

Yale Studies in Sacred Music

Musicians for the Churches:  
Reflections on  
Vocation and Formation



A Publication  
of the  
Institute of  
Sacred Music at  
Yale University

2001

Guest Editor: *Margot E. Fassler*  
Publications Editor, ISM: *Katherine Rodgers*  
Copy Editor, ISM: *John Leinenweber*  
Designer: *Elaine Piraino-Holevoet/PIROET*  
Printer: *Lithoprint Inc.*

Copyright © 2001 by the  
Yale Institute of Sacred Music

Printed on recycled paper

Yale Studies in Sacred Music  
Musicians for the Churches:  
Reflections on Vocation and Formation

**Preface**

*Margot E. Fassler* ..... 1

**Psalmody and the Medieval Cantor: Ancient Models  
in the Service of Modern Praxis**

*Margot E. Fassler* ..... 3

**Information vs. Formation in the Training  
of Church Musicians**

*Quentin Faulkner* ..... 14

**Training Church Musicians as Pastoral Liturgists**

*John D. Witvliet* ..... 17

**Tomorrow's Church Musician: Artisan or Artist?  
The View from an English Conservatoire**

*Patrick Russill* ..... 23

**No Assembly Required: Why Church Music for the  
Twenty-first Century is an Ecclesial Concern**

*The Rev. Frank Stoldt* ..... 27

**Questions of Excellence: Training for the Music  
Ministry in a Local Church**

*Linda J. Clark* ..... 34

**The Imperative of Theological/Philosophical  
Education for Church Musicians**

*Calvin M. Johansson* ..... 37

**Training Church Musicians: What Are the  
Appropriate Methods?**

*Edward Foley, Capuchin* ..... 40

**The Budapest Academy of Music: Its Course of Study  
and Philosophy of Sacred Music Education**

*László Dobszay* ..... 44

**Liturgy and Moral Imagination: Encountering Images  
in a TV Culture**

*Don E. Saliers* ..... 47

**Lights on the Road to Heaven**

*William Porter* ..... 51

*The articles in this issue (with the exception of the concluding sermon) were originally presented as papers at the Institute's conference on "Musicians for the Churches" in May, 1998. Professors Margot Fassler and Martin Jean coordinated the conference. A version of the sermon Lights on the Road to Heaven, preached at Christ Church in New Haven, previously appeared in The Journal of the Association of Anglican Musicians (Vol. 9, No. 10, December 2000).*



# Preface

MARGOT E. FASSLER

In an editorial on the value of mixing popular culture and high literary culture when teaching the polarized students in his English classes, Richard K. Simon offers a suggested reading list and selects a pithy quotation from Robert Scholes to describe the tangled heads of the media-fed:<sup>1</sup>

They are bombarded with signs, with rhetoric, from their daily awakenings until their troubled sleep, especially with signs transmitted by the audio-visual media. And, for a variety of reasons, they are relatively deprived of experience in the thoughtful reading and writing of verbal texts. They are also sadly deficient in certain kinds of historical knowledge that might give them some perspective on the manipulation that they currently encounter.<sup>2</sup>

Full acknowledgment of a mental condition prevalent in many segments of modern congregations underlies the present set of reflections upon the training needed for contemporary musicians with vocations to the churches and synagogues.<sup>3</sup> Each of us has pondered the training of musicians who will play, sing, and compose for liturgies, offering in the process a critique, and acknowledging thereby that “a rite, like any other cultural phenomenon, is likely to be less than perfect and therefore subject to criticism.”<sup>4</sup> None of us is sanguine about the immediate future. Each of us is concerned with liturgy, culture, and ecclesiology as well as with music; and each of us knows full well the many ways in which the congregations musicians serve have been transformed by changes in contemporary society, education, and the extent to which many are dominated by those who control popular entertainment and taste.

