

Music of the Reformation Era

October 18, 2020
Anthems of Anglicanism

In 1521, Pope Leo X conferred upon King Henry VIII of England the title of *Fidei Defensor* (Defender of the Faith) as a reward for his pamphlet *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martinum Lutherum* (“Declaration of the Seven Sacraments Against Martin Luther”). A mere 12 years later, he was stripped of this title for breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church because the Pope refused to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Henry ordered the Archbishop of Canterbury to grant the divorce, which he did. The Church of England remained Catholic in doctrine under Henry VIII with a few exceptions. One such exception was the replacement of Latin services with English. This brought forth a new style of sacred composition, called the anthem (from Latin “antiphon”). An anthem is a polyphonic work (multiple voices moving independent of each other) in English.



Thomas Tallis (ca. 1505 – 1585) was a prominent composer of English choral music. He is considered one of England’s greatest composers. Little is known of Tallis beyond his music. Even the only portrait of him in existence, by Gerard Vandergucht, was painted around 150 years after Tallis’ death (so this picture probably does not look like him).

Tallis’ anthem, *If ye love me*, exemplifies the early Anglican anthem as it balances the demands of the Anglican Church for clear, comprehensible setting of the text with the musical qualities of beauty and variety. The words, derived from John 14:15-17 (see reverse), held an important place in the new Book of Common Prayer and were the beginning of the Gospel reading on Pentecost, Whit Sunday, the exact day in June 1549 when the new rites of the Church of England were officially put into effect.

ORIGINAL ENGLISH TEXT

*If ye love me,
keep my commandments,
and I will pray the Father,
and he shall give you another comforter,
that he may abide with you forever,
even the spirit of truth.*



NEXT WEEK’S PRELUDE CHORALS OF LUTHERANISM

Ein feste Burg
by Martin Luther