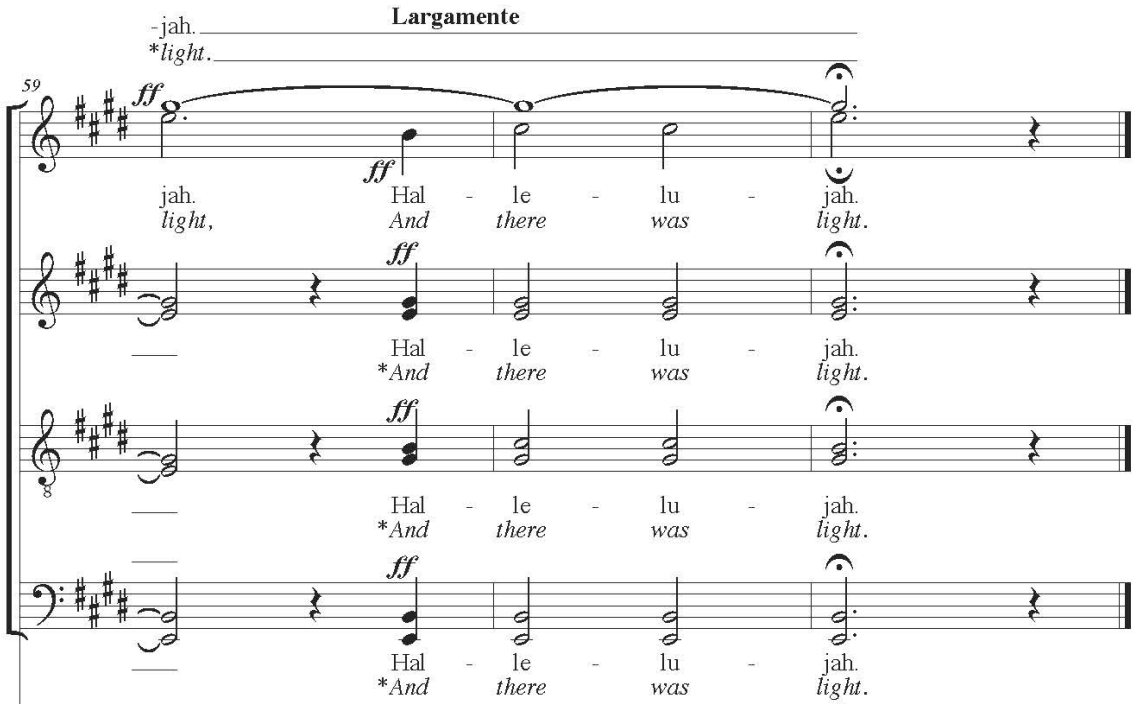
At the words "in paradise," Christiansen reduces the dynamic level, creating a sense of distance and repose. The diminuendo is important because it prevents the work from moving directly from climax to resolution.



Example 2.32 Excerpt from F. Melius Christiansen's "Glorification," mm. 48–50

The return of the "Hosanna" motive then leads into the closing "Hallelujah," marked *Largamente,* where the work reaches a final, full-voiced doxological cadence (mm. 59–61).





Example 2.33 Excerpt from F. Melius Christiansen's "Glorification," mm. 57–61

SUMMARY

The works considered in this chapter reveal two distinct ways in which sacred choral music functioned within Lutheran institutional life in Minnesota. Reuter's compositions generally emerge from the German cantor tradition and from the practical needs of church and school. Although many of his sacred works are a cappella, others call for organ, children's voices, varied choral combinations, or instrumental forces. In each case, however, the music remains closely tied to worship, instruction, and congregational music formation.

Christiansen's works point to a different model: the polished collegiate a cappella choir. In "Beautiful Savior," a familiar hymn becomes the basis for a refined choral

sonority. In "Glorification," original contrapuntal writing displays the discipline and tonal control associated with the St. Olaf sound. Christiansen brought hymns, chorales, sacred texts, and original choral writing into a concert medium marked by balance, blend, and artistic refinement.

This distinction clarifies rather than diminishes the work of either man. Reuter wrote sacred music that was functional in the strongest sense of the term. His works were adaptable to the needs of schools, congregations, organists, choirs, and developing musicians. Through Reuter's compositions, ensembles, and curriculum, he cultivated a musical culture intended to equip future church workers for service in local congregations. Christiansen, by contrast, demonstrated how sacred repertoire could be shaped for a disciplined collegiate choir and carried into the public concert sphere.

The contrast, however, should not obscure their shared commitments. Both men understood sacred music as more than entertainment. Christiansen described sacred music as the expression of God's Word in hymns and spiritual songs.[31] Reuter likewise treated music as a servant of the text. They both valued discipline, textual seriousness, sacred repertoire, and musical excellence. The difference lay chiefly in institutional function. Christiansen's choir increasingly operated within the concert world, even when singing sacred music. Reuter's choirs remained tied to the church's internal educational and worship life. Reuter's measure of success was not national acclaim but durable

[31] Leola Nelson Bergmann, *Music Master of the Middle West: The Story of F. Melius Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 134.

usefulness: trained teachers, strengthened congregational song, improved musical literacy, and sacred repertoire for the church.

This chapter has therefore shown that the difference between Reuter and Christiansen was not one of significance and insignificance, but between two complementary and necessary forms of influence. Together, their work helped establish the conditions for the continued growth of Lutheran choral music in Minnesota.

CHAPTER 3

LEGACY AND THE LUTHERAN CHORAL TRADITION TODAY

INTRODUCTION

The clearest way to understand Friedrich Otto Reuter's legacy is to trace his impact within Dr. Martin Luther College and the Lutheran synod he served. Reuter did not leave behind a nationally recognized touring choir in the manner of F. Melius Christiansen, nor did Reuter's name become attached to a widely imitated choral sound. Reuter's influence was quieter and more internal. It moved through teachers, organists, choir directors, congregations, school music curricula, hymn tunes, campus resources, and sacred repertoire. For that reason, Reuter's legacy requires a broader definition of Lutheran choral tradition, one that accounts not only for public performance and choral technique but also for the formation of church musicians and the musical life of Lutheran schools and congregations.

This chapter considers that legacy in three related areas: Reuter's generational impact through Lutheran educators, his preservation of the cantor-teacher model in a Midwestern church college setting, and his contribution to sacred choral music. Christiansen provides a necessary point of comparison because his work shaped American collegiate choral standards through the St. Olaf Choir and the a cappella concert tradition. Their legacies differed in method and emphasis, but both were foundational for Lutheran choral music in Minnesota.

REUTER

Generational Impact through Lutheran Educators

Reuter's first and most enduring legacy was pedagogical. He came to Dr. Martin Luther College at a time when the synod already recognized a need for stronger music instruction among future teachers. John C. Lawrenz summarizes the college's institutional purpose in "In Retrospect – DMLC at 111":

> DMLC's main mission was to be a "teachers' seminary" with a two-year "normal" program to serve the 140 schools with nearly 9,000 elementary-aged children across Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.[1]

Within that mission, President John Schaller showed foresight in securing Reuter's services. Under Reuter, Lawrenz observes, "music became the queen of DMLC's disciplines." Music was no longer peripheral to teacher training; it became one of the means by which future Lutheran teachers were prepared for service in schools and congregations.[2]

The wider synod soon recognized the importance of this musical emphasis.

> It would be desirable that students from all districts of our Joint Synod, who wish to become teachers, would from the very beginning enroll at our institution for the reason that experience has taught us that those young people who begin their secondary education at other schools do not receive the necessary instruction in music….It is merely in the interest of our congregations that we insist on a good music education for our students.[3]

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[1] John C. Lawrenz, "In Retrospect: DMLC at 111," historical sketch, New Ulm, MN, May 1995, 2.
[2] Ibid., 2.
[3] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 29.

Reuter's early work at Dr. Martin Luther College confirmed this pedagogical purpose. He taught singing, organized and conducted male and mixed choruses, carried a heavy course load, and provided organ and violin instruction. Through this work, Reuter helped create a musical culture that flourished under his leadership. Later accounts noted that Reuter "fostered music by giving it a place and a dignity hitherto unknown at the college," and that he "made such an impact on the school that following generations have difficulty realizing that he served DMLC only sixteen years."[4]

The long-range consequences of this work are still evident in the musical culture of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.[5]

> At locations throughout the United States, hundreds of Lutheran elementary and high school teachers of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod meet each year for educational conferences. A key element at these conferences is worship, featuring vigorous singing by the assembled teachers…these assemblies contain skilled keyboard players, competent choir and choral directors, proficient musical composers and arrangers, and a host of men and women who love to sing traditional Lutheran music. This musical proficiency now enjoyed by the educational agencies of the Wisconsin Synod did not develop easily or by chance.[6]

Reuter was one of the key figures behind this growth in the synod's musical life. Reuter's influence was not concentrated in a single famous ensemble. His influence was diffused

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[4] Morton A. Schroeder, *A Time to Remember: An Informal History of Dr. Martin Luther College, 1884–1984* (New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1984), 46.

[5]The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) was formerly known as the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. That name was adopted after the 1917 merger of the Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska synods, while the present name, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, was adopted in 1959.

[6] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 35.

through the musical competence of Lutheran educators. The musical habits he cultivated at Dr. Martin Luther College entered classrooms through his students, who then passed them on to their own students. In this way, Reuter's work continued through successive generations of Lutheran teachers and students.

For that reason, Reuter's legacy survives as a pattern of formation. His model assumed that the Lutheran teacher should be musically capable because congregational song and school music were part of that call. This emphasis distinguishes Reuter's contribution from Christiansen's. Christiansen trained singers to realize a refined collegiate choral ideal; Reuter trained future church workers to serve musically in the places to which they would be called.

The Preservation of the Cantor-Teacher Model

Reuter's work at Dr. Martin Luther College preserved and adapted the German cantor-teacher model for a Midwestern Lutheran context. In Germany, Reuter studied organ, counterpoint, chorale practice, and composition. Lutheran teacher training treated these disciplines not as the concern of the music specialist alone, but as part of the broader preparation of a school teacher expected to serve the church in many areas, including music. Music held particular importance because of its connection to worship. At Dr. Martin Luther College, Reuter translated the musical disciplines he had received in Germany into a practical program of church worker education, a development reflected in the expanded music offerings that appeared in the college catalogue shortly after his arrival.

Meyer summarized this work by identifying two compelling needs that shaped Reuter's career at Dr. Martin Luther College: a college music program capable of training students for the "teacher-musician profession" and an adequate body of church music literature. Reuter labored faithfully to meet both needs until his career ended.[7] This summary captures the unity of his legacy. Curriculum and repertoire belonged together. Students needed thorough musical training, and the church needed usable sacred music. Reuter's teaching and composing were both aspects of one vocation.

The continuation of this model through Emil D. Backer is one of the clearest signs of Reuter's generational influence. Backer was not simply a successor in office; he was his student, protégé, and personal friend.

> Emil Backer not only continued a tradition of education established at DMLC by Fritz Reuter but also improved on the practical training of classroom music teachers – training which persists in the Martin Luther College curriculum even today, and as a teacher of Lutheran church music and a choral director, Emil D. Backer advocated a high standard of Lutheran worship and sacred music literature in the German-Lutheran tradition which he conveyed to many students and musical colleagues, and which contributed to the development of the Martin Luther College choral program.[8]

Backer himself later recalled that he had been close to Reuter as a student and friend and that they had spent many hours discussing music and education.[9] Through that

[7] Edward Meyer, "The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter" (master's thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 85.
[8] Grace A. Hennig, "The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer" (master's thesis, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, 1999), 2.
[9] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.

relationship, Reuter's convictions were carried into the next stage of Dr. Martin Luther College's musical life.

A later summary in *A Time to Remember* captures this succession with the statement, "Reuter laid a fine, firm foundation; Backer built on that foundation a splendid edifice."[10] The image of foundation and edifice is important for this study because it prevents Reuter's legacy from being reduced to his own sixteen years at the college. His work continued through those he trained. Later teachers and directors stood within a tradition whose first full institutional form at Dr. Martin Luther College, and later Martin Luther College, had been shaped by Reuter.

This continuity was not limited to personnel. It also included repertoire and performance practice. Reuter's choral works were sung regularly by Backer and his students, especially in Christmas programs, and many of Reuter's compositions continued to appear in Backer's programs years later.[11] Reuter's *Weihnachtsgeschichte* was performed almost every year at the college's Christmas concerts from the late 1920s to the late 1950s, several times between the 1950s and 1990s, and again at the final Christmas concert of Dr. Martin Luther College in December 1994, before the school's amalgamation.[12] These later performances demonstrate that Reuter's music remained part of the college's memory and liturgical-musical practice long after his death.

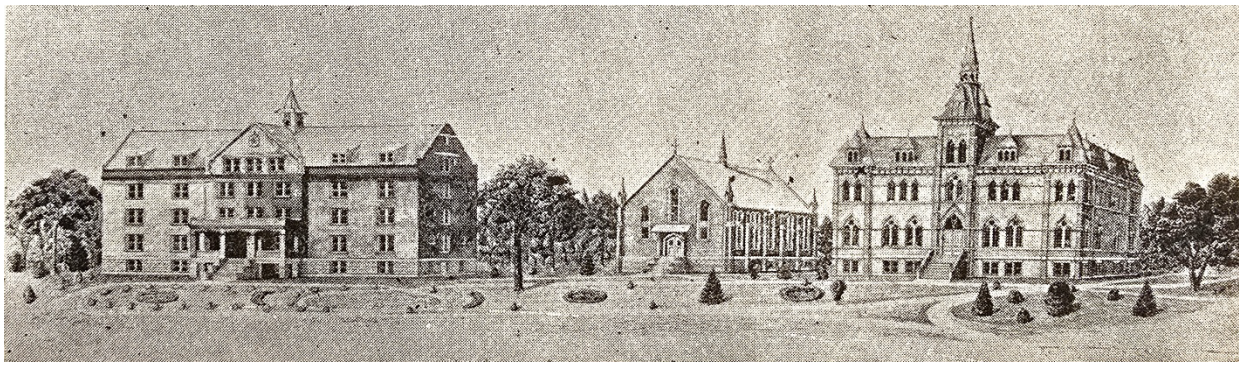
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[10] Morton A. Schroeder, *A Time to Remember: An Informal History of Dr. Martin Luther College, 1884–1984* (New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1984), 78.
[11] Grace A. Hennig, "The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer" (master's thesis, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, 1999), 9.
[12] Margo Martens, "Friedrich 'Fritz' Otto Reuter," speech delivered at The Minnesota Music Hall of Fame 35th Annual Induction Ceremony and Banquet, Best Western, New Ulm, Minnesota, Friday, April 19, 2024.

Even physical objects and buildings on campus came to embody Reuter's legacy. When Reuter arrived in 1908, the campus consisted of one building, now known as Old Main. Bruce Backer notes that

> Reuter quickly saw the need for a music facility, and within three years the synod authorized the building of an Aula, the present Music Hall.[13]

The project cost $12,000 and, together with Old Main and the newly built "Boys' Dorm," brought the number of buildings on the Dr. Martin Luther College campus to three by the beginning of the 1911 school year. The Aula served as both chapel and auditorium, providing space for campus worship, concerts, plays, and other public performances.



Example 3.1 Drawing of the Dr. Martin Luther College campus, circa 1911; from left to right: Boys' Dorm, Aula, Old Main

Reuter's concern for campus musical resources extended also to instruments. The first Steinway concert piano on campus was a six-foot-eleven-inch grand piano that

[13] Bruce Backer, "The Reuter Steinway," Martin Luther College, accessed April 13, 2026, https://mlc-wels.edu/history/chapel-of-the-christ/the-reuter-steinway-piano/.

Reuter purchased for the college at a cost of $850, using funds contributed by congregations where Reuter's men's choir had sung. The instrument was later rebuilt under Emil Backer's supervision and eventually renovated for use in the Chapel of the Christ, the present worship space on the campus of Martin Luther College.[14] The Aula and the Reuter Steinway are therefore more than anecdotes. Together, they demonstrate how Reuter's vision for musical resources became part of the institution's material culture in its formative years. Reuter understood that musical training required not only teachers and students, but also buildings, instruments, books, scores, choirs, and programs.