Whereas a strong majority of us operates upon the premise that sound and excellent preparation in the art of music—a classic conservatory training—remains the core of what is most essential to equip musicians for service in the liturgical arts, none of us has chosen to talk about the music curriculum *per se*, and none of us praises or endorses our own work or that of our colleagues in the training of superior musicians; rather we take it for granted (may we ever be so privileged!). The reader will not find formulae for how much is needed of standard repertory and how much of jazz, how many hours of improvisa-

tion, how many recitals, how much history, theory, and ethnomusicology. We have chosen rather to talk about what musicians need in addition to the difficult curriculum of professional music students who are learning to play, sing, conduct and compose with technical excellence, musical understanding, and aesthetic integrity.

Indeed, the desiderata we have offered to be overlaid upon the requisite professional graduate degree in music include courses in the psalms and psalmody (Fassler), exercises in religious formation of the sort ministers and rabbis receive (Faulkner), a curriculum of liturgical study (Witvliet), courses in theology and the philosophy of religion (Johansson), a curriculum emphasizing practical theology and ethnomusicology (Foley). Several of us realize that the overburdened curriculum of our conservatories will not and should not be diminished by a whole second round of requirements (Russill, for example); yet all of us know that the requisite musical training—our primary responsibility—should be supplemented according to a variety of means for students who desire such knowledge. The questions for this alternative curriculum are how, where, with what, and by whom, and the answers we propose are not uniform. Quentin Faulkner mentions the kinds of things learned from apprenticeship in a choir school as a model; Frank Stoldt lays out the many reasons why church music is primarily an ecclesial concern; Linda Clark argues that classroom work must at some point “move out of the academic precincts into local congregations and their worship practices.” In a similar vein, Edward Foley’s course on ritual music requires “field work in the communities in which [musicians] serve.” László Dobszay’s curriculum—which extends over 5 years—allows for performing faculty to constitute “a workshop which deals with the actual problems of church music and assists in the training of future musicians for the churches.”

What conclusions might be drawn from this thoughtful series of reflections by leading musical and theological educators? Here is one list; each reader will make his or her own. The training musicians get in conservatories, which is primarily concerned with Western art music, remains the backbone of musical excellence in this country. The extent to which ethnomusicology and various practices of improvisation and vocal techniques from non-western cultures are taught in our conservatories is a concern which must be addressed; so too the need for a

strong course in jazz and traditions of American popular music. Musicians who expect to spend at least part of their performing careers working in churches and synagogues need to go beyond their professional training; programs serious about the training of musicians whose major vocations are to the churches and synagogues need to find ways of adding and supporting financially a third year of study beyond the Master of Music. This would include study of liturgical subjects, especially when taught from the interdisciplinary perspectives described by John Witvliet, and the study of Scripture and practical theology mentioned by several of us. A *practicum* should be part of this curriculum, as candidates for the Master of Divinity degree are required to do work in the field.

In his advocacy of the balance between restraint and exuberance required by “music...celebrants...and all liturgical ministries,” Don Saliers suggests that the liturgy “must provide images for the long haul in its praying, singing, and sacramental acts.” Just as successful liturgical arts cannot be made primarily of “quick fix” artistic productions, so too there is no short cut to training effective leaders for the music programs of churches and synagogues. They will always need the finest musical training; they will also need to learn to lead congregations through a theological course of study, and this must include congregational studies and field work. Those of us who help train these musicians must find ways to support them financially while they are in school for what will be an increasingly “long haul”; and churches and synagogues need to pay them accordingly for their extraordinary work once they are ready to serve.

In the midst of the controversies over worship and music for worship which hold sway in many American congregations, comfort may come from a book cited here

by many of us, Walter Brueggemann’s *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. The cycle of rage, grief, and praise Brueggemann describes so eloquently is elemental to the dance of prayer, song, and liturgy which sustains congregational life, no matter its guise.

---

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See his “Much Ado about ‘Friends’: What Pop Culture Offers Literature,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 46/41 (June 16, 2000): B4-6.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Scholes, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven, 1985) p. 15. The paper by Don Saliers speaks directly to the role of the entertainment industry in the shaping of Christian ritual and liturgical music (pp. 47-50 below).

