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Luther Seminary, Church Music, and Hymnody

Paul Westermeyer

Luther Seminary in St Paul, Minnesota began with a cluster of Norwegian schools which became part of the American Lutheran Church (ALC): Augsburg Seminary, Augustana Seminary, Luther Seminary, Red Wing Seminary, and the United Church Seminary. The earliest of these was founded in 1869. In 1917 Luther Seminary was created from the former Luther Seminary, Red Wing Seminary, and the United Church Seminary. Augsburg Seminary joined it in 1963. In 1967 Northwestern Seminary moved next to Luther Seminary. It was part of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and had German roots in Chicago Theological Seminary, founded in 1891. From 1976 to 1982 the two schools worked together. In 1982 they became Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. In 1994 the school took the 1917 name Luther Seminary, now as part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a merger of the ALC and LCA.

All the seminaries included music and hymnody. Red Wing Seminary had a music department. J. Arndt Bergh (1847-1927) was professor of music there. Valborg Hovind Stub (1860-1901) – a singer who had studied in Leipzig, Weimar, and Paris, had been accompanied by Franz Liszt (1811-1886) and Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), and was the second wife of Professor Hans G. Stub – taught chanting at the Norwegian Synod's Luther Seminary. Peter Rydning (1866-1919), an organist and choirmaster who studied at the Conservatory of Music in Oslo, taught chanting and church music at the United Seminary.

F. Melius Christiansen (1871-1955), an organist, conductor, and composer who organized the St Olaf Choir and was the music editor of *The Lutheran Hymnary* (Minneapolis, 1913), directed the Augsburg Seminary Chorus, taught singing and theory there, then taught at the United Seminary. John Dahle (1853-1931), also an organist, conductor, and composer, taught at the first Luther Seminary and the United Seminary, and he was one of the initial eleven faculty members at Luther Seminary from its founding in 1917. He retired in 1930. Dahle chaired the committee that compiled *The Lutheran Hymnary* (see Ernest E. Ryden, 'Hymnbooks [Lutheran]', *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius Bodensieck, Minneapolis, 1965, II.1088) to which he contributed the tunes LUTHER SEMINARY and RED WING SEMINARY.

Dahle is especially important. With Christiansen he worked out from the pre-Reformation, chorale, and Scandinavian traditions into the Reformed ones, harnessing the church's hymnic heritage for his generation and future ones. These two composed and edited pieces on hymns, and they prepared song services and choral hymn festivals which highlighted and stimulated strong congregational singing. This was undergirded by the study of sacred music, hymnology, chanting, congregational singing, theory of music, and chorus and voice building – topics which continued in various ways throughout the century. A choir was part of the mix, often conducted by students after Dahle retired. It sometimes toured and later in the century occasionally made recordings. A faculty choir also developed. Over the coming century more than thirty people taught music and hymnody, conducted choirs, and led hymn singing from the organ.

In 1930 Herman Preus (1896-1995) first taught chanting, then liturgics and other subjects. Rupert Sircom (1897-1962), Laurence N. Field (1896-1983), and Gerhard Cartford (1923-2016) followed him. Sircom was organist for CBS and Westminster Presbyterian Church in

Minneapolis. Between 1933 and 1952 he also taught hymnody and church music at Luther Seminary. Field wrote an insightful student thesis on J. S. Bach which turned into a book (*Johann Sebastian Bach*, Minneapolis, 1943), and he prepared large indexes of hymns in Lutheran hymnals. Cartford, who contributed greatly to the liturgical and musical life of the church in and beyond Luther Seminary, in 2011 donated his books and papers to the Seminary's fine hymnological collection.

Northwestern Seminary brought with it the liturgical and aesthetic interests of the General Council and included a course in the history of music. Edward D. Berryman (1920-2008), Clarence P. Lund (1909-1985), Charles E. Johnson (1913-1993), Harold P. Krull (1928-2004), and Kathryn Moen (1920-2019) were among Northwestern's music teachers and musicians. The choir, as at Luther, reached beyond its chapel responsibilities, toured, and gave concerts.

