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Preaching About Pipes and Praise: 
Lutheran Organ Sermons of the Seventeenth Century
Joyce L. Irwin

The seventeenth century was a grand era for organ building. As new organs were installed in Lutheran churches in Germany, there were services of dedication at which a sermon was preached to explain the theological basis for using organ music in worship and to extol the value of musical instruments for the praise of God. In some respects these sermons were all similar: scriptural passages, predominantly from the Old Testament, were cited to remind the congregation of ancient musical practices; opponents of church organs from Zwingli through Calvin in the sixteenth century to Voetius and Grossgebauer in the seventeenth century were chastised as misguided or worse; the value of music for spiritual inspiration and psychological well-being was extolled; and, most important, the role of music in rendering proper praise to God was highlighted.

When the sermons were preached at a special occasion of thanksgiving and celebration, the scriptural text was frequently taken from the Psalms, particularly Psalm 150; with this text there was no difficulty in making the connection between the use of instrumental music and the praise of God. In other cases, the preacher kept to the lectionary text for the day, making the connection to music and organs with varying degrees of success.

This article is limited to organ sermons of the seventeenth century and does not claim to be a thorough study of all such sermons. Lucinde Braun has recently appealed for such a study, regretting that musicologists have paid little attention to the genre. My approach will be more theological than musicological, looking at the different homiletical approaches and the most prominent themes. Even within these limits, only a sampling of the available material on each topic is possible within an article of this length.

One question that arises immediately upon observing the length of the printed sermon is what the relationship is between the printed version and the sermon that was actually delivered from the pulpit. While we know that the standard length of the sermon at the time was about an hour, many of the sermons that have appeared in print could not possibly have been delivered within that time frame. Granted, the size of pages and font makes a comparison of length difficult, but they are not uncommonly about 60 dense pages long. While the writer of the shortest, at least as measured in number of pages, implies that he has submitted the sermon without revisions, others make no such claims, and at least one mentions on his title page that he has been asked to

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2 Johann Münstermann dedicated his Christliche Orgelpredigt to his sister-in-law Maria Scheidemann and said he copied it in his own hand for her to read, as she had been unable to attend the dedication of the Otterndorf organ because of illness. Her husband, the famous Heinrich Scheidemann, organist at St. Catharine in Hamburg, had provided the music for the dedication service. Münstermann’s sermon is in Hector Mithobius, Psalmodia Christiana (Bremen: Berger, 1665), 378–93.

submit an expanded version for print.\textsuperscript{3} We have good reason to believe, therefore, that most of these sermons had been edited and expanded before being sent to the publisher, and we can only hope that seventeenth-century congregations were not asked to sit through these lengthy discourses. Even the shorter, possibly unedited ones would stretch a twenty-first-century attention span beyond its limit. One can easily empathize with those who fell asleep during these expositions and wonder if the listener was entirely to blame.\textsuperscript{4}

Even supposing that readers of this journal could name some famous preachers of the seventeenth century, the preachers of these organ sermons would not be on the list. Few of the names would be familiar even to most specialists in the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Most were neither court preachers nor pastors of large-city churches; most of the towns in which these organs were being dedicated are not in any tourist guidebook. Yet the high level of education of these small-town preachers is apparent in their citations of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts and their knowledge of theological literature. They also show greater knowledge of the components of pipe organs than most of their counterparts among today’s clergy. Like clergy of any age, however, some were far more skilled in engaging their congregations than were others.

Those who preached these sermons did not strive for originality, recognizing that many similar sermons were already in print. Paul Martin Sagittarius specifically named seven other preachers of organ sermons and the locations of the organs being dedicated: Nicolaus Polantus, Meissen, 1604; Erasmus Winter, Meuselwitz, 1610; Christoph Frick, Burgdorf, 1614; Johann Münstermann, Otterndorf, 1662; Hinrich Hinrici, Hadeln, 1662; Gottfried Olearius, Marienkirche in Halle, 1664; Johann Olearius, Domkirche in Halle, 1667. Interestingly, the 1624 organ sermon of Conrad Dieterich in Ulm\textsuperscript{5} does not make his list, though it was arguably the most often cited, both in other organ sermons as well as in more general writings on church music well into the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{6} Nozomi Sato compiled a chart of organ sermons that shows the similar themes and references in 26 organ sermons of the seventeenth century: not surprisingly, Luther is cited in almost all, Augustine in 17, Michael Praetorius in 12, and Dieterich in six.\textsuperscript{7} Also in his chart are such themes as criticism of Calvinism and Catholicism, effects of music, abuse of music, disposition of the organ, organ as allegory, and history of the organ. The simple conclusion to be drawn from the chart is that while some themes and sources are common to almost all of the sermons, there is still considerable variation among them.