Sacred Music as Servant of the Word

Reuter's legacy also rests in his theology of sacred music. Under his guidance, sacred music was cultivated not merely as an artistic display but as an expression of theological conviction and educational responsibility. This approach to music was grounded in the theology of Martin Luther, who wrote that "next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest place" and further declared, "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."[15] Such convictions placed music near the center of Lutheran worship and Lutheran education. At Dr. Martin Luther College, this belief took practical form in structured musical instruction, disciplined ensemble singing, and the expectation

[14] Bruce Backer, "The Reuter Steinway," Martin Luther College, accessed April 13, 2026, https://mlc-wels.edu/history/chapel-of-the-christ/the-reuter-steinway-piano/.
[15] Martin Luther, *Liturgy and Hymns,* ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 53 of *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1965), 321–24.

that future church workers would possess both musical competence and theological awareness.

This theological foundation explains why Reuter's legacy cannot be reduced to choral technique. His sacred music was text-driven because his theology was Word-centered. Backer explains that, for Reuter, music was an art given by God to serve him, and that text and music were fused into one unit.[16] This principle shaped the works analyzed in Chapter 2. Reuter's music does not seek independent display; it interprets, supports, and proclaims the text.

Reuter's compositional legacy was broader than his surviving reputation suggests. Although most of his works were not issued by a major publishing house, Reuter self-published pieces that he believed could serve effectively in worship. Through these self-published works, Reuter's music reached beyond Dr. Martin Luther College and entered the musical life of Lutheran schools and congregations. The continued regard for his compositions was evident at the Valparaiso University Church Music Seminar of 1944, where Reuter's works were still considered suitable for church use.[17] Such evidence helps explain why his contribution deserves renewed attention. Reuter's influence was real within the schools and congregations that used his music, even though it did not receive the same public recognition as Christiansen's work in Northfield.

The broader legacy also includes Reuter's hymn tunes, especially REUTER, now closely associated with "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage." Reuter first wrote the tune
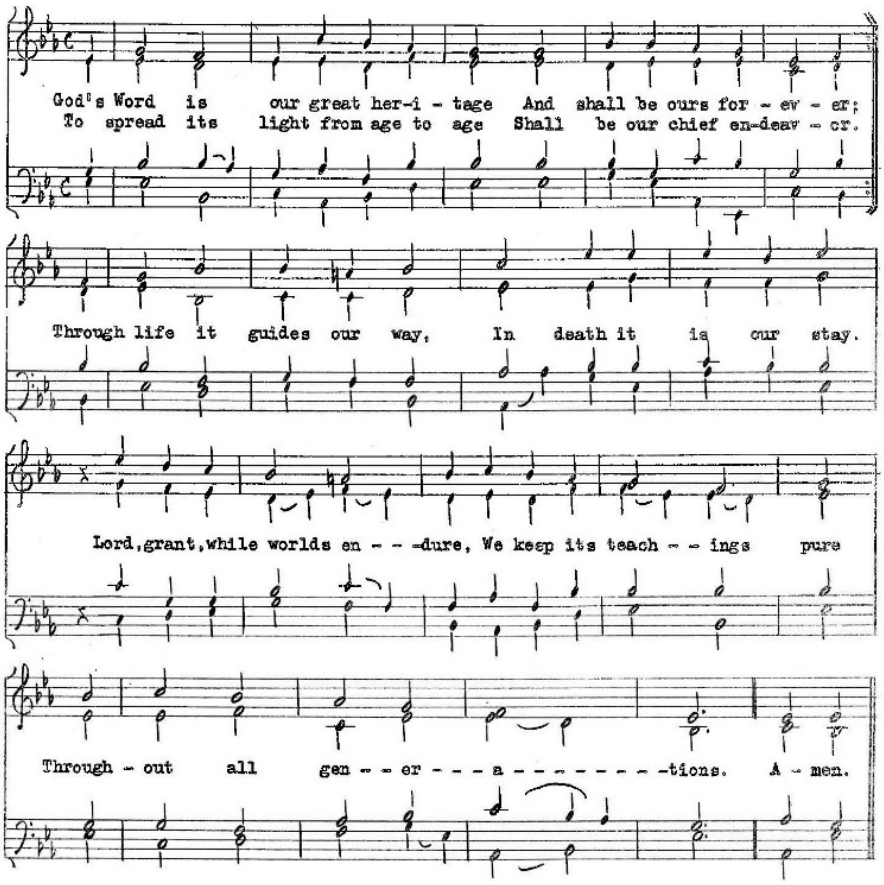
[16] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 4.
[17] Mark Braun and William Braun, "The Life and Work of Fritz Otto Reuter," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 25, no. 1 (April 2007): 49.

for the German hymn "O Jesu einig wahres Haupt," number 228 in the Wisconsin Synod *Gesangbuch*. That hymn had previously been set to Luther's EIN FESTE BURG, but the pairing created practical difficulties because the accents of the text did not fit the tune well. Reuter recognized this mismatch and supplied a new tune that was used at the celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, held on the campus of Dr. Martin Luther College on September 30, 1917. The result was a tune whose musical structure more naturally served the text.

The tune REUTER later became closely associated with the hymn, "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage." The text, written by the Danish Lutheran pastor Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig and translated into English by Ole G. Belsheim, originated as the fifth stanza of Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."[18] The stanza was written by Grundtvig for the three-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Reuter's tune and harmonization have remained effective because the syllabic melody follows the natural accentuation of the text. Its balanced phrases allow the hymn's confession to unfold in four musical thoughts: the church's possession of God's Word, the church's mission to spread that Word "from age to age," the confession that the Word guides "through life" and sustains "in death," and the closing prayer that its teachings remain pure "throughout all generations." The melody moves mostly by step and forms a broad arch, reaching its highest point at the phrase "In death it is our stay." Reuter then augments the rhythm in

[18] C.T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship: Handbook* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 317.

the final phrase, giving weight to the prayer that God's Word be preserved for all generations.

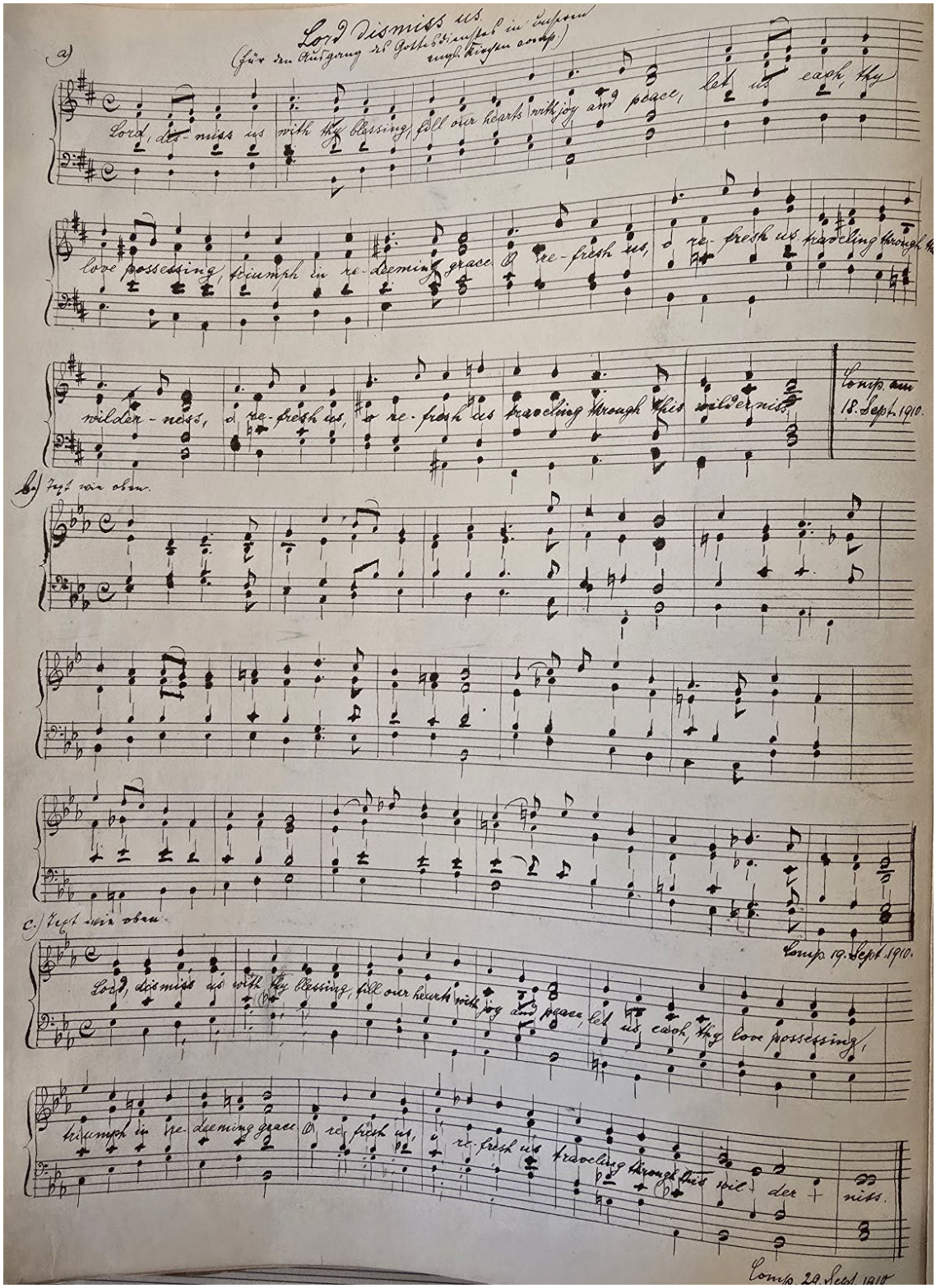


Example 3.2 "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage," tune and harmonization by Reuter

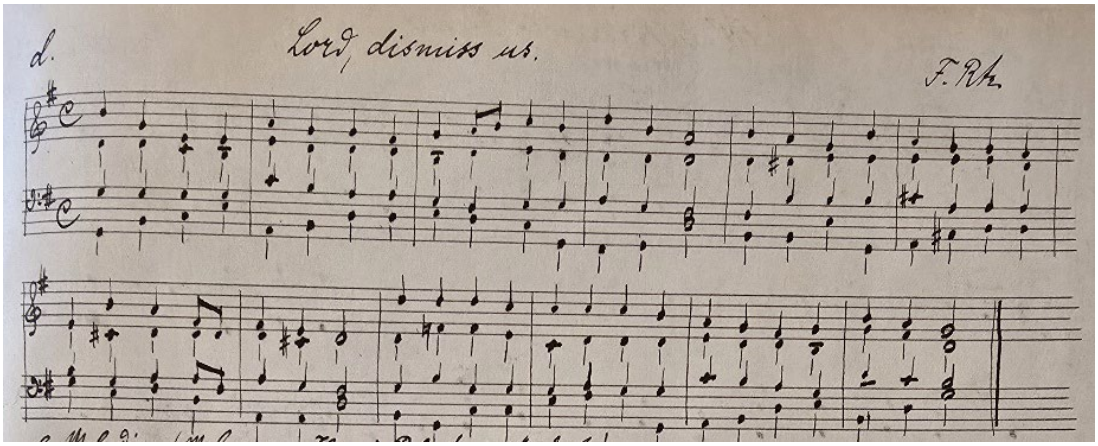
Reuter's hymn tune NEW ULM provides another example of his practical contribution to Lutheran hymnody. Reuter wrote the tune in 1910 for "Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing," a hymn text attributed to the English Baptist pastor John Fawcett and credited to Fawcett in the 1791 York edition of *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*.[19]

[19] C.T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship: Handbook* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 349.
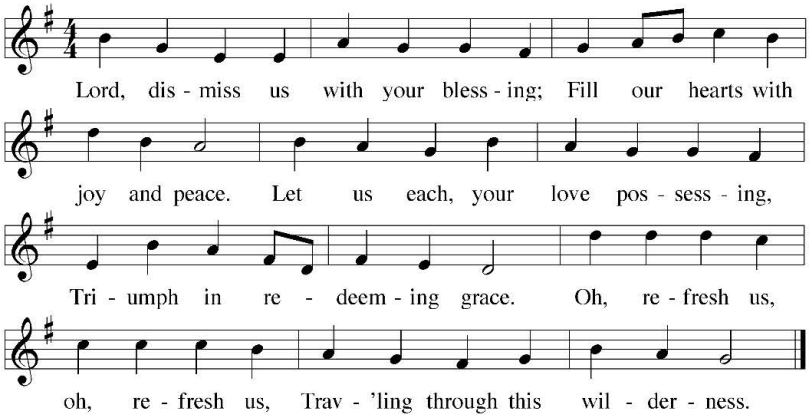
Reuter's manuscript collection preserves three drafts of the tune, dated September 18, September 19, and September 29, 1910. These drafts show that the final tune was not the product of a single casual attempt, but of revision and refinement. The surviving manuscript reveals Reuter working through melodic shape, harmonic direction, and congregational usability before settling on the version later known as NEW ULM.



Example 3.3 Reuter's drafts of "Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"



Example 3.4 Reuter's accepted final version of "Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"



Example 3.5 Reuter's NEW ULM engraved with text underlay

Musically, NEW ULM reflects the same practical, churchly instinct evidenced in REUTER. Reuter cast the tune in a straightforward four-part hymn style that supports the text's meaning. Its phrases are balanced, and the harmony moves with enough simplicity to make congregational singing possible while still giving dignity to the text. The

repeated “O refresh us” receives musical emphasis through repetition, while the final line, “trav’ling through this wilderness,” moves naturally toward the final authentic cadence.

Together, REUTER and NEW ULM exemplify Reuter’s hymn-writing legacy and concern for well-crafted church music. Meyer’s judgement is fitting:

> “[The hymn tunes] show Reuter’s sincere desire to supply the church with worship music of a high standard.”[20]

The two tunes served different textual and liturgical purposes. REUTER was joined to a confessionally strong hymn on the Word and the church’s mission, while NEW ULM served as a closing hymn of blessing and dismissal. Both tunes entered wider use within the Lutheran church and were included in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) and *Christian Worship* (1993). Although NEW ULM was not retained in *Christian Worship* (2021), REUTER remains included and continues to hold an important place in the Wisconsin Synod’s hymn tradition. At Martin Luther College, Reuter’s “God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage” is sung at the conclusion of every Commencement Service and, by long-standing tradition, by the Martin Luther College Choir as it returns to campus after every tour. One college account describes the moment this way:

> As soon as the bus begins the final ascent of the Center Street hill, conversation ceases and the a cappella arrangement fills the space.[21]

[20] Edward Meyer, “The Life and Works of Fritz Otto Reuter” (master’s thesis, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL, 1972), 63.
[21] “Fritz Reuter Inducted in MN Music Hall of Fame,” Martin Luther College, accessed April 13, 2026, https://mlc-wels.edu/publications/2024/06/26/fritz-reuter-inducted-in-mn-music-hall-of-fame/.

This association is especially fitting. A composer whose work was governed by the service of the Word is remembered, in part, through a tune joined to a text that confesses the church's inheritance in God's Word.

Descendants of the Reuter Tradition

A direct descendant of Reuter by practice and philosophy, though not by blood, was Emil D. Backer. Backer came to replace Reuter through a combination of circumstances, preparation, and musical inheritance. By the early 1920s, Reuter's health had begun to fail, and from the Christmas season to the end of the 1922–23 school year, he was granted a leave of absence from Dr. Martin Luther College.[22] Backer, a New Ulm native, Dr. Martin Luther College graduate, and former student of Reuter, was asked to assume Reuter's duties temporarily in the hope that his former teacher might recover. Reuter did not return to teaching, and after his death on June 9, 1924, Backer continued the work as music professor and choir director at Dr. Martin Luther College.