<sup>3</sup> The reflections were presented in 1998 at a “Think Tank” on the subject sponsored by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and held at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. We are grateful for the support of Dean William Franklin of Berkeley, and to Deans who attended for part of the time, Robert Blocker of the Yale School of Music and Richard Wood of the Yale Divinity School. The staff of the Institute of Sacred Music made all the arrangements, including those for recording. The conversations surrounding the topics have been transcribed, and copies are extant in the Yale archives. The full roster of participants included several people who did not offer written statements for this publication, and who made presentations and offered substantive contributions: Horace Boyer, Marguerite Brooks, David Connell, Peter Hawkins, Martin Jean, Thomas Murray, Richard Proulx, Bryan Spinks, and Peter Wallin. I am particularly grateful for the work of associate editor Katherine Rodgers in the preparation of final copy. Her many editorial skills are everywhere in evidence as a group of spoken papers were rendered stylistically uniform. John Leinenweber joined with Dr. Rodgers in the final copyediting.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Grimes, “Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances,” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L. Grimes (Upper Saddle River, 1996), 279. See as well his *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory* (Columbia, SC, 1990).

# Psalmody and the Medieval Cantor: Ancient Models in the Service of Modern Praxis<sup>1</sup>

MARGOT E. FASSLER

No more important single document for the study of the early Christian liturgy exists than the diary of the fourth-century nun Egeria, who—perhaps from the region of what is today southern France—made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and recorded what she saw and heard.<sup>2</sup> The churches, from waystations peopled by single monks to grand basilicas, were filled with songs, and Egeria reminds us first hand of the importance of psalmody to the churches, of the singing of clergy, of monks, and of laity, throughout the day and the night. Then, as in the medieval Latin West, religious services were sung—in all their aspects—and the language of liturgical songs was the psalms.

The Psalter was the heart of early Christian singing and prayer. We do well to remember this at the outset, even before we do or say anything else about the work of cantors in the Middle Ages, or the work of musicians in the churches today, and the training they will need for the immediate future. By the time of Egeria the psalms were the major vehicles for expressing the infinitely complex relationship between God and human persons. Traditionally they were prayed by Christians to the parent God, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, offering a glimpse of the forces binding the individual members of the Holy Trinity into an all encompassing “oneness.”<sup>3</sup> The emotions and the interpersonal relationships provided for human delectation and exploration, for human shame and exhortation, embody prayer moods unfathomed in the muted and often colorless voices of contemporary corporate prayer.<sup>4</sup> The psalms take modern Christians to realms both alien and familiar, and position those who pray them in worship at the doorstep of mystery. To have a canonical songbook of this complexity and antiquity is a priceless gift, and the stewardship of this gift belongs particularly to musicians.

The thesis of this paper is simple and relates to both texts and music in Christian churches today, to the work of church musicians, and—most importantly for this collection of papers—to the modes of training best supportive of music ministry: the basic task of musicians

who work in the Christian churches is to ensure that worshippers know the psalms, by heart, and well enough to pray them meaningfully, both in community and individually, and to recognize and resonate with them as they occur throughout Scripture, in the liturgy, in the texts of those who preach. If the celebrant is responsible primarily for administering the sacraments and proclaiming and preaching the Word, the musician’s responsibility is the Psalter, the songbook that sustains the congregational lives of the churches.<sup>5</sup> A corollary to this thesis follows directly: the further church musicians are removed from the psalms, and from responsibility for proclaiming them and teaching them, the more likely that vocation will be minimized. It only follows from the thesis that the psalms and psalmody acquire a major role in the training of musicians for Christian churches, regardless of their denominations. I have developed these ideas by reference to the office and training of musicians in the medieval period, particularly for monastic life, and then, at the close, I extrapolate ideas from the past to help with the complicated subject of training musicians for contemporary churches.