\textsuperscript{3} Hinrich Hinrici, \textit{Denck- und Danck-Seule} (1664), also in Mithobius, \textit{Psalmodia Christiana}, 395.

\textsuperscript{4} Johann Conrad Saher, \textit{Organolustria Evangelico-Stambachiana} (Hof: Mintzlin, 1660), 13, chastises those who enjoy listening to bawdy jokes and salacious songs but cannot stay awake for a half-hour sermon. Georg Gerlach, \textit{Organologismos} (Dresden: Bergen [1651]), sig. G2r, criticizes those who come to church only every few weeks and then complain if the preacher even unintentionally exceeds an hour in the length of his sermon.

\textsuperscript{5} Conrad Dieterich, \textit{Ulmische Orgel Predigt} (Ulm: Meder, 1624).


Sato suggested a categorization of six types, which is helpful in identifying some of the ways the sermons differ. However, it should not be followed so rigidly as to overlook the sermons’ many similarities. Furthermore, many of the sermons are so wide-ranging that they cover many of the approaches. In the following, I will not attempt to place the sermons themselves in categories but to draw out recurring themes and approaches while identifying variations within broader themes. Because of the formulaic structure of Lutheran Orthodox sermons, some of the organ sermons included all of these themes, though a particular theme or approach may be dominant: biblical and historical instruction, allegory, moral exhortation, and expectation of eternal salvation. Only after I identified these four approaches did I realize that they correspond to the medieval fourfold method of biblical interpretation.

Music in the Bible and History

Applying Psalm 150, which begins with the verse “Praise God in his sanctuary,” ends with “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord,” and names all known musical instruments in the intervening verses, several pastors employed a simple instructional method to elaborate on the meaning of praise: Whom should one praise? Where? Why? By what means? Who should perform the praise? These, at least, are the questions outlined by Johannes Melchior Vetterlein in dedicating the organ in Bindlach in 1679.8 Within the inquiry “By what means?” Vetterlein introduces the subsidiary questions about who invented the organ, when, and why organs were brought into use in churches. These questions are addressed in almost all organ sermons, sometimes in a separate introductory section, sometimes at points that seem peripheral to the scriptural exegesis, but most often within the instructional interpretation of Psalm 150.

Vetterlein begins his response to the question “To whom should one offer spiritual thanks and praise?” in a slightly unusual manner by answering, “Not Mary, by any means.” None other than the eternal Triune God is worthy of praise, he asserts, and this is embedded in the word Hallelujah, in which the jah (יה) is a contraction for the biblical name of God. For the question “Where?”, the term sanctuary in Psalm 150:1 referred to the tabernacle in which the ark of the covenant was kept prior to the building of the temple. In the New Testament, as Vetterlein understands it, sanctuary refers to any place of worship in which God’s Word is truly preached and the sacraments are distributed according to Christ’s institution. In answer to “Why?”, three words from Psalm 150:1–2 stand out in German as attributes of God deserving praise: Macht (power or strength), Taten (deeds), and Herrlichkeit (splendor). Using a historical illustration to teach the extent of God’s power, Vetterlein tells of the unsuccessful attempt of the Persian king Xerxes, who imagined himself as invincible, to cross over the unruly sea into Greece by whipping the sea into submission. God, by contrast, can do everything He wills, in heaven, on earth, in the sea and all the deeps (Psalm 135:6).

Verses 3–5 of Psalm 150 name a variety of instruments and provide the basis for an answer to the question “By what means should God be praised?” Yet the preachers have to face the
ambiguity of the text and the dissimilarities between ancient Hebrew instruments and those of their time. They were aware that the Septuagint used the word *organon* for the Hebrew word עוגָב (ugav), whereas Luther had used the German word *Pfeifen*, meaning pipes, not organs. Michael Praetorius had offered a solution to this problem with a lengthy citation from Girolamo Diruta explaining that the word *organum* held the original Greek connotation of instrument in general, and thus *Orgel* contains all other instruments and is the king of instruments.9 In this context Praetorius passed along a report from Jews of his own time that the organs in Solomon’s temple were so grandiose and marvelous that all subsequent organs could only be dim reflections.10 This story served both to explain why Jews no longer used organs and to support the belief that instruments like early modern pipe organs were used in Old Testament times. Praetorius himself admitted some skepticism, however, and those preachers who passed the report along recognized its limitations. As Conrad Dieterich wrote, “Because this is uncertain and there is no certain information about it in biblical or other histories, Dr. Luther considered it a particular kind of pipe instrument.”11 Gottfried Peisker copied this from Dieterich for his 1652 dedication of the new organ in Stolpen but added his own research from sixteenth-century commentator Esrom Rudinger, who decided to retain the original Hebrew word in his psalm paraphrase because interpreters could not agree whether עוגָב was a pipe, string, or other kind of instrument.12 All of the preachers were well enough schooled in biblical scholarship to leave open the question whether the ancient Hebrews possessed any instrument comparable to organs as they knew them, but Gottfried Kretschmar seemed to speak for them all in his Görlitz organ sermon of 1704:

Whether this is sufficient for everyone to believe that in this psalm and by these words David meant organs, I cannot promise . . . . But no one can doubt that David was such a great lover of music . . . that he would have procured as many kinds of instruments as was possible to assemble.13

The same Hebrew word *ugav* caused similar issues in attempting to identify the inventor of organs. By tradition, Jubal, a descendant of Cain, was regarded as their inventor on the basis of Genesis 4:21, where, according to the Vulgate, he was called “pater canentium cithara et organo” (father of those who play on the harp and organ). As with Psalm 150, Luther had used the word *Pfeifer* (players of pipes) to translate *ugav*, which meant that Luther’s followers were not committed to connecting Jubal with organs. Nevertheless, they were committed to providing a divine justification for organ music, so many of them moved the point of invention back to God in creation or even prior to creation of the world. With reference to passages in the book of Job, Andreas Gormann wrote at the dedication of the Annaburg organ in 1675: “We may let Jubal have the praise that has been bestowed on him for this; but originally the Lord God remains the

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9 Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma Musicum II: De Organographia* (Wolfenbüttel: Holwein, 1619), 86. Girolamo Diruta’s *Il Transilvano* was first published in Venice in 1593; Praetorius provided a German translation from the original Italian.
10 Praetorius, *Organographia*, 84.
author and inventor of the same. For he is the one ‘who gives songs in the night,’ as Job says [35:10].” Gormann goes on to cite Job 38:7, where “the morning stars sang together and all the children of God shouted for joy,” noting that this has been taken to refer to angels singing with their harps and psalteries. Gottfried Olearius took a more naturalistic approach by looking to God as the originator of natural pipes, namely bronchial tubes, with their bellows, the lungs, that can produce a variety of sounds by means of the tongue, teeth, and lips. These, along with the vestiges of divine wisdom given to humans, enabled Jubal to create an artificial imitation of this organ of nature.

Some writers felt the need to dissociate Jubal’s invention from his tainted family background. Johannes Lang, the earliest of the writers under consideration here, assured his listeners that there was no cause to reject organs just because Jubal was descended from godless Cain rather than faithful Seth. The arts he invented, like all such outward gifts and arts, are a gift of God, regardless of the degree of faith of the one practicing the art. Lang later made the same point in relation to Pope Vitalian, who was said to have introduced organs into the Roman Church; even if this or any other pope had invented organs, which is not the case, they are not to be rejected on the grounds of such an association. Theodor Schneider sheds further light on why Vitalian needed defending: “Some claim that Pope Vitalian invented organs and that, because he occupied the Holy See in the year 666 and because, as can be learned from the secret revelation of John, this is the number of the beast, therefore one can conclude that [organs] are bagpipes of the Antichrist.”

Much more could be said about the historical evidence presented by all these writers, but we need not imitate their verbosity. There remains one more verse of Psalm 150 to discuss: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” Dieterich applies this both to natural human breath and to instruments into which breath is introduced. Vetterlein takes “breath” to refer only to a rational spirit or soul, but he uses the example of a nightingale singing with all its strength to God to shame humans who fail to do likewise, thereby lowering themselves beneath the level of beasts. Christoph Friedrich Bucher, who takes this single verse as the text of his 1678 sermon, not only extends the application to literally everything but also introduces some social commentary. Observing that society in general divides people into distinct roles according to class, office, or gender, he notes that this office of praise, by contrast, is common to all people. And because breath is nothing other than the air that a person draws in and then blows out, humans have this in common with animals and also with instruments that make sounds through wind. While David may have had mainly people in mind with the phrase “everything that has

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17 Lang, *Christliche Predigt*, 15.
18 Theodor Schneider, *Das Lieblich-klingende Orgeln und Saiten-Spiel* (Coburg: München, [1676]), sig. D4r, at the dedication of the organ in Fechheim.
breath,” Bucher argues, Psalm 103 extends the invitation to praise God to all creatures—rational and irrational, animate and inanimate (sun, moon, stars, water, snow, hills, and more). But of all the instruments that make music with air, Bucher concludes, the organ is the Principal.21

Allegory

This label of the organ as the Principal (also the name of one of the main organ stops) is no cheap pun but rather a point of transition to the allegorical approach to organ sermons. Many of the sermons make analogies between well-voiced, tuned organs and human beings with body, mind, and soul in right proportion, or with members of the Christian community working in unity and harmony. Many also use the image of God as the supreme Kapellmeister, the director of the heavenly choir. In most cases, such images and analogies serve to bring the biblical and historical evidence for organ music to the next level, where the listener may apply this knowledge to his or her spiritual life. In some cases, however, the main body of the sermon is an explanation of the symbolic significance of different aspects or components of the organ. Though preached at organ dedication services, such sermons are less about audible music than about the inaudible music of the soul.