Emil Backer was influenced by his former teacher's convictions regarding Lutheran worship, sacred repertoire, and music education. Bruce Backer later reflected on his father's work with the Dr. Martin Luther College Choir:

> In directing the Dr. Martin Luther College Choir my father had the opportunity to express his Lutheran Christian faith within the classical tradition of choral literature. Every member of his many choirs knew that clear presentation of the text of the music was uppermost in his mind. Through
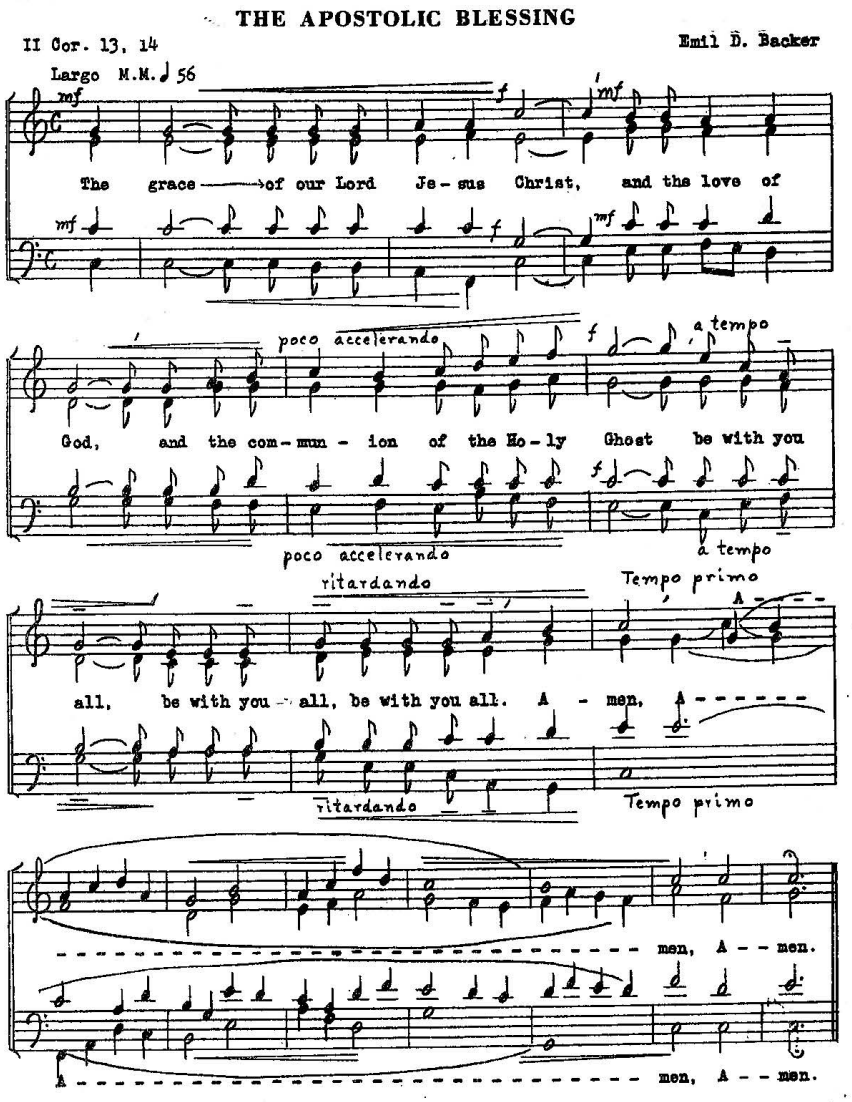
[22] Margo Martens, "Friedrich 'Fritz' Otto Reuter," speech delivered at The Minnesota Music Hall of Fame 35th Annual Induction Ceremony and Banquet, Best Western, New Ulm, Minnesota, Friday, April 19, 2024.

> the medium of the best music he knew he was compelled to speak about the things he had seen and heard.[23]

The recollection shows the continuity between Reuter and Emil Backer. Like Reuter, Backer understood choral music as a means of textual and theological proclamation rather than as musical display alone.

Emil Backer's a cappella choral work "The Apostolic Blessing" may be understood within this inherited tradition. Dedicated to the Dr. Martin Luther College Choir of 1949–50, the work reflects the continuation of Reuter's text-centered sacred-music ideal into the next generation. Backer sets 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." The setting is compact, homophonic, and designed for clear proclamation. The music supports the text's meaning without drawing unnecessary attention to itself. The opening crescendo leads naturally to the word "Christ," after which the dynamic level recedes in preparation for the next phrase. A second crescendo, accompanied by a slight accelerando, gives shape to the words "the Holy Ghost." The final phrase, "be with you all," is the only scriptural text repeated in the piece, emphasizing the personal character of the blessing. The threefold "Amen" then broadens the conclusion and brings the work to a fitting, reverent close.

[23] Grace A. Hennig, "The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer" (master's thesis, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, 1999), 60.



Example 3.6 Emil D. Backer's "The Apostolic Blessing"

The musical inheritance that began with Reuter and continued through Emil Backer extended into another generation through Bruce R. Backer. Bruce's connection to the Reuter tradition was both familial and institutional. As the son of Emil D. Backer, he grew up in a home shaped by the musical culture of Dr. Martin Luther College. While

attending Dr. Martin Luther College from 1947 to 1950, he toured three times with his father's choir and later recalled the high musical standards of that experience:

> "We sang all of the Bach motets except for one. We sang three Brahms motets and other classic music of the St. Thomas tradition…We sang only the best and from my father I learned only the best."[24]
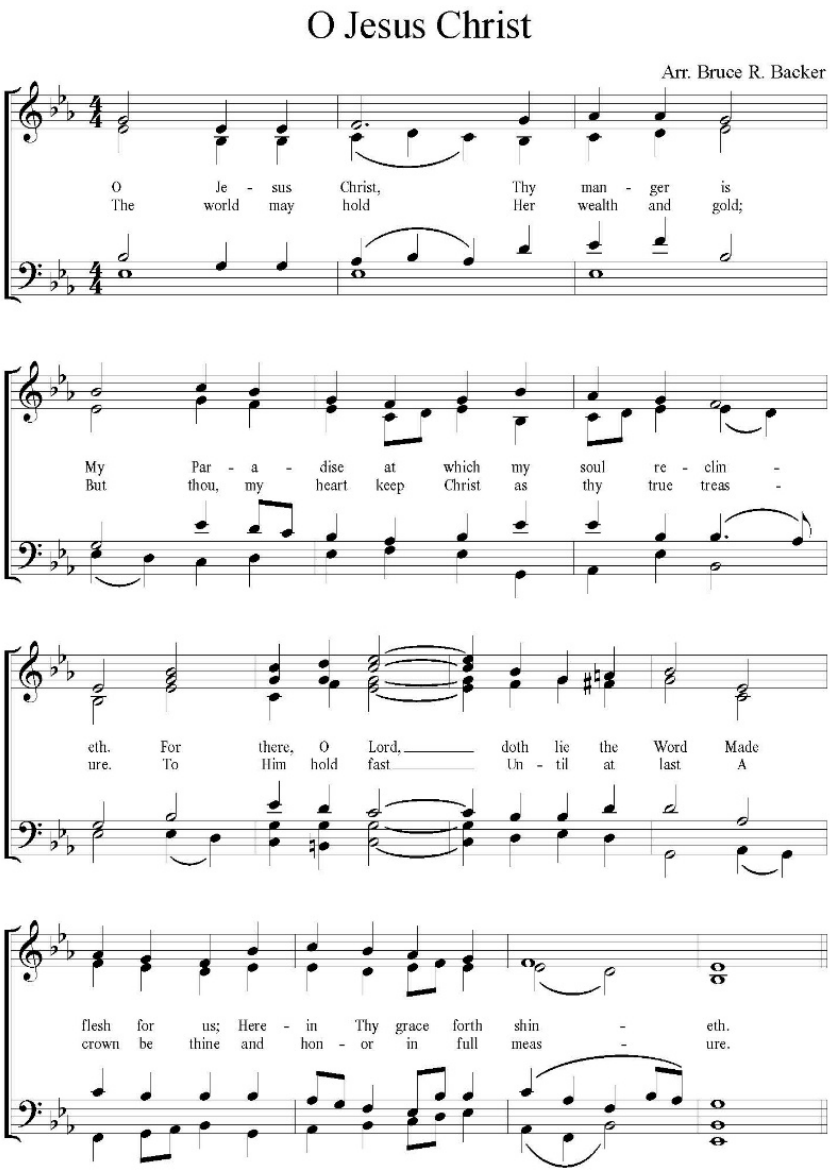
After Emil Backer died in 1957, Dr. Martin Luther College called Bruce the following year to succeed him. His teaching responsibilities included organ, liturgy, worship courses, hymnody, conducting, and music theory.[25] In this work, he continued the broad church musician model that Reuter had introduced at the college.

Bruce Backer's own understanding of choral music also reflects the Reuter tradition. Backer wrote, "Choral music does not reach its glory on the concert stage. It reaches its glory in connection with the means of grace."[26] This statement echoes Reuter's view of sacred music as servant of the Word. Backer's compositions and arrangements likewise served practical churchly needs. They have been described as *Gebrauchsmusik,* or utilitarian music, written for particular occasions and practical needs as they arose. His 1975 setting of "O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is" belongs to this same stream of hymn-based, church-centered composition.

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[24] Jonathan T. Leach, "The New Ulm Men Behind the Music: A Study of the Lives, Ministries, and Legacies of James Engel, Bruce R. Backer, and Edward H. Meyer" (student paper, Lutheranism in America, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 22, 2002), 8.
[25] C.T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship: Handbook* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 649.
[26] Jonathan T. Leach, "The New Ulm Men Behind the Music: A Study of the Lives, Ministries, and Legacies of James Engel, Bruce R. Backer, and Edward H. Meyer" (student paper, Lutheranism in America, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 22, 2002), 12.

The seventeenth-century Lutheran pastor Paul Gerhardt wrote the hymn text, which first appeared in fifteen stanzas with Johann Crüger's (1598–1662) tune, O JESU CHRIST, DEIN KRIPPLEIN IST. Its message joins the mystery of the incarnation with a personal response of faith, so that the Christmas story becomes not only an event to remember but a promise to receive. Backer's setting begins with a standard four-part harmonization, but the texture expands at the third phrase through divisi writing in the soprano, alto, and bass parts. This expansion creates a striking crescendo before the final phrase returns largely to four-part writing, with bass divisi on the final chord providing a calm and weighty close. This setting continues to be sung annually at the conclusion of every Martin Luther College Christmas Concert, demonstrating how Bruce Backer's work carries forward the Reuter tradition of practical, text-centered sacred music.



Example 3.7 Bruce R. Backer's "O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is"

CHRISTIANSEN

Comparative Legacy

Christiansen's legacy took a different path from Reuter's. Anton Armstrong identifies F. Melius Christiansen as a pioneer in the twentieth-century rebirth of choral singing. His influence on American collegiate choral standards can be seen in three significant ways.

First, Christiansen helped establish unaccompanied sacred choral music as serious collegiate concert repertoire. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, glee clubs, festival choruses, and large accompanied oratorio societies primarily defined American collegiate choral culture.[27] These ensembles reflected nineteenth-century Romantic performance aesthetics, frequently favoring operatic vocal production and orchestral accompaniment. Anton Armstrong states that Christiansen "established a new standard of choral performance in the early part of this [twentieth] century" through his programming of a cappella sacred literature.[28] Armstrong further explains that one of Christiansen's greatest contributions was his elevation of sacred choral music to the concert hall, replacing much of the "second-rate glee club" repertory common among collegiate ensembles.[29]

Second, Christiansen created a touring collegiate choir model that other institutions could hear, study, and imitate. Through its national tours, the St. Olaf Choir

[27] Gordon Paine, *Five Centuries of Choral Music* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1988), 2.
[28] Anton Armstrong, "The Christiansen Tradition in Sacred Choral Music," *Word & World* 12, no. 3 (1992): 250.
[29] Ibid., 254.

became a pace-setting role model for choral musicians across the country. Its reputation rested not only on its repertoire but also on the disciplined sound Christiansen cultivated.

Third, Christiansen defined a choral sound that could be taught and reproduced. Balanced and blended choral tone was the central feature of his ideal, and he designed a system of singer selection, placement, and rehearsal technique to achieve the "St. Olaf sound."

Christiansen's influence extended beyond the St. Olaf Choir and St. Olaf College through the Christiansen Choral Schools, which were founded in 1935 by F. Melius and his son, Olaf. These schools introduced hundreds of church, school, college, and community musicians to the Christiansen approach. Participants studied audition procedures, seating and placement, vocal methods, rehearsal techniques, and choral literature.[30] As with Reuter, Christiansen extended his legacy beyond the institution where he taught. The choral schools helped carry Christiansen's philosophy beyond Northfield, disseminating his methods among conductors and choral educators throughout the country.

The Chorale and Christiansen's Stylistic Influence

Central to Christiansen's legacy was his treatment of the chorale. The chorale motet was not a new form; its roots reach back to the Reformation and to the worship life of the Lutheran church. Christiansen's contribution was to take a form primarily associated with worship and reshape it for the collegiate a cappella choir. In doing so, he
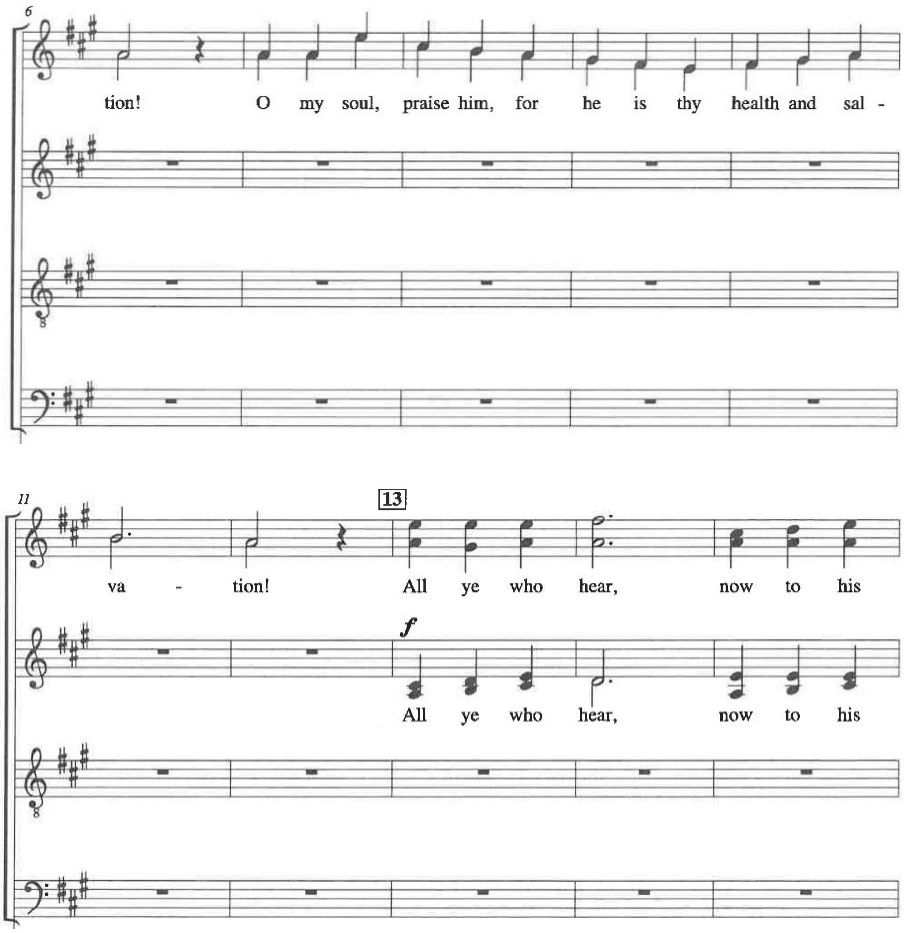
[30] Ibid., 252.

concertized the chorale motet and made it one of the signature features of the Lutheran choral tradition in America. His approach also influenced later composers, who continued to treat chorales not only as congregational hymns; but also as material for choral settings in school and concert contexts, as well as in the church.