## The Psalms

For all the talk of music and singing associated with Christian psalmody, the history of these poems must begin with their texts. No melodies, or even melodic formulae, from the Judaeo/Christian traditions of antiquity survive.<sup>6</sup> It is clear from evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the order of the psalms was not fixed until the early Christian era. Dating the various groupings of psalm texts, or even many individual psalms, is not a subject upon which a scholarly consensus has appeared. The five loosely-ordered collections comprising the 150 psalms are well established, however, based upon details intrinsic to the works themselves, and to the doxologies that close each of the first four sections:<sup>7</sup>

Book 1: (pss 1-41), the majority of which are “of David.”

Book 2: (pss 42-72), Elohim rather than Yahweh is the preferred term for God. Six are connected with “the sons of Korah” and eighteen with David.

---

*Margot E. Fassler is the Director of the Institute of Sacred Music and the Robert S. Tangeman Professor of Music History at the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Music.*

Book 3: (pss 73-89), also Elohistic.

Book 4: (pss 90-106).

Book 5: (pss 107-150).

The psalms are not only divided into five groupings, to mirror the organization of the Pentateuch, but they also are of several well-recognized types: hymns of praise, laments, royal psalms, wisdom psalms, psalms that mention liturgical action, and historical psalms, with great amounts of overlapping of these themes and uses from section to section, and even from psalm to psalm. Complex and varied though sources of the poems are, the 150 are most commonly seen as the “songbook of the temple,” especially of the Second Temple.<sup>8</sup> Kselman and Barré evoke an understanding of the joint intermingling of song, place, and sense in their introduction to the psalms in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*:

The Israelite went to the Temple, where he hoped to “see” God (i.e. be granted an “audience” with God) as subjects of a king went to a palace. The notion of God as a “refuge” shades into that of the Temple as the place of safety par excellence. (526)

### The Psalms in the Early Church

Although Christian reliance upon the psalms for corporate prayer is witnessed to by an immeasurable flood of materials, the greater part of the evidence for study dates from the fourth century forward, just after the time Egeria made her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Indeed, comparatively little is known about the ways the psalms were learned and prayed by the very earliest Christian communities, and the psalms as reflected in the New Testament is a subject ripe for study: Jesus cried out psalmodically on the Cross; the Cornerstone defined his ministry in their language. The Epistles of Paul and other early Christian writers make frequent reference to the psalms. The numerous quotations from psalms in the New Testament demonstrate how well at least some early Christians knew various versions of these poems.<sup>9</sup> A striking example is the Letter to the Hebrews, the key arguments of which unfold against a psalmodic backdrop. How early Christians came to know the psalms, though, and from what sources, remain matters of speculation and dispute, although it is clear that both public and private gatherings were venues for singing and studying these texts.

The wealth of commentaries and the abundance of sermons poured out in the patristic period offer understandings of what the texts meant to the learned in this later period, to teachers both explaining the psalms to the unlettered, and making the nature of praise in song