The allegorical interpretation of musical instruments had a long history going back to the ancient Greeks. Following the method of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, the Alexandrian school of Christian thought was known in general for its allegorical interpretation of the Bible. With Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215), the lyre and cithara, regarded as lifeless instruments, are contrasted to the metaphorical “New Song” that is Christ and the image of God in a harmonious human instrument.22 In an image more favorable to actual instruments, Athanasius (ca. 296–373) compares the strings of a lyre sounding in harmony to the harmonious order of the world as a whole.23 Somewhat later, Augustine (354–430) and Cassiodorus (ca. 485–ca. 580) gave metaphorical interpretations to many musical references in their psalm commentaries.24 For early church theologians who regarded instrumental music as too sensual for worship (though Lutherans generally did not admit that this viewpoint was characteristic of the church fathers), allegory gave spiritual significance to the many musical references in the Bible that were unacceptable on a literal level. Their interpretations remained influential throughout the Middle Ages, even after musical instruments became widely accepted in worship.25

Clearly, those seventeenth-century preachers who allegorized the organs they were dedicating did not intend to denigrate the actual instruments or their contributions to the worship life of the

21 Christoph Friedrich Bucher, Gott und Gnug / Oder Göttliche Gutthätigkeit (Meissen: Günther, 1681), 12–15.
congregation. Presumably they thought it their responsibility as pastors to explain to the individuals in their flock what this new instrument could mean for them. We cannot know how these sermons were received (or how much of the printed text was actually delivered), but for this twenty-first-century reader some seem exceedingly tedious and others quite effective.

Scholarly commitment alone kept me reading through the 60 points (and 64 dense pages) of allegory in Samuel Roscher’s *Organum Mysticum Oder Des Herrn Jesu Geistliche Christen-Orgel*, preached at the dedication of the Lindenu organ in 1686. Nor would I want to bore my own readers by detailing each point. Most interesting to me is the way in which Roscher makes the assigned reading for the day, Matthew 6:31–33, work to his purposes: “Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ . . . But seek first the kingdom of God . . . .” The “spiritual organ of a Christian,” Roscher says, gets out of tune when the stomach becomes the focus of concern.  

Dissonances result from this kind of pagan worry or failure to trust in God’s providence. If an organ maker is not entrusted with the task of maintaining the organ he built, he would be rightly offended; likewise, if people do not trust God as their Creator to provide for them, they insult Him as if they do not believe in His power. We would not entrust a pipe organ to an unskilled craftsman, nor should we entrust our spiritual organ to any but the heavenly Father, who knows what we need (Matt. 6:32). An organ tuner needs to give the principal stop the right tone and tuning, and all else will follow; similarly, “seek ye first the kingdom” must be our principal, and God will take care of everything else.  

If you are driven by the Holy Spirit, heavenly matters will be your Principal, and earthly matters just your Rückpositiv. You may have crosses to bear, but let these be expressed to God in a soft tremulant, not in a loud reed. Always let the principal be the foundation.

A better-organized use of allegory is found in the aforementioned sermon by Christoph Bucher. After an engaging preface in which Bucher recognizes the travails and responsibilities of each class of society—commoners, rulers, and clergy—and admits that all are tempted to run away from these like Jonah, Bucher calls upon all to look past the travails and remember their many happy hours and pleasant accomplishments, praising God for these. Under the alliterative title *Gott und Gnug Oder Göttliche Gutthätigkeit* (God and Enough, or Divine Beneficence), Bucher divides his topic into three sections: bodily, spiritual, and heavenly blessings.