One chorale that appears frequently in this style of a cappella choral writing is "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," set to the tune LOBE DEN HERREN. Joachim Neander wrote the hymn text in 1680, originally in five stanzas. It first appeared in America in the *Hymnbook for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Schools and Congregations* in 1879.[31] Christiansen sought to include familiar chorale tunes in the St. Olaf Choir's touring repertoire, and this hymn suited that purpose well. Its strong melody, congregational familiarity, and doxological character made it effective as both a hymn and as a basis for an extended choral setting.
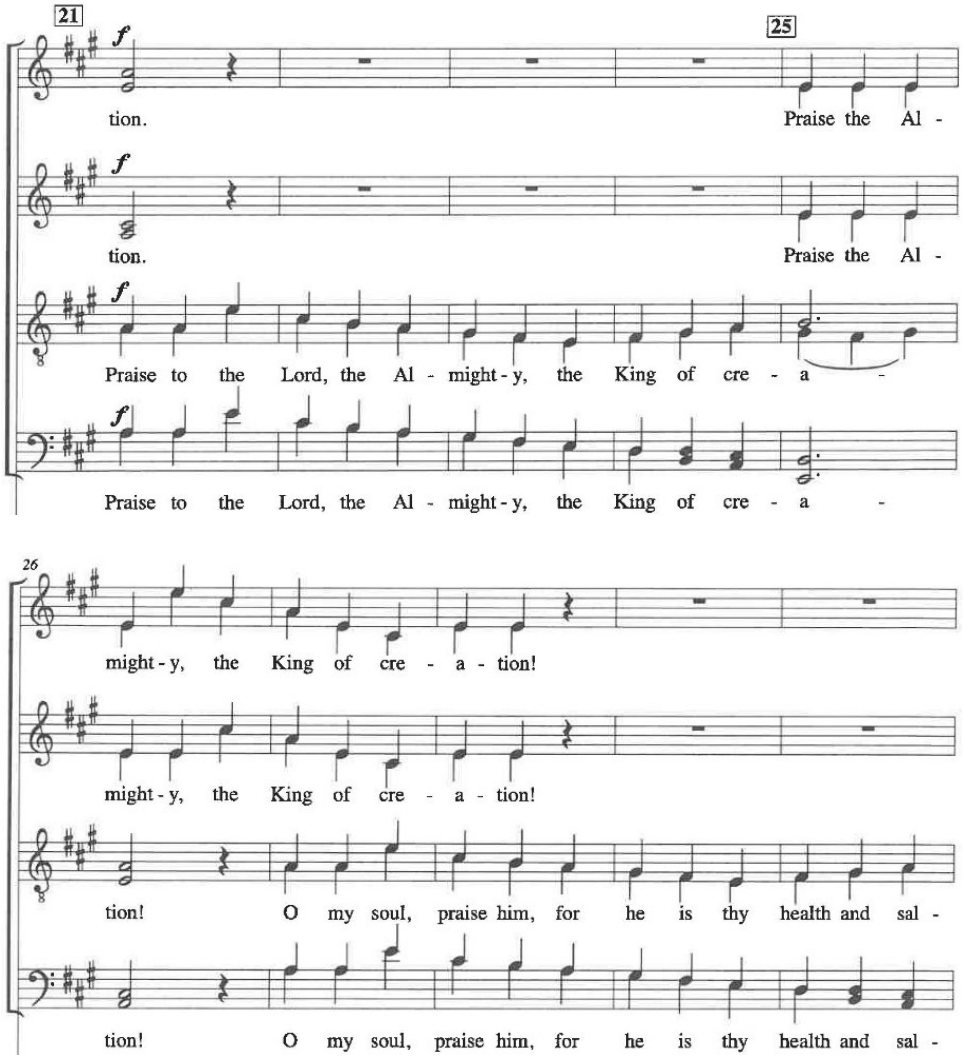
Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord" was originally conceived for a mixed choir with divisi and keyboard accompaniment, though it is now frequently performed a cappella. The setting begins with the first stanza sung by soprano and alto voices, first in unison and then in divided parts. The opening clarifies the hymn tune while creating textural contrast.

[31] C.T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship: Handbook* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 263.
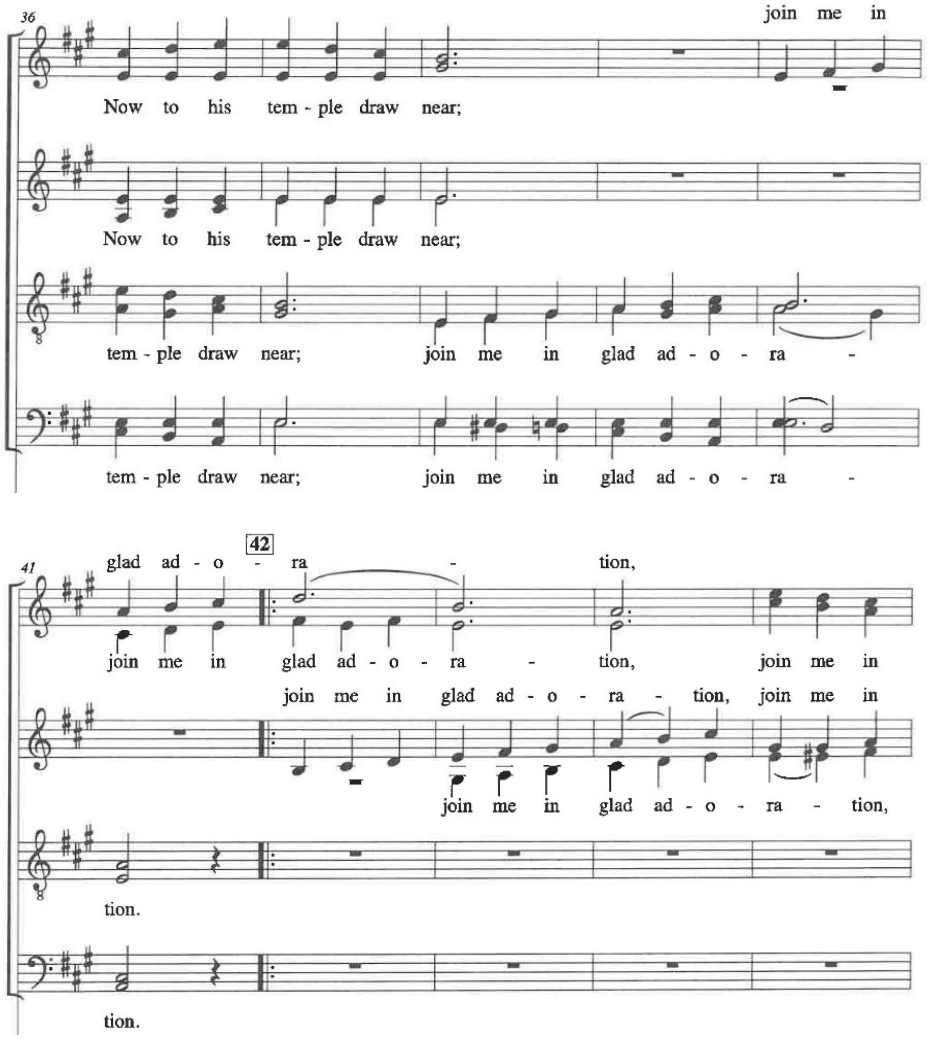


Example 3.8 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 6–15

Beginning at measure 21, the stanza is repeated by the tenors and basses, again opening in unison before moving into divided writing. The upper voices echo portions of the men's phrases, creating a dialogue between sections of the choir.



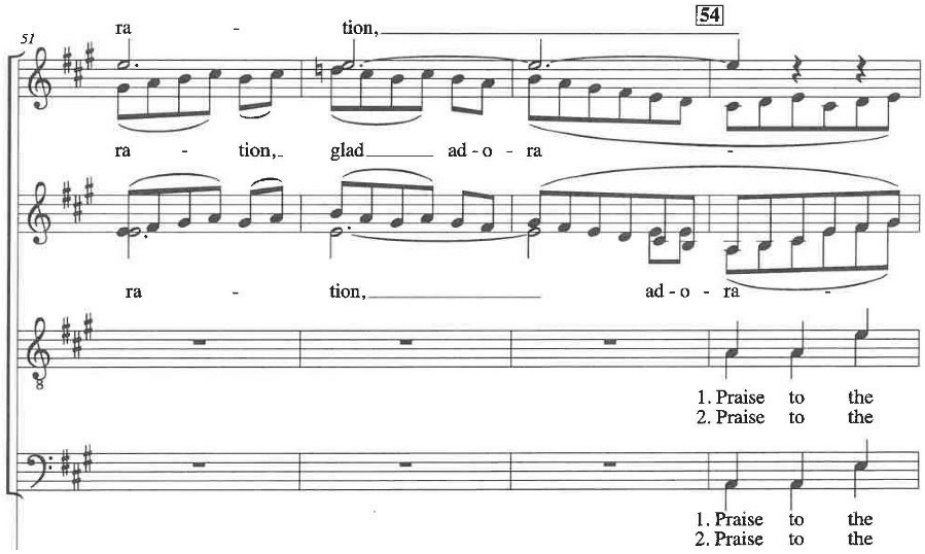
Example 3.9 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 21–30

Beginning at measure 40, Christiansen uses staggered entrances in the soprano and alto voices on the final phrase of stanza one, "join me in glad adoration."
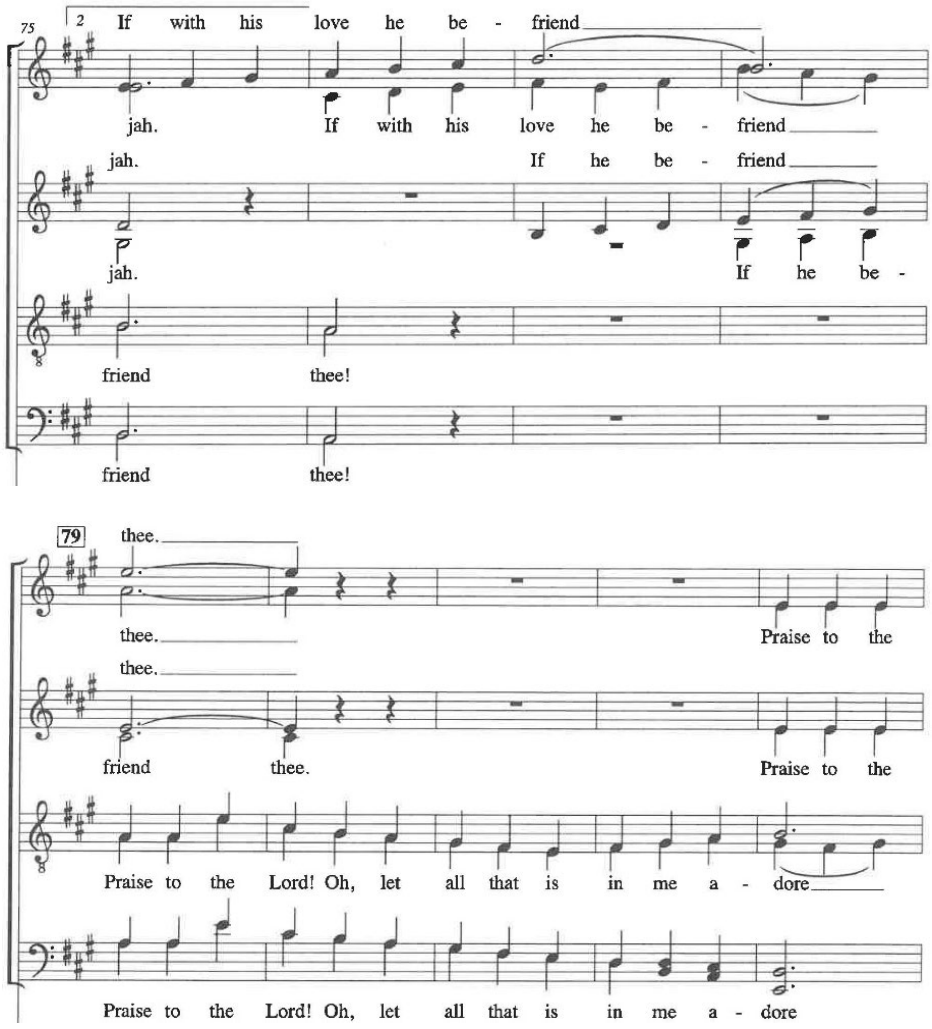


Example 3.10 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 36–45

The repetition of this phrase in quarter notes, followed by quicker eight-note motion, creates a transition into the firm entrance of the hymn text in the tenor and bass voices at measure 54. The invitation to "join" in adoration is enacted musically, as overlapping entrances and expanding choral participation draw more voices into the act of praise.
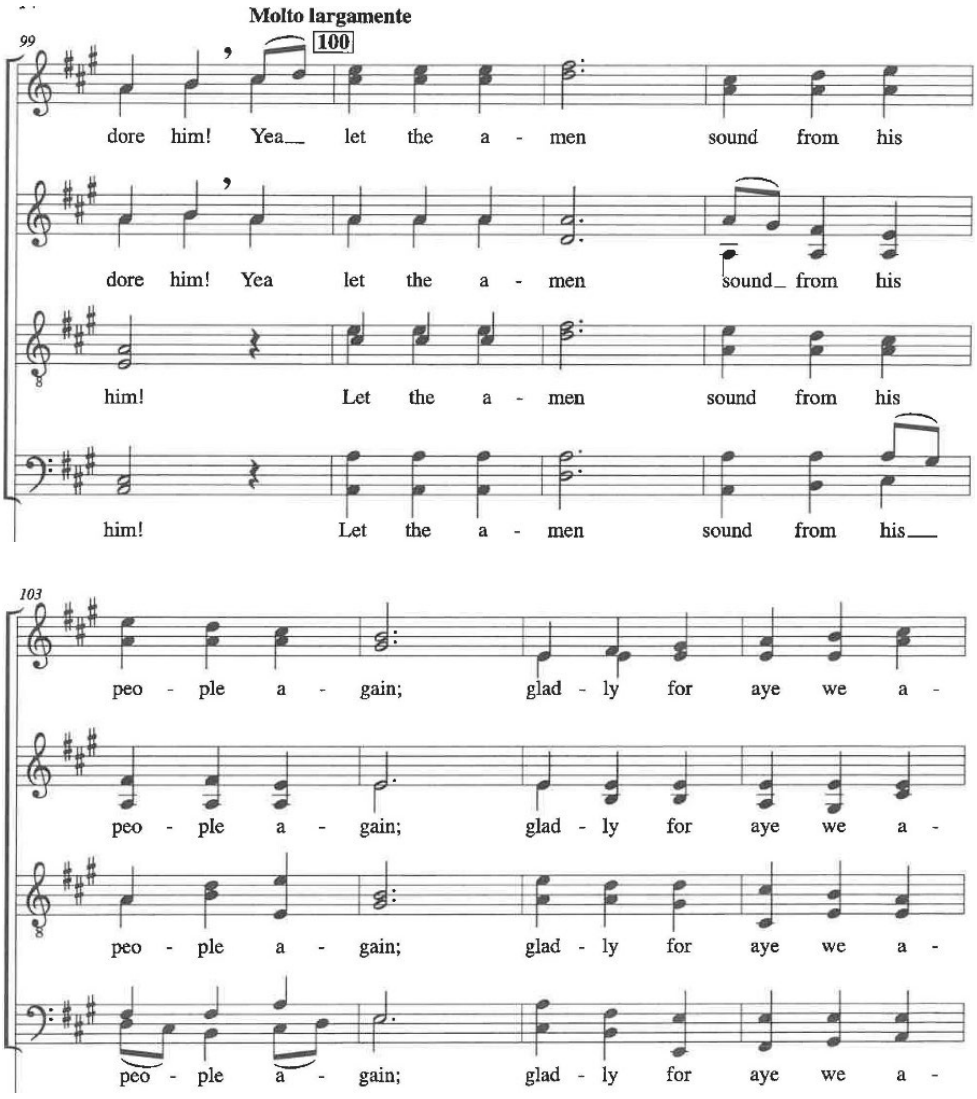


Example 3.11 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 51–54

Christiansen uses a similar technique in his treatment of the fourth stanza, while omitting the second and third stanzas of the original hymn text. Once again, the women's voices enter in imitation, this time emphasizing the phrase "If with his love he befriends thee." The tenors and basses then present the final stanza (m. 79), opening in unison and dividing into four-part men's writing, as they had done earlier in the setting. Near the end of the first phrase of the stanza, the soprano and alto voices begin to echo portions of the text, reinforcing the hymn's central ideas while adding motion and color to the texture.