integral to developing ecclesiology and Christology.<sup>10</sup> These texts offer an ancient cloud of witnesses to understanding the psalms as vehicles for prayer and praise that refresh not only musicians but also preachers. Perhaps one of the most striking and well-known explications is found in the third-century, by Clement of Alexandria, who makes instruments of those human persons singing to the Lamb through Psalm 150, their tongues inflamed by the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit, distinguishing the divine liturgy from this sort of revelry, sings: “Praise him with the sound of the trumpet,” and indeed he will raise the dead with the sound of the trumpet. “Praise him on the psaltery,” for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. “And praise him on the cithara,” let the cithara be taken to mean the mouth, played by the Spirit as if by a plectrum. “Praise him with tympanum and chorus” refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the flesh in the resounding membrane. “Praise him on strings and the instrument” refers to our body as an instrument and its sinews as strings from which it derives its harmonious tension, and when strummed by the Spirit it gives off human notes. “Praise him on the clangorous cymbals” speaks of the tongue as the cymbal of the mouth which sounds as the lips are moved. Therefore he called out to all humankind, “Let every breath praise the Lord,” because he watches over every breathing thing he has made.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth century marks a great watershed, for it is the period in which many great commentaries on the psalms were written, including the most wide-spread and influential of all, those of St. Augustine.<sup>12</sup> In this same period, monastic and cathedral practices of psalmody blended in diverse ways throughout the East and in the Latin West to make the praying of the psalms a public communal act.<sup>13</sup> In the Roman tradition, competing Latin psalters in the third century were providing texts for the liturgy in various regions, as well as grist for the mills of commentators. The fourth century was also the period of the single most influential biblical scholar of all time, Jerome, who translated the psalms three times.<sup>14</sup> Comparatively little is known about his first translation, which apparently does not survive, although it was once confused with the so-called Roman psalter, a Latin version sung in Rome until the sixteenth century. His second translation was prepared from the Hexaplaric text of the Septuagint, part of that erudite comparative Old Tes-

tament prepared by Origen in the first half of the third century.<sup>15</sup> Jerome's third Latin psalter is the *Juxta hebraeos*, a work that he claimed was based on Hebrew originals, although the actual state of his knowledge of Hebrew remains a question of scholarly debate.

The second psalter, made about AD 392, had an abiding influence on the Roman Catholic liturgical tradition. This, the so-called "Gallican Psalter," was the version adopted north of the Alps. It became the basis for the Roman liturgy as standardized during the Carolingian period, and was the Psalter of the Vulgate Bible.<sup>16</sup> Thus it was the text most commonly sung in the medieval Office, and was officially recognized by the Council of Trent as the Psalter of the Roman Catholic Church; as a result, the version of the psalms adopted for Catholic services was closer to the Greek Septuagint, whereas Protestant Psalters are closer to the Hebrew and reflect the scholarship of the late medieval period and after.<sup>17</sup>

Attitudes toward the psalms in ancient and medieval writings are often concerned with pedagogy. The primary teacher of the people through psalmody was, as the *Apostolic Constitutions* has it, the bishop as leader of public prayer: "For it is said not only of priests, but rather each of the laity must hear it and consider it for himself...But you must assemble each day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the houses of the Lord."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, teaching has always been required to learn the psalms. The texts of our common Christian song are long, complicated, and hard to remember. If one wants the psalms by heart so that one can enter into them, pray them, under many sets of circumstances, there is no easy way out. Thus, a major function of the bishop, be it Augustine or Ambrose, was to teach the people the contents of the psalms, what they meant, and the spirit in which to sing them. And this work complemented that of the professional singers, who rendered the texts, not only because they deserved such attention, but so that the splendor of the song would put the words into the heart of the oral and aural cultures of early times. Augustine's descriptions of liturgical practices in northern Africa demonstrate that, as with monks in John Cassian's descriptions, liturgical psalmody was frequently soloistic, with refrains added to keep a larger group focused and involved. The soloistic psalmody Augustine knew was frighteningly beautiful, and he sometimes felt that the music threatened to take his concentration from the words. Yet he knew as well the power of music to ingrain texts deep within the soul, producing a kind of knowing not otherwise possible. His ambivalence—long used by various polemicists in arguments regarding the appropriate nature of liturgical song—is expressed in various places in Augustine's works, but at greatest length in the *Confessions*, Book Ten:

The delight of the ear drew me and held me more firmly, but you unbound and liberated me. Now I confess that I repose just a little in those sounds to which your words give life, when they are sung by a sweet and skilled voice; not such that I cling to them, but that I can rise out of them when I wish. But it is with the words by which they have life that they gain entry into me, and seek in my heart a place of some honor, even if I scarcely provide them a fitting one. Sometimes I seem to myself to grant them more respect than is fitting, when I sense that our souls are more piously and earnestly moved to the ardor of devotion by these sacred words when they are thus sung than when not thus sung, and that all the affections of our soul, by their own diversity, have their proper measures (*modos*) in voice and song, which are stimulated by I know not what secret correspondence. But the gratification of my flesh—to which I ought not to surrender my mind to be enervated—frequently leads me astray, as the senses do not accompany reason in such a way as patiently to follow; but having gained admission only because of it, seek even to run ahead and lead it. I sin thus in these things unknowingly, but afterwards I know.