On the physical level, God is compared to a master organ builder who works with great care and thought to make the materials fit just right. The members of our bodies can be compared to the parts of an organ: the wings of the case are our hands, the chest holding the pipes is our body, the bellows our lungs, the windchest the heart, the keys the teeth, the pedals the feet, and so on. Not only an individual body but also the church as the body of Christ is, like an organ, composed of many members working together (Rom. 12:4–5 and Eph. 4:15–16). On a societal level, the

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29 Roscher, *Organum Mysticum*, 41. The Rückpositiv is an organ division located behind the player, smaller than the other divisions and usually mounted on the gallery rail.
30 Roscher, *Organum Mysticum*, 54.
two manuals and pedal remind us of the three estates of Christendom, with the spiritual and secular estates above and of nearly equal value, while the commoners are below and serve the others but yet are not to be scorned. In the domestic sphere, the man is the upper and main manual, the woman the lower, the children and servants the pedal.\textsuperscript{31}

For the spiritual blessings, Bucher turns to the less visible aspects of the organ, noting that, just as with the soul, one cannot see most of the workings of the organ such as the air flow and the sounds. The soul is like the air, the living breath that God breathed into Adam. The foundation stops, or principals, are the understanding and the will, which have their source in the soul. Reed stops are like the law of Moses and like the voice of the preacher calling the congregation to awareness of sin. Soft and pleasant stops, on the other hand, preach the gospel of forgiveness of sins. The mixtures\textsuperscript{32} are the ability of preachers to use different registers to artfully lead their hearers to conviction of sin and to repentance, as Nathan did with David (2 Sam. 12). The tremulant is the shaking and trembling that we sometimes experience in our afflictions, but just as the organist controls this effect, so God is the one who sends these crosses in order to test our faith. The Terz (third), Quint (fifth), and Octave stops are important in themselves but also serve to determine whether the whole organ is in tune: the Terz can signify the Trinity or the three main virtues of faith, hope, and love; the Quint stands for the five wounds of Christ or also the five wise and five foolish virgins; the Octave signifies Jesus’s circumcision on the eighth day and the eight blessings of the Beatitudes.\textsuperscript{33}

Bucher’s third section, on heavenly blessings, consists less of allegory than of contrasts between earthly experience, including music making, and life in heaven under the direction of God the organist and Kapellmeister. His concluding section, commonly called the Usus (or in this case Gebrauch), uses three metaphors to illustrate the moral application of the lessons of the main portion of the sermon. First, to learn of God’s beneficence, we glean His different attributes from different portions of scripture; but as in an organ, where all the stops can be drawn without dissonance, so God’s attributes and works are in harmony. Second, as all the pipes in an organ have their own sound and purpose, so each person has his or her status and serves a particular function, but brotherly love and unity provide harmony. Finally, just as a musical piece will come to an end when nothing more is written on the page, or an organ will cease to sound when all the air goes out of the bellows, so too each earthly life will come to an end. A person who has prepared for death, however, will not let out a monstrous howling tone, as if taken over by Satan, but will be taken into the church triumphant to hear the unending music surrounding the throne of God.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} An organ mixture combines two or more pipes of different pitches in the upper overtone series that sound together when a key is pressed; though never used without the corresponding fundamental pitch, a mixture adds color and brilliance to the sound.
\textsuperscript{33} Bucher, \textit{Gott und Gnug}, 26–37.
\textsuperscript{34} Bucher, \textit{Gott und Gnug}, 43–53.
These samples of organ allegory by no means exhaust the subject. With each church organ having a different design and set of specifications, each preacher could use his imagination in his analogies to specific organ ranks, but we will leave further study of such details to others.35

Moral Exhortation

All of the preachers of organ sermons agreed that God is merciful and beneficent; the very fact that their churches had new organs to dedicate was evidence of that. Thus, beyond the general obligation of gratitude for God’s blessings, there was the specific obligation to give thanks for the completion of this instrument for enhancing worship. This is not to overlook the role of patrons, city councils, church councils, benefactors, and the organ builders themselves. Gratitude was expressed to them in effusive dedicatory prefaces, and sometimes within the body of the sermon. As with the invention of music, however, all human contributions ultimately came from God.

A major purpose of these sermons, then, was to remind the congregation that the organ was to be used solely for holy purposes and not to be misused in unholy ways. Nicolaus Polantus gives several ways in which music can be misused:

It is misused when, instead of holy, lovely, and comforting songs, psalms, and pieces, and instead of Christian values and devotion, lascivious, shameful, obscene songs are sung or played out of wanton hearts and carefree mouths encouraging all kinds of vice. . . . It is a disgraceful misuse of music, or rather of the name of God, that many, especially of the common folk, have no knack or desire to sing and scarcely ever open their mouths to speak of God and something good; but when they are boozing in the wine taverns and beer halls and have gotten fully tanked in a besotted and brutish manner, then they think they know a lot and want to talk and sing about God, and the bleating and bawling begins . . . . It is a misuse when even spiritual psalms, songs, and pieces are not properly sung as is befitting and edifying for God’s congregation, or when in church people’s voices, tongues, and mouths as well as other instruments are used offensively and reprehensibly: a chorale in German should be sung quite slowly, devoutly, and solemnly, by no means hastily and hurriedly as if it were done on the mail coach, with loathing and irritation. Leaping, chopped-up, worldly figural music is better suited to other entertainment than to godly devotion in the church choir.36

