

Martin Luther (der 10. November 1483—der 2. Februar 1546)

MARTIN LUTHER'S LEGACY

How Martin Luther became the first Christian pop star

Since he knew that most of his compatriots could only be reached in their native language, Luther wrote a mass in German in 1526 that included German songs. The church congregation suddenly took on a whole new role. Instead of sitting quietly and listening, they were now playing an active role in the mass.



Organ at the Freiberg Cathedral (Saxony): Music has been a central part of church life in Germany since Luther

For Luther, a feeling for language and music were both important when writing new songs, though he also felt the music was meant to serve the text. And songs in general, he thought, were there to spread the word of God.

Fierce weapons of a singing movement

The propaganda effect of Luther's songs, as well as songs by other reformist composers, has been documented over and over again. It's not surprising that the diocesan town of Hildesheim prohibited the singing of reformist songs in the public twice, namely in 1524 and 1531. They were considered fierce weapons of the reform movement, explained Burkhard Weitz: "From early on, singing was a trademark of the Lutherans, and it turned the Reformation into a singing movement."

Dieter Falk goes even further: "There is a famous quote by US civil rights activist Martin Luther King (1929-1968), who once said, 'What I learned from Martin Luther is that a movement can only succeed when it sings.' Without a doubt, music has played a prominent role in the spread of the Reformation."

According to Falk, Luther was one of the first to achieve decisive cultural and religious change with music. The song mentioned above, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," composed in 1529, became the most triumphal song of the Reformation.

Luther's songs today

All of Luther's known 37 songs are still part of Protestant songbooks. He continues to be the most heavily represented composer and poet of the official German Protestant songbook, even though only few of these songs are still sung on a regular basis.