Sometimes, however, in avoiding this deception too vigorously, I err by excessive severity, and sometimes so much so that I wish every melody of the sweet songs to which the Davidic Psalter is usually set to be banished from my ears and the church itself. And safer to me seems what I remember was often told me concerning Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, who required the reader of the psalm to perform it with so little inflection (*flexu*) of voice that it was closer to speaking (*pronuntianti*) than to singing (*canenti*).

However, when I recall the tears which I shed at the song of the Church in the first days of my recovered faith, and even now as I am moved not by the song but by the things which are sung, when sung with fluent voice and music that is most appropriate (*convenientissima modulatione*), I acknowledge again the great benefit of this practice....<sup>19</sup>

By the time of Augustine, the musicians who rendered the psalmody, and who performed responsorially with the congregation, were well-established, and through the wide-spread and much-read writings of the saint, these musical types—and, it should be added, ambivalent attitudes toward them—came to be known throughout Western Europe. In a culture that did not notate its music, the songs and their praxis were learned by rote, taught from generation to generation of musicians, with the constant transformation and repertorial instability typical of most of the world's musical practices, even today. So the ancient world bequeathed us two types of singers, and they are with us even now: professionals who bring the words of the Psalter to the group; and untrained choirs and congregations, who sing back.

The development of monasticism in the West gave rise to a concentration upon both types, the cantor, whose office made him the leader of song within community, and the monks and nuns who, either in total, or as represented by the choir, sang along with and responded to, the cantor and his assistants. Although clearly people sang psalmodic or alleluiatic refrains at the time of Augustine, and continued to participate for centuries after him, the nature of congregational singing in the early medieval period is a poorly understood and under-researched subject, and even if attempts were made to understand it better, the evidence is not sufficient for hard conclusions. However, we know a great deal about those centuries from the ninth forward, when vast numbers of men and women lived religious lives in communities where singing the psalms was integral to formation.<sup>20</sup>

### The Ninth Century Forward

The great divide between the musical world of antiquity and that of modernity in the West was the ninth century. During that century changes took place that transformed the musical practice of the West, differentiating its musical culture from that of all others in the world even to the present time.<sup>21</sup> In the ninth and tenth centuries, two things happened that caused this transformation. First, the Roman liturgy in hybrid form was standardized in a powerfully accessible redaction. This was, over the centuries to follow, transmitted throughout Europe, destroying in its wake the indigenous liturgical and musical practices of the various uses that had existed earlier in region after region. Second, in order for this transforming standardization to take place, a most extraordinary thing occurred: human beings learned to write music down, not only the occasional piece, but the entire repertory, hundreds upon hundreds of pieces for the Mass and for the Office. In its earliest centuries, notation was a guide to memory and a catalogue of stylistic understanding; it was useless unless the melodies were also had

by heart.<sup>22</sup> Tragically, the entire repertory (but for the exception of some twenty pieces) of Mozarabic chant is lost to us because it was transcribed only in an unheightened notation, that, although very different from, nonetheless is closely related in nature to those notational styles used for the gregorian repertories. In the course of the eleventh century, and first in Southern France, musicians began to transform notation in yet other ways, arranging the notes so that specific pitches could be read; this also was the century of the theorist Guido of Arezzo, who was rightfully proud of the ways in which solfege and notation could go hand in hand, and choir boys could be taught in new ways, not exclusively by rote and memory, but by system, so they could sing any piece put before them if they but understood how to “read.”<sup>23</sup>