None of these complaints is unique to Polantus, but the similar criticisms that have received the most scholarly attention were voiced later in the seventeenth century.37 The early date of 1604 for Polantus’s sermon in Meissen is worth noting as evidence in answering the question whether

37 The most notorious Lutheran critic of church music practice in the mid-seventeenth century and beyond was Theophilus Grossgebauder, whose Wächterstimme auß dem verwüsteten Zion (Frankfurt: Wilde, 1661) evoked a lengthy defense of church music by Hector Mithobius in 1665 (cited above) and many subsequent refutations. See Christian Bunnies, Kirchenmusik und Seelenmusik (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); Joyce Irwin, Neither Voice nor Heart Alone: German Lutheran Theology of Music in the Age of the Baroque (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Joseph Herl, Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
hymns were in fact being sung too fast when Johann Eccard, in his 1597 preface to his choir hymnal, directed the choir to maintain a slow beat. Furthermore, Polantus’s critique reinforces the many negative comments on church music practice that Joseph Herl found in visitation records and pastors’ reports from both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

More frequent than such criticisms of inappropriate music or behavior, however, are the admonitions to sing with the heart as well as the voice. The words of Paul in the letter to the Ephesians (5:19), “sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord,” and to the Colossians (3:16), “sing to the Lord in your hearts,” found their way into each sermon, though of course without minimizing the outward song. Also, the Latin saying derived from canon law (“Non vox, sed votum; non chordula musica, sed cor”—Not the voice, but the prayer; not the sounding string, but the heart) is routinely cited to emphasize the futility of mere audible song.

Gottfried Kretschmar, whose rambling sermon is ostensibly based on the story of the Pharisee and the publican, devoted a section to “the fervor of love,” emphasizing the importance of giving thanks, serving God, praying, and loving others, which includes helping to enliven their devotion. In this context he admits that there is good cause to complain about the misuse of music, but he is confident that those who are employed to play the organ being dedicated will do so for the honor of God and the edification of the neighbor. This favorable sentiment turns threatening, however, for those whose hearts are wrongly directed. Like the Pharisee, they will not go home justified (Luke 18:14). “They experience neither comfort nor joy; God rejects their service; he rejects them.”

Kretschmar adheres to the belief that God wreaks justice here and now upon evildoers, and specifically on those who abuse music. He tells of a horse trader in 1587 who wanted to do business with a certain count; as it happened to be Easter, he went to church with the count but just laughed and scoffed during the singing. Divine revenge was soon to come: after a meal in which he ate like an Epicurean, he started to go down a short flight of stairs but fell, broke his neck, and did not get up. Another story, told by Kretschmar and others, was that when the Lutheran Elector of Saxony was taken prisoner in 1547, the Catholic clergy of Meissen Cathedral held a jubilee at which they sang Te Deum laudamus with great rejoicing. Out of a clear blue sky came thunder, and the cathedral was hit by lightning that melted their beautiful bells and grand organ. Punishment for holding God’s Word in contempt may not always come with thunder and lightning, Kretschmar acknowledges; it may be through war or fire that churches are destroyed.

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38 Joseph Herl (Worship Wars, 162, 167) suggested that this instruction might be only cautionary and not based on actual experience of fast tempos.
39 Herl, Worship Wars, 70–83.
40 See, for instance, Peisker, Stolpenische Ehren-Crone, 50, and Olearius, Encænia HierOrganica, sig. B1v, who give different translations. In Olearius the source is misprinted as Dist. 97, which should be Dist. 92 of Gratian’s Decretum. Kretschmar, Einweihungs-Predigt, 32, cites a lengthier prose passage rather than the more common couplet.
41 Kretschmar, Einweihungs-Predigt, 28.
42 Kretschmar, Einweihungs-Predigt, 34.
and God’s Word is taken away from the people. Indeed, it was a fire originating in a citizen’s home that spread to the church of SS. Peter and Paul in Görlitz in 1691, destroying an organ that had been dedicated by Michael Fetter just two years previously. Other than to say that it was a fire of divine wrath (“ein göttliches Zorn-Feuer”), Kretschmar refrained from identifying any specific godlessness that might have angered God.