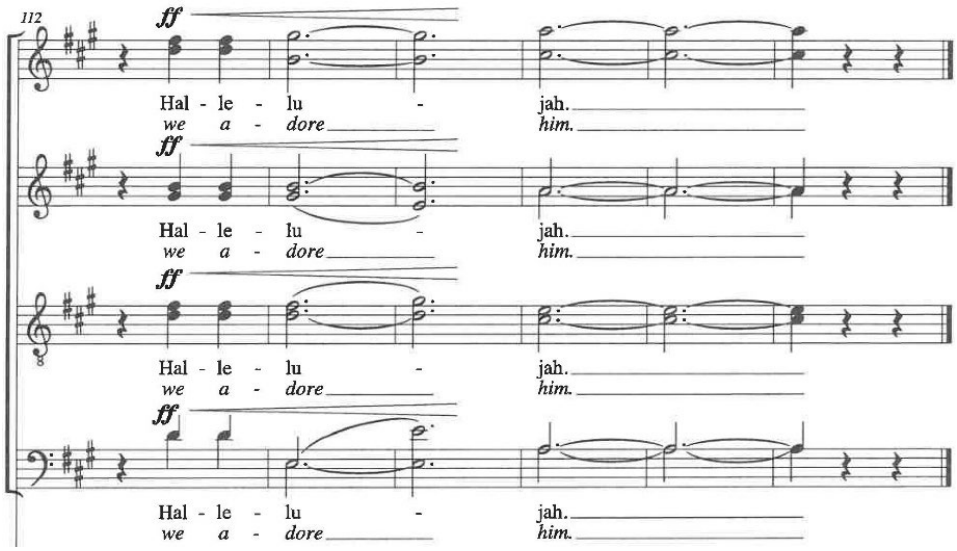
Example 3.12 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 75–83

The setting concludes with a coda at measure 100, marked *Molto largamente*. At this point, the full choir sings in a completely homophonic texture for the first time, giving particular weight to the final text: "Yea, let the amen sound from his people again; gladly for aye we adore him."



Example 3.13 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 99–106
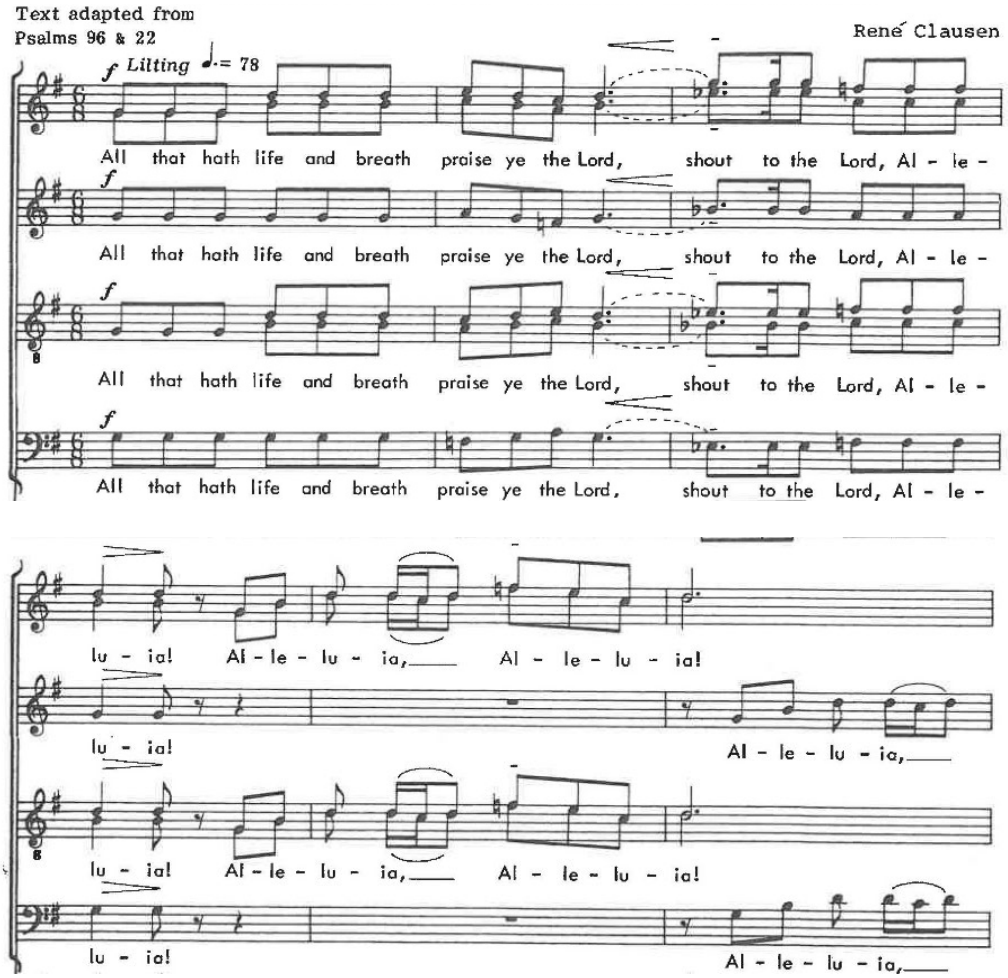
In the final three measures, Christiansen reinforces the doxological character of the close with one last powerful *fortissimo* statement: "we adore him."



Example 3.14 Christiansen's "Praise to the Lord," mm. 112–117
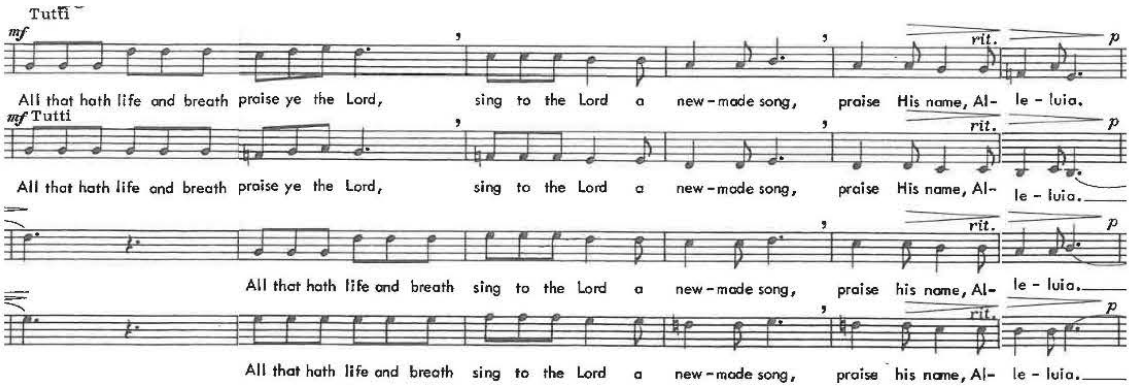
Christiansen's setting of "Praise to the Lord" continued to influence later composers, especially those connected to the St. Olaf tradition. One such composer is René Clausen, a St. Olaf graduate whose choral works range from accessible pieces for high school and church choirs to more demanding works for advanced collegiate and professional ensembles. His "All That Hath Life & Breath Praise Ye the Lord!" provides a useful example of how the American Lutheran a cappella choral tradition continued to shape later sacred choral writing. Published in 1981 by Fostco Music Press and dedicated to the Wichita State University A Cappella Choir, the work incorporates texts from Psalms 96 and 22 and quotes the hymn "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." Clausen does not merely imitate Christiansen's chorale setting, but extends the tradition by placing the chorale tune within a broader musical structure.

The work is cast in an ABA form. It begins with the SATB choir singing a unison G before expanding into a six-part homophonic texture divided between SSA and TTB voices. The opening A section, thirty-three measures in length, presents musical material that is never directly repeated in the piece. The repeated word "Alleluia" frames the thematic material.



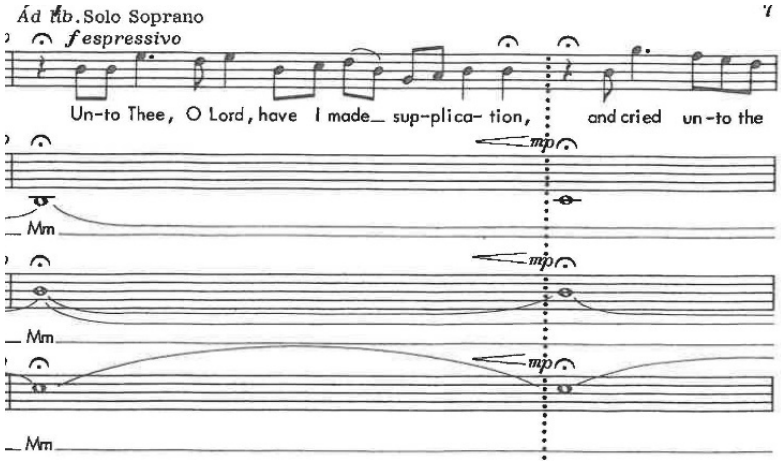
Example 3.15 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," mm. 1–6

The opening sonority returns at measure 28 in the section marked *tutti*. Here, the sopranos and altos again sing a unison G, followed by the tenors and basses on the same pitch. These six measures function as a transition into the contrasting middle section.



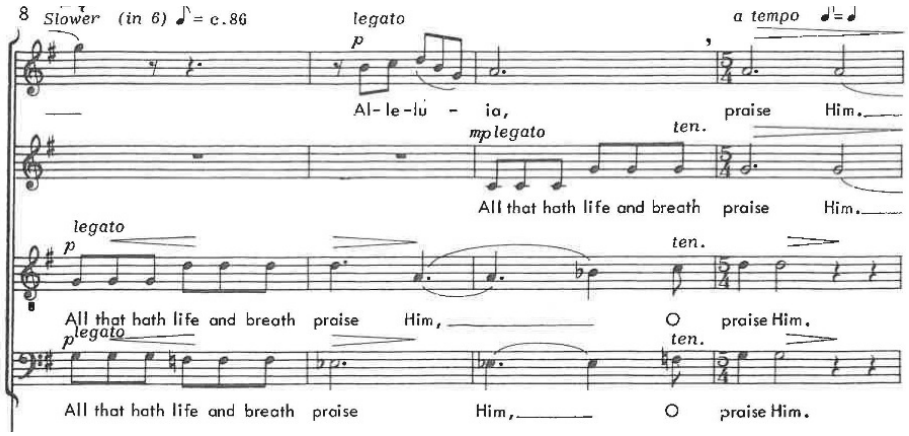
Example 3.16 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," mm. 28–33

The B section unfolds in several parts. Measures 34–35 feature a soprano solo supported by sustained alto, tenor, and bass harmonies.



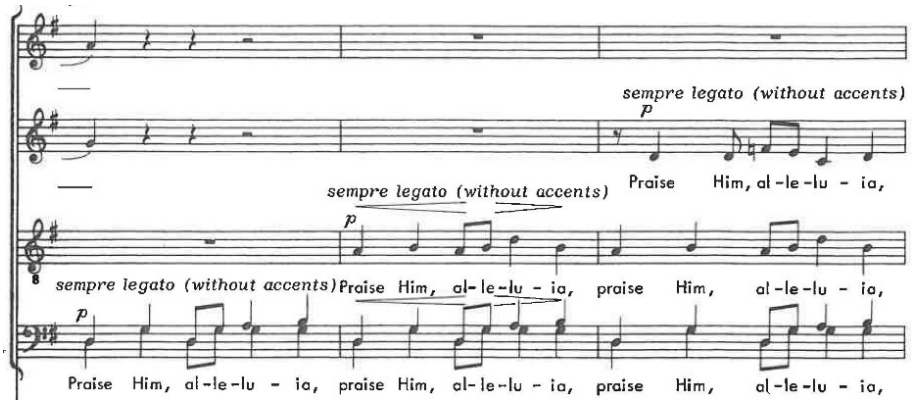
Example 3.17 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," mm. 34–35

Measures 36–39 provide a brief transition that recalls modified material from the opening section. Unlike the opening, however, the tempo now slows, and the music shifts from a feeling of two broad beats to one of six equal beats.



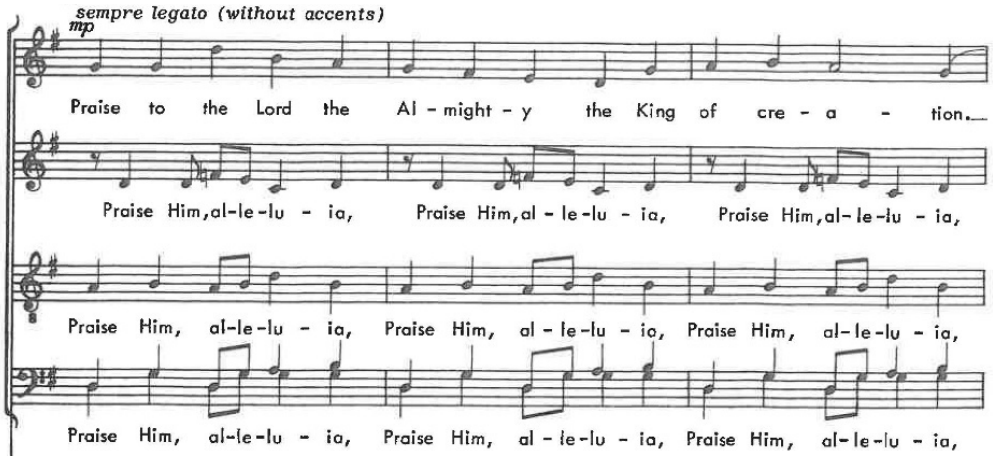
Example 3.18 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," mm. 36–39

Beginning at measure 40, the bass, tenor, and alto voices each enter successively with a repeated motivic idea.



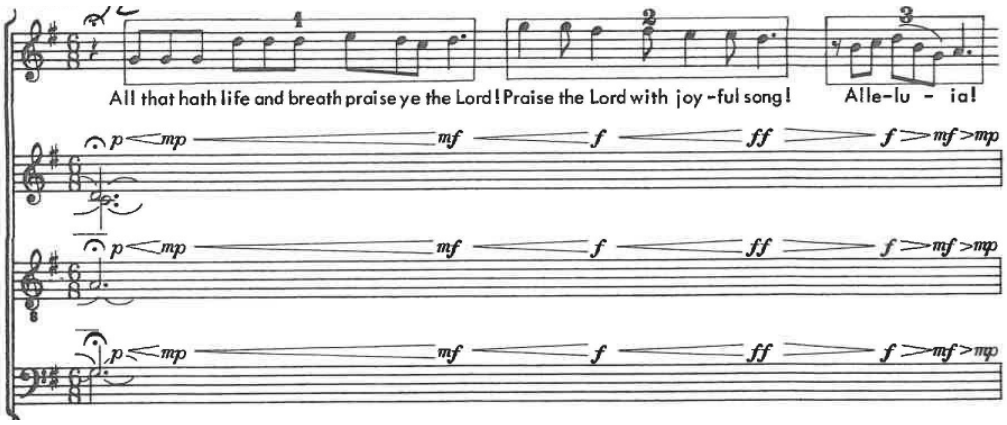
Example 3.19 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," mm. 40–42

Against this layered background, the sopranos present a direct quotation of the hymn tune. Clausen marks their entrance *sempre legato* and sets the melody in 5/4 rather than the hymn's usual triple meter. This change subtly transforms the familiar chorale without obscuring it, allowing the tune to emerge within Clausen's own rhythmic language.