The text books for boys and novices in monastic and cathedral schools were primarily Psalters and, by the eleventh century, hymnals as well.<sup>24</sup> From these sources, teachers taught not only the essential texts for the liturgy, but also grammar, syntax, and principles of religious formation.<sup>25</sup> The psalms prepared students for the study of the liberal arts, which came later, once psalmody had been mastered. Study of the texts of the psalms continued throughout life: the most copied texts in the Middle Ages, besides the Bible and liturgical books, were commentaries upon the psalms, particularly those of St. Augustine. The psalter was thus thrice known:

1. It was the basic text of the antiphonal chants of the Mass liturgy, the Introit and Communion, and dominated the responsorial psalmody of the Gradual and Alleluia. Chanted commentaries on some of these repertories were designed by musicians to be sung alongside them.<sup>26</sup>
2. It was, of course, the primary text of the Office, and held the day together through the Hours of prayer. There it was part of the *cursus*, but it also appeared in the many other offices and devotions that became the backbone of lay piety, not only in church, but also, in later centuries, in the home.
3. It was the basis of numerous sermons, commentaries, and artistic programs of liturgical singing.

So many adult novices streamed into the renewed monasticism of the late eleventh century that teaching materials had to improve, and this work often belonged to cantors and their assistants.<sup>27</sup> And not all the texts were the same—in fact, the uniformity we moderns sometimes attribute to earlier times is a mythical con-

struct, and no more existed in the past than it does in the present. Whereas there was considerable standardization in the Latin West in those regions where the Carolingian reforms of the late eighth and ninth century were followed, diversity and variety existed as well, especially regarding texts for the proper chants as compared with the intoned psalmody of the Office. And although the Carolingian liturgical forms came quickly to some regions, they arrived only slowly in others. Churches of today have much to learn from studies of liturgy and identity in the Middle Ages. When scholars go back behind the liturgical reforms of Trent and those of the Carolingian period to the liturgies of the West in the fifth through the eighth centuries, they encounter a riot of traditions suggesting more than one use in Rome, for example, several uses in the Gallican churches, and distinct uses in Spain, in Benevento, in Anglo-Saxon England, in Ireland, in Aquileia, in Ravenna, and, of course, in Milan. Even the standardized rite that evolved in the Carolingian period contained numerous “soft spots,” and creativity and communal identity blossomed in the abundance of decorative details added in the central Middle Ages, both to the Mass liturgy—especially in the forms of ordinary chants and their tropes, tropes for the proper, and sequences—and through the extraordinary numbers of new Offices for the saints.<sup>28</sup>

### The Role of the Cantor

What happened to psalmody and the role of the cantor in the centuries when music was written down and taught to greater numbers of people, adults as well as children? How did the training of musicians for the churches change the practice and the nature of music itself? These are complicated questions, but clearly the shift to a written notation made cantors more important than they had ever been before in the West. Monastic rules and customaries from the ninth through the twelfth centuries show a person whose office becomes increasingly overloaded, so much so that finally, by the close of this latter century, it splits into pieces.<sup>29</sup> Before the Carolingian revolution in standardization and transmission, the cantor was a singer who improvised the soloistic psalmody, and had some relationship to the training of a schola or choir. His mind was wrapped around the repertory, and he taught it, transmitted it. The success with which he did this must have depended upon his talent and training. Writers of the eleventh

century mourned the passing of great singers of the past, and lamented that the old ways of doing things were no longer understood. Although musicologists frequently dismiss these comments, the way the notation was transmitted, and what was said about it in the theorists, show clearly that the practice it once reflected was modified and changed over time. Early notation demonstrated that musicians cared intensely about style and ornamentation. In later notations these elements drop out, and the recording of pitch becomes the supreme goal of transcription.