Larry Fleming (1936-2003) – who would conduct the Augsburg College Choir and the Valparaiso University Choir, and in 1986 found the National Lutheran Choir – directed the Luther Seminary Choir for six years from 1963. During that time Dominick Argento at the University of Minnesota was commissioned by the Seminary to write *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*. A dissonant and challenging piece for men's chorus, solo, brass, and percussion, the Seminary Choir premiered it on May 16, 1966, at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Argento wrote the solo for tenor Vern Sutton who sang the premier performance with young Philip Brunelle (b. 1943) as one of the percussionists. In 1969 Brunelle became the organist and choirmaster at Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis where he founded the Plymouth Music Series which became Vocal Essence. Argento dedicated his piece to the memory of C. Carroll Bailey, a Presbyterian pastor who was his father-in-law, the father of soprano Carolyn Bailey Argento.

In 1982, as a student, Mark Sedio (b. 1954) began to play for chapel services, conducted the choir, and taught in the hymnody classes of Gracia Grindal (b. 1943) and the worship classes of Mons A. Teig (1935-2019). He continued to play for chapel services (for a total of twenty-five years) after Paul Westermeyer (b. 1940) came as professor of church music.

Grindal joined the faculty in 1984 and taught hymnody and the writing of hymns. Teig came in 1986 and taught worship. Westermeyer came in 1990 and taught church music. Westermeyer was called primarily to teach in the MDiv curriculum, but also to be Cantor and Director of a two-year Master of Sacred Music (MSM) degree for church musicians, launched in cooperation with St. Olaf College. MSM students formed a cantorial team with the Cantor, future pastors and musicians studied together, and the Seminary's abundant musical and hymnic history was focused with the requisite courses and resources to provide leaders for Christian communities.

Singers and players from the whole community sang in the Seminary choir, played in a brass group begun by Old Testament professor James Limburg (b. 1935), and formed other groups for shorter periods. Fine congregational and choral singing included a wide swath of hymns and hymn-related music, from global song to choruses of Bach cantatas. An annual set of 'Lectures in Church Music' included hymnic themes. A choral and brass library contained over a thousand pieces. Three organs were heavily used, one in each of the two chapels and one in the choral

rehearsal room. Orff instruments, small percussion instruments, a set of bells, a harpsichord, a clavichord, two timpani, and brass instruments were acquired.

The MSM program, for which Luther Seminary partnered with St. Olaf College, attracted more students than expected, from around the world and from a wide ecumenical spectrum, to study in the laboratory of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, with some of the finest theologians and church musicians in the country, among them Anton Armstrong (b. 1956), John Ferguson (b. 1941), and over thirty other musical experts. MSM graduate (2002) Kristin Rongstad (b. 1962) served as the MSM Administrative Assistant and cared for operational details. After two decades ninety graduates had become leading musicians and teachers in churches and schools around the world.

In the line of Dahle and Christiansen, the hymnic heritage of the church – now including the breadth of the late twentieth century hymn explosion – was harnessed in annual Reformation Festivals that Grindal began with Sedio at the Seminary in 1987, in hymn and choral hymn festivals that Ferguson and Armstrong led across the country and around the world, and in worship and music projects that MSM students prepared and led as part of their degrees. The teaching and writing of these leaders, of Westermeyer, and of others undergirded the singing.

A faculty committee recommended continuation of the MSM degree, but President Richard Bliese (b. 1956) suspended it against many objections when a crisis of fiscal mismanagement struck in 2012. The professors who taught music (Westermeyer) and hymnody (Grindal) were not replaced when they retired, and musical connections with St Olaf College were severed.

Paul Westermeyer

Further Reading

1. E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia, 1975); Warren A. Quanbeck, *et al.*, *Striving for Ministry* (Minneapolis, 1977); Joseph M. Shaw, *The St. Olaf Choir* (Northfield, 1997).
2. Frederick H. Gonnerman, *et al.*, *Thanksgiving and Hope* (St Paul, 1998).
3. Luther Seminary catalogues.