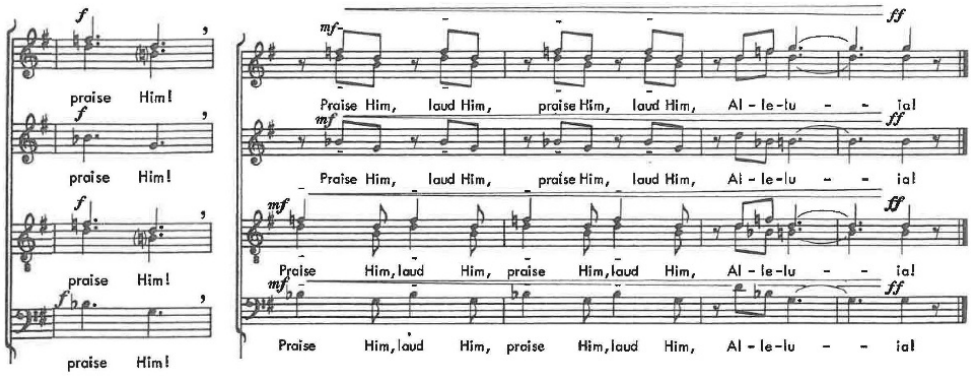
Example 3.20 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," mm. 43–45

The final portion of the B section introduces a new musical idea with aleatoric elements. The lower three voices provide harmonic support while the sopranos sing freely above them. Clausen directs the singers to enter one at a time in quickening succession, repeating combinations of three melodic themes with rhythmic freedom. Because these three themes are drawn from the opening A material, even the freer passage remains connected to the work's initial musical ideas. The effect is one of expanding praise: individual voices enter separately, but together they create a growing texture of joyful acclamation around the text "All that hath life and breath praise ye the Lord."



Example 3.21 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," final portion of B section

Clausen concludes the work with a portion of the A material and a five-measure coda featuring the text "praise him, laud him, alleluia."



Example 3.22 Clausen's "All that Hath Life & Breath," coda

Clausen's setting demonstrates the continuing influence of the Lutheran choral tradition shaped by Christiansen. Like Christiansen, Clausen treats the chorale not simply as a congregational melody but as the basis for a larger choral work. At the same time, his setting reflects a later musical language through its use of changing meter and

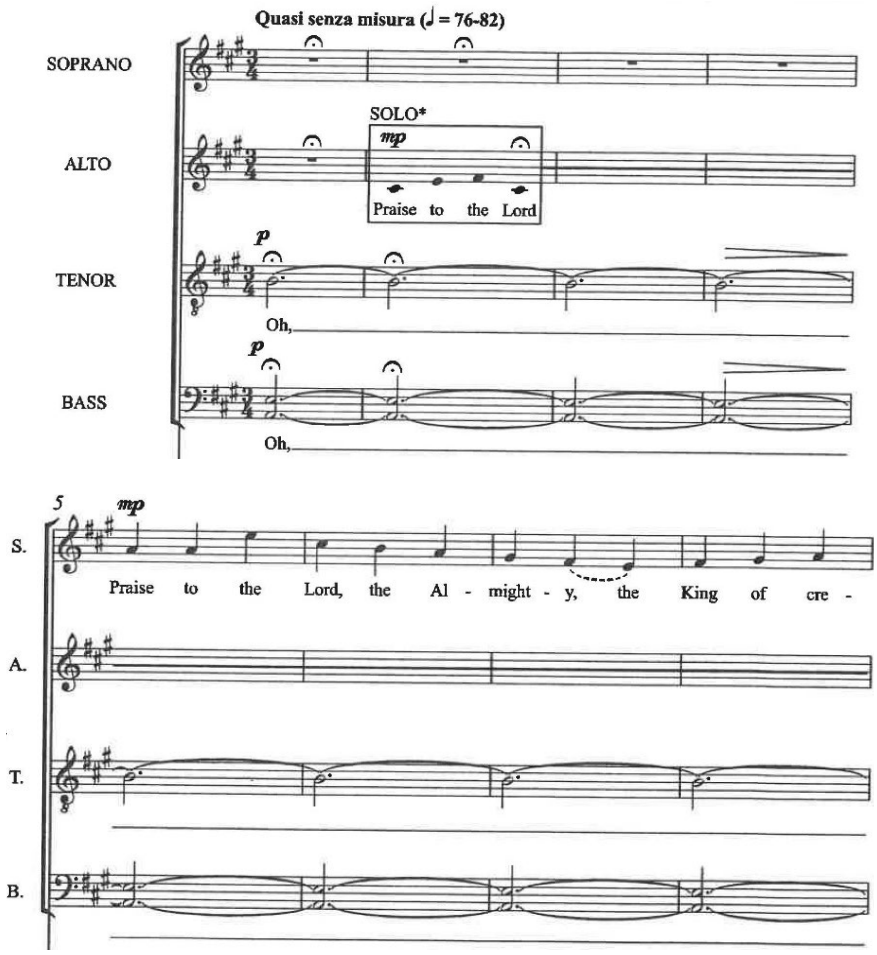
aleatoric writing. In this way, the work extends Christiansen's chorale practice while showing how the chorale continued to inspire new forms of sacred choral expression in American collegiate music.

Alvin Trotman's arrangement of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" demonstrates the reach of the American Lutheran a cappella choral tradition beyond St. Olaf College. Although that tradition remained closely associated with Christiansen and the St. Olaf Choir, its influence also extended to other Midwestern Lutheran institutions, including Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. Trotman's program note identifies Matthew Culloton, a Luther College graduate and composer, as one of the sources of inspiration for the setting. He also explains that he sought to preserve the hymn's familiarity while approaching it with newer harmonies and rhythms.[32] In this way, Trotman's arrangement stands downstream from the same chorale tradition shaped by Christiansen, while also reflecting the expanded musical language of a later generation.

Trotman's setting is cast in two large sections and uses the first and fourth stanzas of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." The opening section begins with a sustained sonority in the lower voices: the basses hold an open fifth on A and E, while the tenors add B above E, creating another open fifth. Together, these pitches form a spacious, chant-like foundation. Above this sonority, the altos introduce an aleatoric four-note motive, entering independently and continuing at their own tempi until measure 28. This procedure recalls the controlled aleatoric writing in Clausen's "All That Hath Life & Breath Praise Ye the Lord," though Trotman uses the technique more quietly and

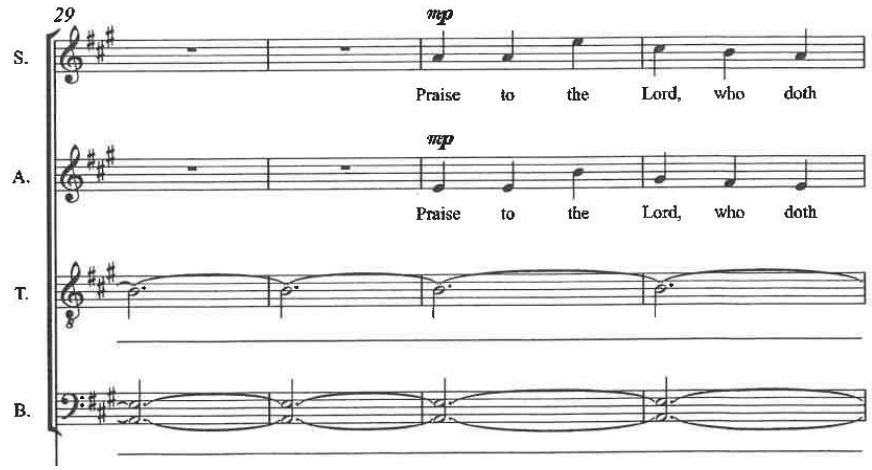
[32] Alvin Trotman, program notes to *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* (Solemn Flight Music, 2014).

atmospherically. At measure 5, the sopranos enter in unison with the first stanza of the hymn while the drone and aleatoric elements continue beneath them.



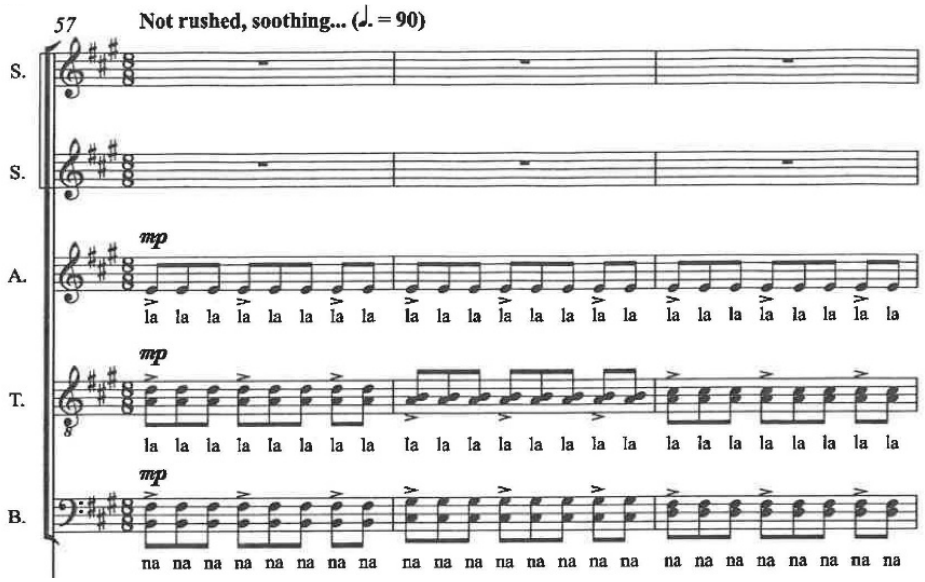
Example 3.23 Trotman's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," mm. 1–8

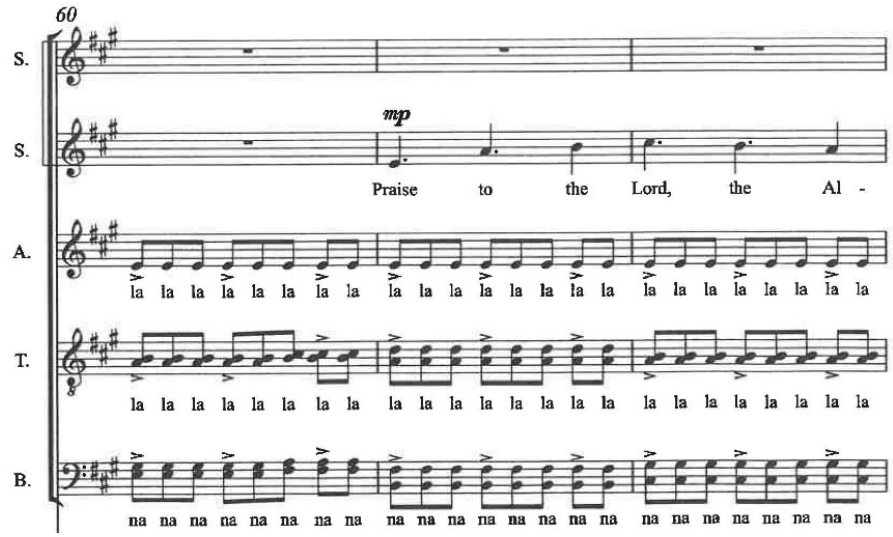
In measures 29–56, the sopranos continue the hymn melody with alto harmony added above the sustained lower-voice sonority. The tenors and basses maintain the open fifths through the conclusion of the first section at measure 56.

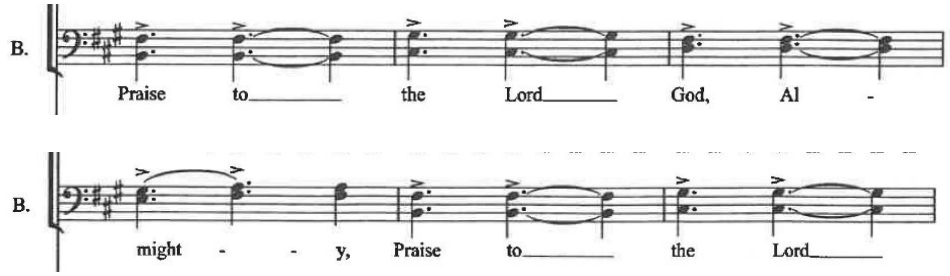


Example 3.24 Trotman's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," mm. 29–32

The second section introduces a contrasting rhythmic character. Marked 8/8, it moves with a light, dance-like pulse. The alto, tenor, and bass voices establish a repeated "la" or "na" pattern with accents on the first, fourth, and seventh beats, creating a rhythmic foundation over which the hymn tune is reshaped.

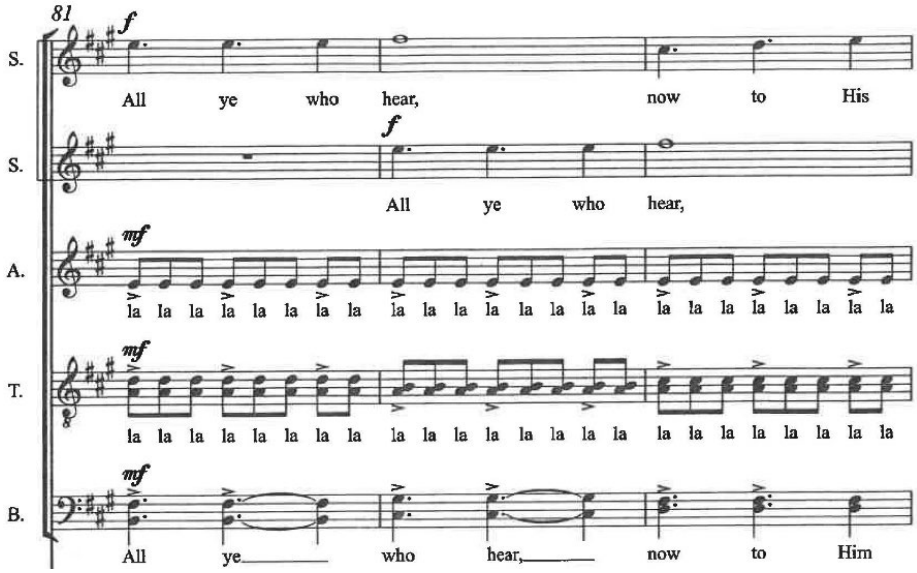



60
S.
S.
A.
T.
B.
mp
Praise to the Lord, the Al -
la la la



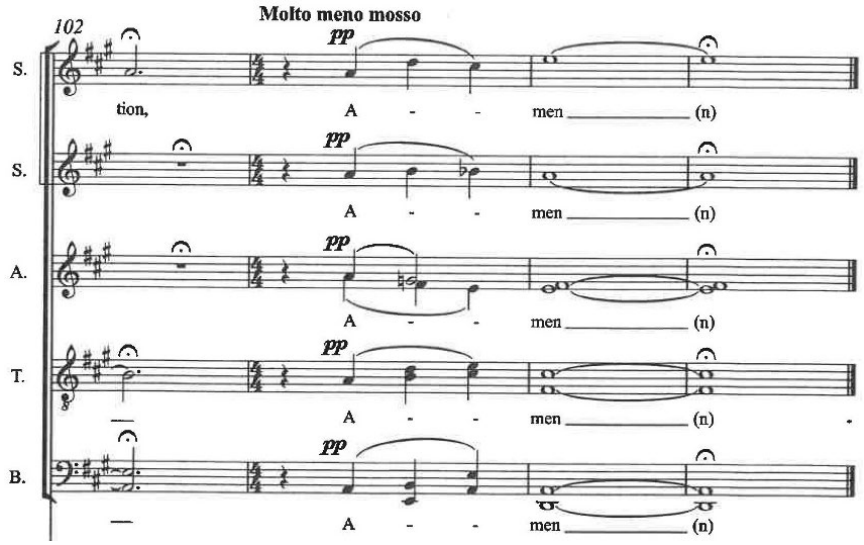
Example 3.27 Trotman's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," ostinato pattern two

Trotman gives particular attention to the phrase "All ye who hear, now to his temple draw near." Beginning at measure 81, the first sopranos sing the third phrase of the hymn, while the second sopranos echo the material. As in Christiansen and Clausen, the invitation to praise is not treated as a static text. It is given musical shape through repetition, layered entrances, and expanding choral participation.



