

2018

## Deutscher Kirchengesang in der Neuzeit: Eine Gesangsbuchanthologie

Philip V. Bohlman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/yjmr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bohlman, Philip V. (2018) "Deutscher Kirchengesang in der Neuzeit: Eine Gesangsbuchanthologie," *Yale Journal of Music & Religion*: Vol. 4: No. 2, Article 5.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17132/2377-231X.1126>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Yale Journal of Music & Religion* by an authorized editor of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact [elischolar@yale.edu](mailto:elischolar@yale.edu).

*Deutscher Kirchengesang in der Neuzeit: Eine Gesangsbuchanthologie*, ed. by Gustav Adolf Krieg. Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen im Insel Verlag, 2013. 984 pp. ISBN: 978-3-458-70040-1.

When gathering provisions for settlement on a utopian island in Johann Gottfried Schnabel's early eighteenth-century novel, which would come to be known simply as *Insel Felsenberg* (1731–43), those founding the community of German pietists were careful to make space for 400 “song- and prayerbooks,” the largest single category of materials necessary for survival as they struggled to establish a new way of life in a world far removed from Europe. Regarded by many literary scholars as the first true novel in the German language, *Insel Felsenberg* contains only a few accounts of music making in the new colony, but these are inevitably made possible by the function of the sacred songbooks and performances from them, in smaller or larger gatherings of congregational worship on the island, or in more personal and pietistic settings. The narratives in the songbooks paralleled those of encountering and establishing a Christian presence in new worlds, and in this way they also presaged a literary trope that would accompany the spread of German religious practices through the centuries that followed. When German Protestants settled in the American Midwest or southern Brazil, when the Amish, Mennonites, or Hutterites established colonies across the world, when German Catholics established missions in German East and West Africa, or when the German Jewish Reform movement spread from its early nineteenth-century roots as the vanguard of a modern, urban Judaism, sacred songbooks, hymnals, and *siddurim* were there as well, exemplifying what Gustav Adolf Krieg, compiler, editor, and contributing

author of the remarkable *Deutscher Kirchengesang in der Neuzeit: Eine Gesangsbuchanthologie*, describes as a *Volksliteratur* and coalescing as a counterpoint of music histories formed through the copresence of religion and everyday life in the modern world.

The *Neuzeit* that Krieg documents and analyzes by collecting hymns themselves, as well as detailed commentary about their creators, published sources, and transmission, had its roots during an earlier moment that was also distinguished by the confluence of historical streams: the emergence of print culture in early modern Europe and the revolutionary impact of the Luther Reformation in Germany, together with those forces that led to a proliferation of reform and those that countered it. The first songs and songbooks arose from oral tradition and circulated through the earliest forms of print culture, in other words as folk songs. The sources for these songs were often medieval texts and melodies, which the early anthologizers, Martin Luther chief among them, gathered as evidence of continuity with the past. The transition from earlier oral transmission to contrafacts (e.g., the broadsides of 1524, with which Krieg begins his history of songbooks) to canonic repertoires and their revival and renewal was critical. Individual songs might enter the songbooks from different sources—the earliest Lutheran songbooks, for example, borrowed freely from Catholic sources as well as from songs of the Bohemian Brethren—where they conjoined in the expression of common religious and musical practice.

In a different way during the Counter-Reformation of the late sixteenth century, songbooks became the material possession of the rapidly expanding waves of pilgrims in central Europe, accompanying them on journeys to shrines across Europe and the

Mediterranean. In the late twentieth century, during another revival of pilgrimage, songbooks again mobilized Catholic pilgrims as they crossed the landscapes of a reunified Europe. At the moments framing the modernity that Krieg documents here, sacred songbooks served as texts for the restoration of a Europe historically imagined as Christian. Throughout this historical *longue durée* religious differences were critical for the proliferation of the songbooks, and yet their contents bore witness to many similarities and overlapping repertoires. The books themselves, gathering sacred songs from multiple sources and shared canons alike, led to the creation of anthologies that reflected diversity.

As an anthology and gathering of song texts from diverse sources, the sacred songbook itself coalesced from communication between creators, publishers, religious institutions, and everyday worshippers. The anthology became a means of transforming oral into written tradition. Many songbooks had texts only, with references to tunes that could be used. It is particularly helpful to understanding these processes of exchange that Krieg mixes texts with melodies at the time of their appearances together with those that have only references to previous melodies or printings. In a section devoted to “Textgrundlage, Melodien und Textgestaltung” (pp. 827–928), he then provides detailed descriptions of the text and melody sources for each of the 418 hymns appearing in the book. During the early centuries of the songbook tradition, the music itself—primarily melodies, but also choral arrangements and some instrumental versions—circulated as folk song, shared by and constitutive of local congregational practices. We are able to witness this even today in the Amish hymnbook, the *Ausbund*, whose texts describe the history of the Amish

beginning in the sixteenth century (e.g., specific acts of persecution), while hymn singing even into the twenty-first century grows from oral tradition and collective improvisation in performance practice.

