Abstract
This conference essay seeks to examine how Martin Luther and his successors impacted the singing assembly during the Lutheran Reformation and give an honest assessment of the challenges to maintaining a distinctive hymnological emphasis in both congregational and educational ministries today. The twenty-first century church can struggle to face the discrepancy between the rising consumption of music on digital playlists in society and the actual production of hymn singing in the church. At the same time, some areas of the church have become polarized in their preferences for the forms and styles of so-called “traditional” and “contemporary” hymnody. If left unchanged, this essay contends it could not only fail to leverage but also threaten the legacy Martin Luther has left the church. After assessing the challenges, it examines criteria for determining the best hymns today and concludes with a case study of Luther’s own hymn “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” (Nun freut euch, liebe Christen, ge’mein). No matter where an individual congregation or school falls on the worship spectrum, Luther’s approach of careful innovation has the potential to greatly contribute to the worship dialogue of the singing church today.