Example 3.28 Trotman's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," mm. 81–83

The arrangement concludes with a short coda that recalls the opening section. Once again, the tenors and basses sustain open fifths while the soprano voice sings the opening fourteen-syllable phrase of the hymn. Trotman then closes with a final "Amen," not as a loud or exuberant gesture, but as a soft, subdued homophonic statement marked *pianissimo*.



Example 3.29 Trotman's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," mm. 102–105

Cody R. Jones's setting of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" offers another perspective on the Lutheran a cappella chorale tradition. Jones was not a student of either Dr. Martin Luther College or St. Olaf College, and therefore does not stand in direct institutional succession to either Reuter or Christiansen. As a Lutheran composer, church musician, and music educator, however, he works within a practical church music context. His setting is dedicated to the choir of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina, a detail that suggests parish use rather than collegiate concert

performance. In this respect, Jones's arrangement stands closer to the worship-centered tradition represented by Reuter and Backer.

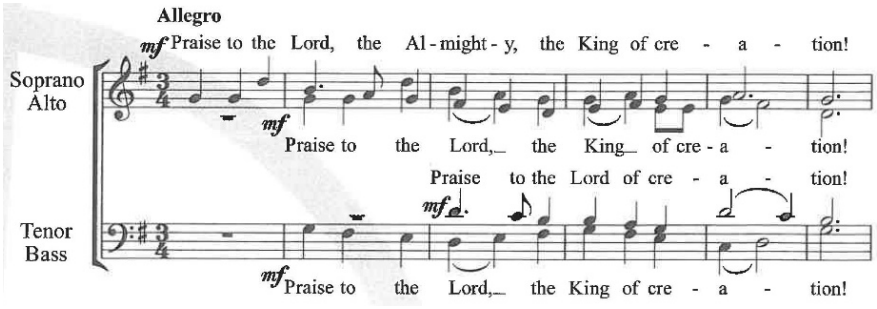
The publication context strengthens this connection. Jones's setting was published by Concordia Publishing House, the publishing arm of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Since its founding in 1869, CPH has served congregations, schools, and individuals with doctrinally sound materials and other church resources.[33] This denominational context is significant because the Missouri Synod and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Other States were in fellowship during Reuter's years at Dr. Martin Luther College. A century earlier, Reuter's practical sacred choral music often circulated through private publication and institutional use. Jones's setting shows how far church music publication has moved by the early twenty-first century: a work similar in function to Reuter's parish-oriented sacred music could now appear through an established denominational publisher with national distribution.

Jones's setting also invites a final comparison with Reuter. Reuter apparently never wrote an a cappella motet on "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" or on the tune LOBE DEN HERREN. If he had written such a work, however, Jones's setting suggests one possible model for how a Reuter-like approach might have sounded. It is not a virtuosic concert showpiece, nor is it primarily an exercise in choral sonority for its own sake. Rather, it is a sectional, text-governed chorale setting for a capable church choir.

[33] Concordia Publishing House, "Who We Are," accessed May 11, 2026, https://about.cph.org/who-we-are.html#ourstory.

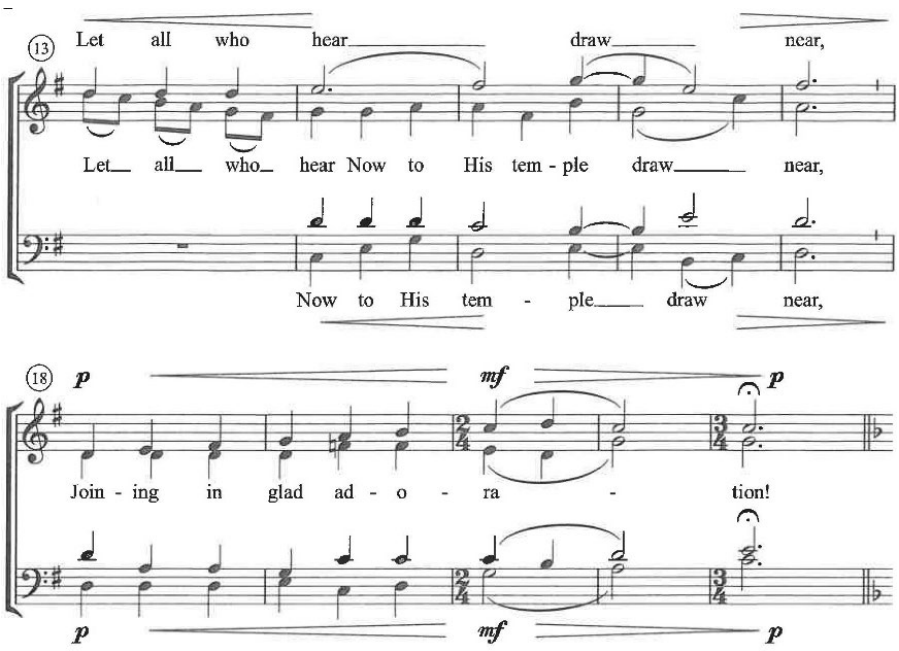
In that respect, the work represents precisely the kind of useful, well-crafted Lutheran a cappella music that was not readily available in the early twentieth century and that both Reuter and Christiansen sought to provide in different ways. Reuter responded to the scarcity of good church music by composing practical sacred works for Lutheran schools and congregations. Christiansen, concerned about the decline of congregational singing and eager to elevate choral practice, shaped chorales for disciplined a cappella ensembles. Jones's setting, written a century later, demonstrates that Lutheran church musicians can now draw on newly composed a cappella chorale settings that join textual clarity, musical craft, and congregational usefulness.

Jones organizes the work in three large sections that correspond to stanzas one, four, and five of the hymn. Rather than repeating the same musical material for each stanza, he gives each one its own character. The opening section begins in G major with an imitative treatment of the hymn's opening gesture. The soprano and alto voices share the initial melodic material, while the tenor and bass parts also move in descending lines. This restrained imitation creates clarity and motion without obscuring the hymn tune itself. Jones then applies a similar procedure to the second phrase, allowing the setting to develop while remaining closely tied to the chorale melody.



Example 3.30 Jones's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," mm. 1–6

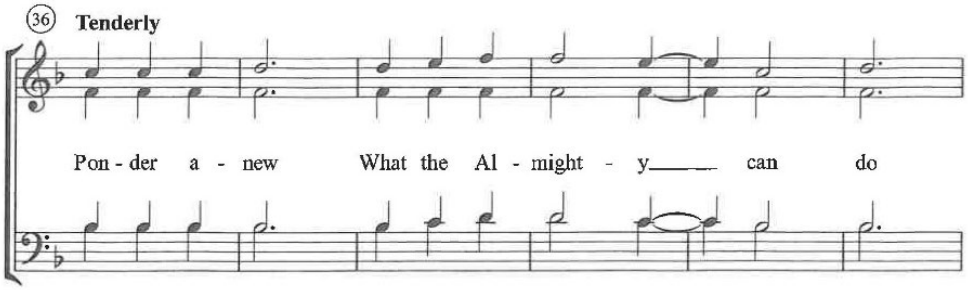
The third phrase of the stanza introduces a more deliberate textural contrast. Jones staggers the entrances of the soprano-alto and tenor-bass pairs, shaping the phrase with a crescendo toward the words "Let all who hear now to his temple draw near." The final phrase, "Joining in glad adoration," then receives the first fully homophonic statement for all voices. Jones also avoids a conventional tonic close. Rather than resolving the stanza in G major, he ends on C major, preparing the transition into the following section in F major.



Example 3.31 Jones's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," mm. 13–21

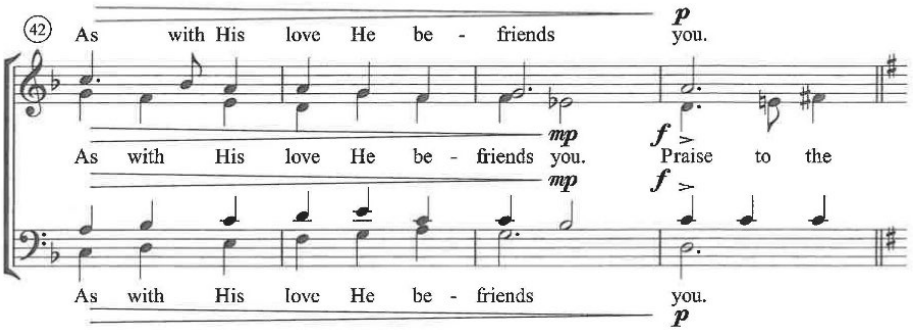
The second main section begins more simply, with three-part homophonic writing, before expanding to include all four voices. The restrained texture suits the reflective character of the third stanza. Jones underscores that character by marking the

phrase “Ponder anew what the Almighty can do” with the expressive indication “Tenderly.”



Example 3.32 Jones’s “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” mm. 36–41

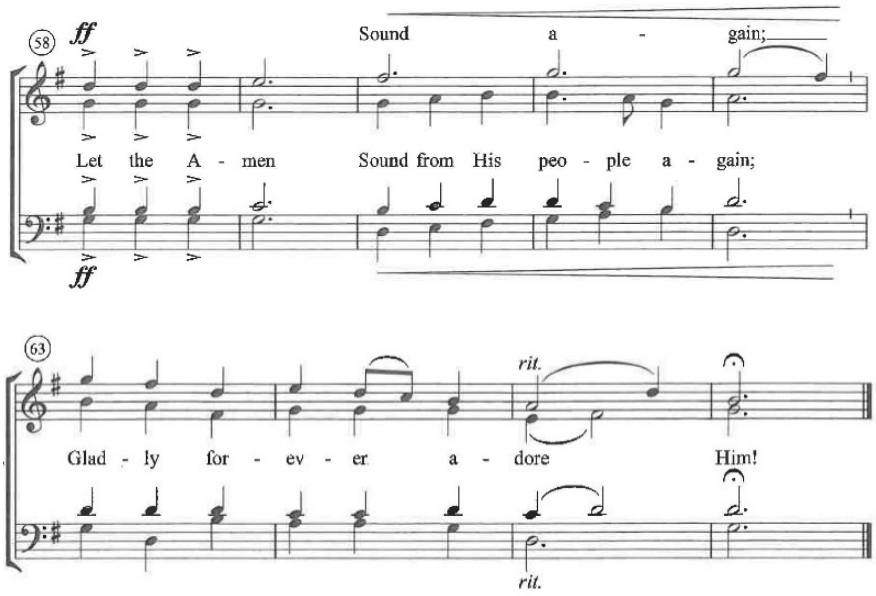
At the conclusion of the third stanza, the voices diminish before the alto and tenor lines overlap with the opening phrase of the final stanza. This overlapping entrance marks a turn from reflection back to proclamation. During this transition, Jones returns to the original key of G major and prepares the motet’s final section.



Example 3.33 Jones’s “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” mm. 42–45

The third section, marked *Allegro*, gradually builds to a *fortissimo* climax at the words “Let the Amen,” giving the final stanza a more declamatory character. A final

crescendo then carries the work toward its closing affirmation: “Gladly forever adore Him!”



Example 3.34 Jones’s “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” mm. 58–66

SUMMARY

Chapter 3 has traced Reuter’s legacy beyond public reputation, locating it in the institutional, pedagogical, and worship-centered life of the church. Reuter’s influence moved through a line of teachers and church musicians who shared his conviction that sacred music serves the Word. Emil Backer and Bruce Backer preserved and extended Reuter’s cantor-teacher model at Dr. Martin Luther College and Martin Luther College.

The comparison with Christiansen and with later chorale settings clarifies the larger argument of this study. Christiansen’s influence moved through the public world of

collegiate a cappella performance, while Reuter's influence remained closer to the church's worship and educational life. Later settings of "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," including those by René Clausen, Alvin Trotman, and Cody R. Jones, show that the Lutheran chorale continued to inspire composers in both concert and parish contexts. Jones's setting is especially important because it demonstrates the continued relevance of Reuter's kind of practical, text-centered, worship-oriented choral writing.

Reuter's legacy, therefore, belongs within the broader definition of the Lutheran choral tradition because his work helped form the musical life of Lutheran teachers, students, congregations, and church musicians. Through these influences, Reuter continued to shape Lutheran choral practice long after his death. The later availability of settings such as Jones's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" shows that the need Reuter addressed in the early twentieth century did not disappear. It became part of a continuing Lutheran effort to provide choirs with music that is musically strong, textually clear, and theologically purposeful.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION: REUTER AND CHRISTIANSEN AS TWO PILLARS OF MINNESOTA'S LUTHERAN CHORAL TRADITION

This study has argued that the history of Lutheran choral music in early twentieth-century Minnesota must be told within a broader frame than the one usually shaped by the national success of the St. Olaf Choir. F. Melius Christiansen's work in Northfield was undeniably significant. As noted earlier, his disciplined a cappella choir, extensive touring, and development of a recognizable choral sound helped shape American collegiate choral standards. However, Christiansen's achievement does not tell the whole story. At the same time, and in the same state, Friedrich Otto Reuter was forming another stream of Lutheran choral practice at Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm. Reuter's work was less public, less widely disseminated, and less often remembered in histories of American choral singing. Nevertheless, it was foundational to the development of Lutheran choral music in early twentieth-century Minnesota.

The comparison of these two men requires a careful definition of the Lutheran choral tradition. If that tradition is understood primarily as a performance practice—especially a cappella singing, refined tone, blend, and touring—then Christiansen naturally stands at the center. If, however, the tradition is understood more broadly as the formation of sacred choral life within Lutheran institutions, then Reuter must be placed alongside him. Lutheran choral tradition includes not only sound but purpose; not only

technique but confession; not only concert performance but worship and the proclamation of the Word. Reuter's work at Dr. Martin Luther College demonstrates that such a tradition was already taking form in New Ulm before the St. Olaf Choir became a national model.

Reuter's funeral also reveals how his contemporaries understood his life and work. Emil Backer records that a very large gathering of pastors, teachers, students, former students, and friends attended the service. The sermon was preached by Rev. C. J. Albrecht, the "Father of Dr. Martin Luther College" and its first president, on the theme "And He Saw Jesus Alone." Albrecht interpreted Reuter's life through that phrase, emphasizing that Reuter had seen Christ alone in preparing himself for service to the church, in serving Christ, in leaving the German state church, and in coming to America to teach.[1] This account brings together the major themes of Reuter's legacy: teaching, music, confession, and service to the Word. Even in death, he was remembered not chiefly as a public musical figure, but as a church musician whose life had been governed by faith and vocation.

Reuter's legacy has also received later public and institutional recognition. In 2024, he was inducted into the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame, joining F. Melius Christiansen, who had received the same honor in 1989.[2] The two men were not inducted at the same time, and their musical legacies developed through different institutions and different kinds of public visibility. Even so, their shared recognition provides symbolic

[1] Emil D. Backer, "Composers of the Lutheran Church: Prof. Fritz Reuter," *The Lutheran School Bulletin*, December 1949, 5.
[2] "Melius Christiansen, 1989," Minnesota Music Hall of Fame, accessed April 22, 2024, https://mnmusichalloffame.org/melius-christiansen/.

confirmation of this study's argument. The national reputation of the St. Olaf Choir had long secured Christiansen's place in Minnesota's musical memory. Reuter received recognition later, but that recognition points to a legacy no less important for Lutheran choral formation in the state. The Minnesota Music Hall of Fame recognition, therefore, serves as a modern reminder that Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition rests on more than one foundation.

Another visible sign of Reuter's continuing legacy appears in a stained-glass window at St. John's Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan. The window features the seal of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and places Reuter alongside Johann Sebastian Bach, surrounded by angels and musical notation. The inscription beside the synodical seal reads, "Praise the Lord, sing praises to our God" (Psalm 147:1). Near Bach appears the title "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," together with a musical excerpt from that work. Near Reuter, the title "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage" appears, accompanied by a musical excerpt from Reuter's tune for that text.

The pairing of Bach and Reuter is significant because it visually connects Reuter to the Lutheran musical inheritance that shaped him and that he helped transmit at Dr. Martin Luther College. Since Reuter could trace his educational lineage back to Bach, the window presents him not merely as a local teacher-composer, but as a bearer of a broader Lutheran musical tradition. In that sense, the window becomes another form of legacy. It fixes in glass the same claim this study has made in prose, namely, that Reuter belongs among the pillars of Lutheran choral formation.