Fetter had done his best to preach sin and redemption to his people. More than any other of the sermons we are examining, Fetter traced salvation history from the creation of man and woman in innocence, their disobedience through Satan’s deceit, the effects of original sin, restoration through Christ, redemption, and sanctification. All this is illustrated through the assigned reading of Jesus opening the ears of the deaf man in Mark 7:31–37, a reading particularly suited to the application of musical imagery. It is with a certain poignancy based on hindsight, then, that we read Fetter’s prayer that God protect their church and new organ from a fire similar to the one which had destroyed the church and two organs in nearby Sorau in 1684. Believing in the power of prayer, he assures his listeners, “We can prevent all misfortune if we pray devoutly. . . . Prayer can turn [God’s] anger into mercy.”

Anticipation of Heaven

For the people of Görlitz and other communities that endured fires, storms, wars, or other calamities, rich sources of consolation were offered in all the organ sermons. Immanuel Weber, preaching at a church in Pombosen that had suffered terrible wind damage, ended his sermon with words from John 16:20, “your sorrow will turn into joy,” and Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may last through the night, but in the morning you shower us with joy.” The value of music in providing consolation is a standard component in the lists of music’s useful qualities; often the story is cited in which Luther advised a melancholy organist named Matthias that he play a Te Deum laudamus or a Benedictus to drive away sad thoughts.

David Grafunder recalled the history of the Israelites who, upon their return from captivity and suffering in Babylon, wept when hearing the law read in their rebuilt temple. Like them, the people of Luckau had suffered greatly: a fire in 1644 had burned the church, city hall, and half the houses; another fire in 1652 burned much of the town that had been spared in the first fire and also many newly built houses, also killing several people; arson in 1666 took 29 houses; again in 1671 a fire burned half the town. Grafunder was willing to accept most of the fires as God’s just punishment for their sins, and, with allusion to Psalm 77:7, he gave thanks that God

43 Kretschmar, Einweihungs-Predigt, 34–35. Interesting research is being done by Ken Kurihara on Lutheran weather sermons and other discourses on natural disasters. A presentation of the theology of disasters is in David Bramer, Vom Donner, Blitz, Hagel, Sturmwinden vnd andern grossen Vngewittern (Erfurt: Bauman, 1577).
44 Michael Fetter, Organo-Praxis Mystica Eine Geistliche Orgel-Rede und Predigt (Görlitz: Hübner, 1689), 43.
46 Weber, Das Gott-lob-schallende Hosianna, sig. F2r. Also cited by Peisker, Stolpenische Ehren-Crone, 48, and others.
had had a change of heart and had not rejected them forever. With the words of Nehemiah to the Israelites, Grafunder told his flock not to grieve, “for joy in the Lord is your strength.”

For all our writers, an organ dedication was an occasion of great joy, not only because of the experience of God’s grace in making it possible but also because the sound of organ music elicited great joy. And if this can happen on earth, as the question on the organ in Perugia, Italy, asked, how much greater will be the joy in heaven? (“Haec si contingunt terris quae gaudia caelis?”) Or, as Luther asked, “If in this life, which is a pure vale of woe, the Lord God has given us such a noble gift of music, what will it be like in that life where everything will be done in the most perfect and cheerful way?” Christoph Frick even expressed this on the title page of his *Music-Büchlein*:

Little Music Book, or Useful Report concerning the Origin, Use, and Preservation of Christian Music and thus Concerning the Praise of God, which Christians should carry out in the lower Choir of this miserable, afflicted vale of tears and woe. Which, however, they will carry out in part (after the songs of lament down here are sung and finished), there in the high bright-shining angel choir of the heavenly hall of peace and joy in unspeakable delight and glory.

One of the major values of organ music, most of the preachers agreed, was its ability to lead the listener’s thoughts heavenward. As often as you hear the organ music from now on, Grafunder tells his congregation, let the sound quicken your heart and remind you of heavenly and angelic music. Preaching on Matthew 22:21 (“Give to God the things that are God’s”), Theodor Schneider says that one way of giving organs back to God, who gave them to us, is to use them as a reminder of the sweet angelic music which we will not only hear in the future but will also engage in ourselves. Samuel Roscher, after describing the perfection of believers as spiritual organs in the heavenly temple, asks whether future expectation is not already present: “Are you not, you blessed souls, immediately transported into heaven through this contemplation? Does it not seem as if you are already standing before the throne of the triune God with your organ instruments and songs of praise?”