The materiality of the songbook assumed different forms, all emerging as print culture expanded from the fifteenth century to the present. Hymns appeared as printed folk and popular songs that circulated in various forms, for example, as broadsides for purchase in vernacular culture (according to Krieg, “von kleinen Menschen unter das Volk gebracht,” p. 605) during the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Notably for the history documented here, the early folk-song print versions were often sold on the street together, or even as pamphlets containing several texts—for example, with the first source addressed by Krieg, the eight songs in the 1524 *Etlich Christlich lider Lobgesang un Psalm* (Various Christian Songs, Songs of Praise, and Psalms), which circulated in Wittenberg. Pilgrimage songbooks in general, but extensively during the Reformation, gathered broadsides as anthologies and circulated folk songs as print anthologies. Songbooks also formed from praxis, in other words, their use in moments of change and the transition to new congregational practices—for instance, various forms of pietism or restoration. When August Hermann Francke (1663–1739) incorporated new expressions of ecstatic piety in Halle in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he did so by holding regular singing gatherings (*Singstunden*), which began with a few dozen congregants in his home, but rapidly expanded to gatherings as large as 2,000, requiring a move from the private to the public sphere. Clearly, a new hymnbook with additional and different songs was required to accommodate that moment (pp. 735–37).

The sacred songbook and hymnbook itself, therefore, exhibited not one form but several. Krieg stresses that, as different as their content and liturgical uses may be, even the modern *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* and the *Gotteslob* function in similar ways today to give German Protestants and Catholics broad and diverse repertoires for religious practice. I would say the same for the prayerbooks, or *siddurim*, of Jewish sacred practices in the modern Reform and Conservative movements. The importance of the anthology is evident in the efforts used to create it. Martin Luther and Johann Gottfried Herder, for example, both contributed substantially to anthologies, though neither was a professional musician, in the church or otherwise. The anthology became a way of imagining common culture and common history. It bore witness to a history of Germans and their religious practices, a convergence and musical space from the bottom up and the top down. This is what Krieg means when claiming that “the songbooks of German-speaking Christianity are *folk literature*, and those for whom they are intended are the folk of the church” (p. 596).

Throughout his own anthology Krieg makes excellent analytical points about the ways in which sacred hymns function as they do: they use clear poetic forms; the language in their texts is straightforward; analogy and metaphor create narratives that can be applied to everyday Christian experience; rhymes and metric patterns enhance the potential that the songs will be sung by many, often together with other worshippers. Musically, too, it is possible to speak of attributes and structure that lend the songs to easy learning and distribution among many worshippers. These are the attributes of the hymn itself, as congregational and common practice. Basic musical forms—the *Bar* form chief among

them (text: ABC; melody: AAB)—appear in the earliest German sacred songs, defining, for example, the Reformation, but they were also used in folk and popular song; think, for example, about the *Deutschlandlied*, now the German national anthem, originally adapted by Joseph Haydn from a “Volck’s Lied” as the *Emperor’s Hymn* for the set of variations in the C-Major String Quartet (Hob. III:77). The crucial point here is that musically and textually German sacred songs provided the means for gathering the collective and the congregation.

*Deutscher Kirchengesang in der Neuzeit* mirrors the genre of music that is its subject matter. It is an anthology that grows from anthologies. Its 418 sacred songs unfold historically from the early sixteenth century through a series of historical moments both shaping and shaped by the creation of German sacred song—the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, and confessionalism, pietism, the Enlightenment, and the Restoration—establishing its most influential canonic editions for modernity in the nineteenth century. Krieg’s remarkable volume captures the spirit of songbooks, which are never simple collections, but rather living and changing testimonies to performance and the formation of religious communities and congregations. In this way, moreover, Krieg has succeeded in shedding new light on the sacred song as prosopography, a history resounding with many voices.

German-language sacred song, at first glance, might not seem to throw light on “world religions,” especially for a publishing series—Verlag der Weltreligionen, an imprint of the distinguished German publisher Insel Verlag—that contains major texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Qur’an, and approaches sacred practices largely from non-European religions through thorough translation and meticulous exegesis. In fact, German sacred

song and its complex movement through time and use by diverse religious communities challenge us to expand too-comfortable notions that locate the religious practices of non-Christians in the other worlds that constitute world religion. Krieg's anthology and the essays examining how the songs gathered in this volume spread among worshippers who experience religious worlds in many and complex ways provide an exemplary model for understanding religion by listening to sacred musical practices as the voices, vernacular and exalted, in world religions.

Philip V. Bohlman  
*University of Chicago*