Example 4.1 Stained-glass window at St. John's Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan, featuring Johann Sebastian Bach and Fritz Reuter

This historical comparison has implications for present practice. A choir connected to a Lutheran institution does not remain Lutheran simply because it sings with discipline, beauty, or refinement. The texts it carries, the doctrine those texts confess, and the purpose for which its music is offered sustain its identity. Artistic excellence remains necessary, but it must be joined to theological understanding. Lutheran colleges and their choirs need not share a single tonal model or institutional pattern; nevertheless, each must remain conscious of the tradition from which its music arises. When that awareness is

lost, choral achievement can become separated from the confession that gives it meaning. Bruce Backer expressed this need for both inheritance and renewal when he advised future church musicians:

> "You can be a successful church musician if you know the past and keep an eye to the future. If you only have an eye to the future, you'll be rootless and you'll be caught up in all kinds of trends; if you have your eye only in the back, then you don't know what's going on…So you have to know your past and you have to know where you are—and there comes the tension. If you know your past, really know it well, out of that tension comes something fruitful."[3]

Roger Hermanson, who directed the Martin Luther College Choir from 1980 to 2003, described the choir's purpose in language that strongly echoes Reuter's understanding of sacred music:

> "First and always the function of the choir is to proclaim the Word of God–sin and grace–law and Gospel in all its truth and as purely as we can…and with that as a goal, to do it as excellently as our gifts allow. We function with that message as representatives of this college to many people…like a church choir to the Synod in a way….It serves the parishioners as it serves itself in worshipping our Lord and Savior. Even in a concert setting….we have a privilege to serve those who come to hear us. It isn't just the performance, but it is something richer than that spiritually."[4]

Minnesota's Lutheran choral tradition, therefore, cannot be traced to one ensemble, one sonority, or one public model. It emerged through two complementary forms of influence: the outward reach of Christiansen's collegiate choral artistry in

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[3] Jonathan T. Leach, "The New Ulm Men Behind the Music: A Study of the Lives, Ministries, and Legacies of James Engel, Bruce R. Backer, and Edward H. Meyer" (student paper, Lutheranism in America, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 22, 2002), 15.
[4] Grace A. Hennig, "The Background, Life's Work, and Influence of Emil D. Backer" (master's thesis, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, 1999), 228.

Northfield and the churchly formation fostered by Reuter in New Ulm. Christiansen remains indispensable to the history of American collegiate a cappella singing. Reuter must stand beside him in the history of Lutheran musical formation. Friedrich Otto Reuter's work shows that this tradition was not only heard in performance; it was cultivated in classrooms, rehearsed in choirs, embedded in worship, and handed on through the ordinary musical life of the church.

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APPENDIX A: THE SACRED CHORAL MUSIC OF FRITZ REUTER ACCORDING TO THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Difficulty ratings: E = Easy; M = Medium; D = Difficult

Title	Copyright Date	Performing Forces	Notes for Church Musicians	Difficulty
ADVENT				
Arise, Shine Mache dich auf, werde Licht!	1918	SATB, SSAA, or TTBB	Three scorings; German or English text; Isaiah 59:9; useful for Advent, Epiphany, or mission festival.	M
Star and Crown of My Salvation Stern und Krone meine Seele	1937	SATB	Chorale setting; German or English text; devotional Advent or general Christological use.	E
Prophecy Weissagung First line: The People that walked in darkness have seen a great light	1920	SATB, children's choir or soloist, organ	German or English text; unison opening followed by SATB chorus; Isaiah 9:2-7.	E
CHRISTMAS AND NATIVITY				
And There Were In the Same Country, Shepherds Es waren Hirten auf dem Felde	1923	SATB, soprano and alto solo, organ	German or English text; contrasting solos lead to an extended SATB section; Luke 2:8-14.	D

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Christmas Carol Weihnachtsgesang	1919	SATB, children's choir or soloist, organ	Three scorings; German or English text; Christmas proclamation centered on salvation in Christ.	M
Come, Hither, Ye Children Ihr Kinderlein kommet	1925	SATB, children's choir or soloist, organ	German or English text; children's voices sing the carol while SATB choir supplies original material and harmonization.	E
Glory to God in the Highest Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe	1918	SATB, SSA optional section, soprano solo, organ	German or English text; five-section design alternating soloist, chorus, and semichorus; Luke 2:11-14.	M
He Shall Feed His Flock Er wird seine Herde weiden	1909	SATB, SAT or children's choir, organ	German or English text; three movements drawing on Isaiah 40, Luke 12, John 10, and 1 Timothy 4:18	M
In Bethlehem a little child In Bethlehem ein Kindelein	1910	TTBB	German text; AAB form with doxological close.	M

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Now Thou Hast Come Bist nun gekommen	1907	SATB, soprano and baritone solo, organ	German or English text; reflective Christmas setting on redemption in Christ; based on Isaiah 9:2-7.	D
O Break Forth, Spread Out Thy Pinions Brich hervor, breit aus die Flügel	1937	SATB	Chorale setting; German or English text; useful for Christmas services or carol settings.	E
Our Savior Is Born Unser Heiland ist geborn	1918	SSA, organ	German or English text; children's or treble-voice Christmas setting.	M
The Story of Christmas Night Weihnachtsgeschichte	1921	SATB, Narrator, organ or piano	German or English text; Luke 2:1-20 with narrator and traditional carols; choral and full scores available.	E
Uns ist ein Kind geboren A Child is Born	1909	SATB	German text; combines Isaiah 9:6 with Luke 2:14; a cappella Christmas motet.	M
Weihnachtslied Christmas Carol	1908	TTBB	German text; joyful Christmas setting with redemptive emphasis and Kyrie section.	D
Where Are You Going, Children Dear? Wohin, ihr Kinderlein, wohin?	1925	SATB, SA or children's choir	German or English text; call-and-response design for adult and children's voices, with combined final stanza.	E

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EPIPHANY				
Arise, Shine Mache dich auf, werde Licht!	1918	SATB, SSAA, or TTBB	Three scorings; German or English text; Isaiah 59:9; suitable for Epiphany or mission festival.	M
Praise the Lord Lobt den Herrn	1937	SSA	Chorale setting; German or English text; emphasizes Christ as the Light of the world.	E
Prophecy Weissagung First line: The People that walked in darkness have seen a great light	1920	SATB, children's choir or soloist, organ	German or English text; unison opening followed by SATB chorus; Isaiah 9:2-7.	E
LENT				
For My Savior's Face I'm Longing	undated	SATB	Chorale setting; English text; two stanzas on the believer's longing for the joys of heaven.	E
For God So Loved the World Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt	1911	SATB	German or English text; John 3:16, Romans 13:12, and Luke 2:14; a cappella, with optional organ manuscript.	M
O Jesus Christ, Our Soul's Desire O Jesu, einig wahres Haupt	1916	SATB	Chorale setting; German or English text; emphasizes redemption and salvation in Christ.	E

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Psalm 90	Manuscript undated	SATB, semichorus, soprano solo, organ	German text; themes of repentance, mortality, and divine help; larger scoring with semichorus and solo.	D
Surely, He Hath Borne Our Griefs Fürwahr, er trug unsre Krankheit	1919	SATB, soprano solo, organ	German or English text; Isaiah 53:4-5; concludes with the chorale Von Herzen wir dir danken.	D
HOLY WEEK				
Behold the Lamb of God Siehe, das ist Gottes Lamm	1911	SATB	German or English text; expressive motet based on John 1:29 and 1 Peter 2:24.	M
Hosanna to the Son of David Hosianna dem Sohne Davids	1911	SATB	German or English text; Psalm 14:7, Psalm 50:2, and Matthew 21:9; varied voice groupings frame repeated hosannas.	M
Umschliess' mich ganz mit deinem Frieden Enfold me completely in your peace	1911	TTBB	German text; meditative, a cappella motet on the eternal peace won through Christ's cross.	M
EASTER				

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Christ Is Risen Christ ist erstanden	1925	SSA or SATB	Three scorings; German or English text; traditional German Easter text from ca. 1100 with original melody and harmonization.	E
O Day of Rejoicing, O Blest Eastertide Du liebliche Ostern, du selige Zeit	1918	SATB divisi, Trio: soprano, alto, tenor, children's choir, organ	German or English text; three-movement Easter cantata with children's choir; orchestration available in manuscript.	D
Easter music (based on words from Holy Scripture) Ostermusik First line: The sorrows of death compassed me	1909	SATB, SA or TB duet, bass solo choir, organ	German or English text; multi-part Easter work using Psalms and 1 Corinthians 15; scoring varies by section.	M
The Lord Is Risen! Der Herr ist auferstanden!	1911	SATB	German or English text; Luke 24:34 and 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; useful for Easter Day or Eastertide.	M
Psalm 118	1922	SATB, organ	German or English text; Easter psalm setting with a central semichorus section.	E
PENTECOST				

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Sing Ye With Happy Voices Freut euch, ihr Christen, alle	1923	SATB, SA or TB duet, quartet, organ	German or English text; three-movement Pentecost cantata. The first movement focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit; the second includes the chorale text Verleih, dass wir dich lieben / "Abide, O Dear Redeemer" as a vocal duet; the third concludes with praise for the work of the Holy Spirit.	M
TRINITY, PRAISE, AND GENERAL WORSHIP				
Lobet unsern Gott Praise our God	Manuscript 1913	SATB, string orchestra, piano	German text; alternates semichorus and full chorus; separate manuscript includes piano duet accompaniment.	M
Lord, Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing	1910	SATB	Chorale setting; English text; suitable as a closing hymn or benediction response.	E
My Zion, God's Fair Garden Mein Zion, Gottes Garten	1910	TTBB and SA, or SATTBB, organ	German or English text; flexible voicing; based on Isaiah 51:3.	M
Te Deum Herr Gott dich loben wir	1917	SATB, SSAA, or TTBB	Three scorings; German or English text; Luther's Trinitarian paraphrase of the Latin Te Deum.	M
Thank Ye the Lord Danket dem Herrn	1937	SATB	Chorale setting; German or English text; general praise; may be sung first by a small choir and repeated by a larger choir.	E

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Von Herzen wir dir danken From Our Hearts We Thank You	1919	SATB	Chorale setting; German text; appropriate for general praise or thanksgiving.	E
REFORMATION				
A Mighty Fortress Is Our God Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott	1914	TTBB, SATTBB, organ	German or English text; four-stanza chorale concertato, each stanza set differently; orchestration available in manuscript.	M
Sing Your Proud Hosannas Singet frohe Psalmen, fromme Christen all!	1916	SATB, soprano or tenor solo, quartet	German or English text; multi-part work shaped by the performing forces; hymn of confidence concluding with Ein feste Burg.	E
Song of Jubilation for Reformation Jubelgesang zum Reformations – Jubiläum 1917 First line: Praise ye the Lord, all ye lands	1916	SATB, SAT, children's choir, organ	German or English text; festival work with Scripture from Psalm 100 and Isaiah 12 and 52.	M
THANKSGIVING				
Thank Ye the Lord Danket dem Herrn	1937	SATB	Chorale setting; German or English text; general praise; may be sung first by a small choir and repeated by a larger choir.	E

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Von Herzen wir dir danken From Our Hearts We Thank You	1919	SATB	Chorale setting; German text; concise thanksgiving or general praise response.	E
Song of Thanks (We Plow the Field and Scatter) Wir pflügen und wir streuen	1909	SATB	German or English text; three-stanza harvest hymn setting with repeated refrain.	E
PRAYER, TRUST, AND DEVOTION				
Be Thou Faithful Unto Death Sei getreu bis in den Tod	1915	SATB	German or English text; Revelation 2:10; appropriate for confirmation, funeral, or encouragement.	M
Be Thou Our Guide Herr, gehe mit	1918	SATB, organ	German or English text; Psalm 23; prayerful setting for guidance and trust.	E
Please Bitte First line: O let me feel that thou art near me	undated	SATB	Chorale setting; German or English text; two stanzas praying for consolation in distress.	E
Blessed Are They That Hear the Word of God Selig sind, die Gottes Wort hören	1915	TTBB	German or English text; Psalm 119; useful for services emphasizing the Word.	M

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Come In! Lord Jesus! Jesus, herein!	1937	SA, organ	German or English text; prayer for Christ's presence and blessing; may be sung unison with keyboard.	E
Motette First line: Der Herr wird mich erlösen The Lord will deliver me	undated	SSA	German text; three individual treble part scores.	E
For the Mountains Shall Depart Es sollen wohl Berge weichen	1923	SATB or TTBB	Two scorings; German or English text; Isaiah 54:10 and 2 Corinthians 12:9.	M
God Is Our Refuge Gott ist Zuversicht	1910	SATB or TTBB	Two scorings; German or English text; Psalm 46; suitable for Reformation or general trust.	M
Ich hebe meine Augen auf I lift up my eyes	1909	SATB, organ	German text; Psalm 121; organ part is optional.	M/D
If God Be For Us Ist Gott für uns	1914	SATB divisi	German or English text; Romans 8:31; contrasting moods follow the text.	D
Lord, 'Bide With Us Herr, Bleib Bei Uns	1937	SSA	Chorale setting; German or English text; prayer for God's help and final deliverance.	E
The Lord Is My Shepherd Der Herr ist mein Hirte	1909	SATB, semichorus, baritone solo, organ	German or English text; Psalm 23; includes semichorus, baritone solo, and organ.	M

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The Lord's Prayer Vater unser	1915	SATB or TTBB	Two scorings; German or English text; useful for worship programming.	M
Wenn's will Abend warden When it is evening, Lord, do not forsake us	1908	TTBB	German text; evening prayer asking for God's help when danger draws near.	M
FUNERAL AND COMFORT				
Be Thou Faithful Unto Death Sei getreu bis in den Tod	1915	SATB	German or English text; Revelation 2:10; useful for funerals or services of Christian perseverance.	M
For My Savior's Face I'm Longing	undated	SATB	Chorale setting; English text; two stanzas on the comforts of heaven.	E
For the Mountains Shall Depart Es sollen wohl Berge weichen	1923	SATB or TTBB	Two scorings; German or English text; Isaiah 54:10 and 2 Corinthians 12:9.	M
Jerusalem, Thou City Fair and High Jerusalem, du hochgebaute Stadt	1918	TTBB	German or English text; easier TTBB form also available; suitable for funerals or All Saints.	E/M

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Praise Our God, All Ye His Servants Lobet unsern Gott	1910	Mixed choir, SAT, tenor solo, organ	German or English text; three-part form; middle section references Revelation 19:9.	M
Umschliess' mich ganz mit deinem Frieden Enfold me completely in your peace	1911	TTBB	German text; meditative text on eternal life through Christ's cross.	M
MISSION FESTIVAL				
Arise, Shine Mache dich auf, werde Licht!	1918	SATB, SSAA, or TTBB	Three scorings; German or English text; Isaiah 59:9.	M
Sing Your Proud Hosannas Singet frohe Psalmen, fromme Christen all!	1916	SATB, soprano or tenor solo, quartet	German or English text; multi-part work shaped by the performing forces; concludes with Ein feste Burg.	E
LITURGICAL				
Te Deum Herr Gott dich loben wir	1917	SATB, SSAA, or TTBB	Three scorings; German or English text; Luther's Trinitarian paraphrase of the Latin Te Deum.	M
The Lord's Prayer Vater unser	1915	SATB or TTBB	Two scorings; German or English text; suitable for liturgical or devotional use.	M

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These Things the Seer, Isaiah, Did Befall Jesaja, dem Propheten, das geschah	1917	TTBB	German or English text; Luther's Sanctus hymn text and tune; useful as a choral Sanctus.	E

Reuter self-published many of these works through his daughter, Magdalene Clara Reuter, who lived in Milwaukee, WI, until her death in 1976. Martin Luther College holds copies of all listed works in its choral library. For selections not in public domain, permission for reproduction or performance may be sought through Reuter's granddaughter, Margo Martens of Annandale, Minnesota.