Gottfried Peisker interpreted John’s vision of elders with harps singing a new song to the Lamb (Rev. 5:8) as metaphorical, a “symbol of the loveliness of their praise and inward joy”; nevertheless, “because it was pleasing to the Holy Spirit to express all this not as it actually is in itself but metaphorically and allegorically, that is a clear indication that earthly musical instruments must not be offensive to Him.” Most of the other writers, on the other hand, took

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48 Praetorius, *Organographia*, 88, quoting Girolamo Diruta. The Latin appears along with various translations into German in a majority of the organ sermons.
52 Schneider, *Orgeln und Saiten-Spiel*, sig. E3r.
53 Roscher, *Organum Mysticum*, 49.

heavenly music to be real, though beyond our imagination. Johann Saher depicted the scene when the Lord will come with trumpet call (1 Thess. 4:16) as “unbelievable jubilation, unspeakable triumphing, inconceivable exultation, singing, and praising.” While he was content to say that the music in the “heavenly castle and collegiate church” would be “many thousand times lovelier” than in the earthly church, Christoph Frick went so far as to say “many hundred thousand times.”

The reality of heavenly music is a good reason here and now “to make a good start praising God the Lord through the art of spiritual music.” Frick tells of schoolteacher Valentin Trotzendorf, who exhorted his pupils to learn to sing “so that when you get to heaven the holy angels will admit you to their choir and you will become heavenly choristers.” Polantus finds the expectation of angels and humans joining in the heavenly music making before the majesty of God a good reason to attempt to organize glorious music already here: “Why should we not here in this life, that is, in public church gatherings and assembles on highly ceremonious and joyous festivals and holidays, make them our best, our most glorious, our most faithful and most joyous, and thus make a blessed good start for the heavenly and angelic Kantorei.”

Social distinctions will be erased in the heavenly choir: “Whatever can sing will sing, whatever can praise will praise, kings and all the people, princes and judges, young men and maidens, old and young will praise the name of the Lord.” Even the distinctions between angels and humans will be leveled, according to Bucher: “Angels and people will all alike be masters, far better than there in David’s court chapel (1 Chron. 26:8). The smallest will be as skilled as the greatest, and one will no longer be able to tell the teacher apart from the pupil.”

Gormann contrasts the equal involvement of all heavenly beings with the attitude of the elite of his congregation who consider it beneath their dignity to open their mouths, thinking that singing belongs only to the common folk and ridiculing those who join in. Because singing God’s praise is an essential element of heaven, some preachers do not hesitate to threaten those who scorn music with hellfire; they “will be shown to a place where instead of pleasant songs only wailing and clamoring will be heard.” Those who do not want to sing along and start practicing this skill now, according to Frick, “will seldom be ready to sing proficiently; singing will be forbidden to them when in outermost darkness they no longer know the notes, and instead of singing Gloria in excelsis Deo, they will always and eternally gnash their teeth, bellow with

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55 Saher, Organolustria, 28.
56 Saher, Organolustria, 31.
57 Frick, Music-Büchlein, 112.
58 Frick, Music-Büchlein, 110.
59 Frick, Music-Büchlein, 108.
60 Polantus, Musica Instrumentalis, 30.
61 Polantus, Musica Instrumentalis, 116.
62 Bucher, Gott und Gnug, 43.
63 Gormann, Einweyhungs-Predigt, sig. H3v.
64 Bucher, Gott und Gnug, 40.
the devils, howl with the damned, and sing the horrifying owl’s screech, ‘O you mountains fall down on us, O you hills cover us!’ (Rev. 6).”

Such images play a minor role in the organ sermons, and these threats seem to be directed at those of the preachers’ own congregations who failed to respect the music performed by the choir and organist and to join in the singing. To be sure, they also had harsh words for Calvinists who destroyed organs and for Catholics who used music in support of rituals that were perceived as idolatry. Those must remain subjects for another study. The sermons always ended in a hopeful mood, usually with a verse of one of the familiar hymns about heavenly music: “Eia, wärn wir da . . . da die Engel singen” from In dulci jubilo, “Da wird man hören klingen die rechten Saitenspiel” from Johann Walter’s Herzlich tut mich erfreuen, or “Zwingt die Saiten in Cythara” from Philip Nicolai’s Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern.

The sermons as a whole are a strong expression and witness to Orthodox Lutheran attitudes and beliefs about music. They may not necessitate any major reinterpretation of the period, but for those wishing to expand our knowledge of German Lutheran church music, they are a fertile field for further study. Hymnologists might identify and catalogue the hymn citations, music historians might learn more about lesser-known organs and organ builders, and historians of spirituality and of theology might pursue one of many topics that I have either sketched briefly or barely mentioned. The ranks of the preachers’ instruments have been sampled, some of their combinations have been heard, but the full organs have yet to resound.

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66 A valuable essay by Sarah Davies, “Kirchen Cron or Baalsfeldzeichen?: The Organ as a Sign of Confessional Identity, 1560–1660,” may be expected to appear soon in conference proceedings from the Catholic University of Leuven. See also the early chapters of my Neither Voice nor Heart Alone.