*We simply will never restore  
the psalms to Christian worship  
without a learned and able cadre  
of church musicians.*

From the ninth century forward, then, cantors had new work to do; they were no longer only singers. Their minds were no longer the major repositories for the music; their books became increasingly central to the process of knowing and

teaching psalmody. The first important type of notated Western liturgical books is the *cantatorii*, small codices that contain the melodies and texts for the soloistic psalmody of the Mass. These books, prepared by the cantor himself, were sometimes covered with magnificently carved plaques, and the cantor took the book with him when he climbed the ambo to render the psalmody of the Gradual and the Alleluia. The book became a symbol of office and of essential musical knowledge; the two went together, the man and the codex.

Yet by the tenth century the cantor's skills were no longer those of singer alone. Increasingly from the ninth century, he taught from and by the book, and was skilled in the practices of theory and notation. In fact, the cantor was one of the most learned people in the monastery and cathedral because of what he had to know for the sake of the liturgy and its practice. Thus, and very importantly, to the cantor fell duties both administrative and pedagogical. He became the leader of the monastic scriptorium, for, although we sometimes forget it, the most important task of scriptoria until the rise of the universities in the thirteenth century was the production of liturgical books. Because he knew books so well, the cantor also became the monastic and cathedral librarian, and his other common name, *armarius*, means “he who is in charge of the book closet.”

If the medieval cantor smelled of ink and parchment, he also smelled of the stylus and wax tablets. Cantors and their main assistants, the succentors, had to teach the boys and novices to sing, and were responsible for what we know as rehearsals. Boys sang together in the monastic cloisters and cathedral closes, and were also heard individually. When responsible for reading

or singing, the musician sat, book in hand, and listened to all those with liturgical responsibilities for the week, correcting mispronunciations and wrong notes. In addition, the cantor kept the monastic rolls, and entered the deaths of community members. So the cantor was, in many cases, also the chronicler, the monastic historian. Not only did he calculate Easter and the feasts dependent upon it, but all other calendrical events. These activities, alongside his work as historian, made him the true keeper of the time.<sup>30</sup>

### The Thirteenth Century

By the thirteenth century, the old ways of training cantors and musicians were clearly breaking down. The cathedral and monastic schools, the greatest centers of learning for centuries, were slowly yet surely surpassed by the rising universities. The thirteenth is yet another watershed century in the history of the cantor, when training changed again, and when music was transformed too. To talk about the thirteenth century would require another paper, one that would discuss how music fared as a subject in university curricula, and what role the choir schools continued to play in learning.<sup>31</sup> The mendicants had an enormous impact upon psalmody and how it was sung and known. They truncated the psalmody of the Office, and were instrumental in the production of that travelling compendium, the breviary.<sup>32</sup> This development was to have a great impact not only on the lives of clerics and other religious, but on the pious laity as well. Indeed, before we leave the subject and draw some conclusions about what can be learned from the office of the cantor for modern times, a brief look at the transformation of popular piety taking place in the later Middle Ages alongside changes in education and the training of musicians is useful.

The friars' attempt in the thirteenth century to shorten and streamline the liturgy—especially with the development of the breviary—was not initially designed to minimize psalmody in the life of the church, but rather to witness to new modes of popular devotion that fed upon the Psalter.<sup>33</sup> In the later Middle Ages, devotional Books of Hours were prepared not only for the rich, but by the thousands for middle class people, whose only book might have been a utilitarian primer copied for private and public prayer.<sup>34</sup> The new books, prepared in ever greater numbers from the late thirteenth century forward, were at their cores truncated psalters. They differed in spirit from the monastic ideal of saying the entire one hundred and fifty each week (or each day!), and yet were related to other chief characteristics of monastic and cathedral psalmody: set psalms were appropriately rendered daily at particular times of the day. Eamon Duffy says:

The early history of the primer, as Books of Hours were often called in England, is complex and essentially monastic. Arising out of the pious practice of individual monks who added the private recitation of the fifteen gradual Psalms (120-34) and the seven penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) to the public liturgy of the seven monastic Hours, the primer acquired an identity as a separate book and absorbed other material, most notably the so-called Little Office or Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary. ... As the devout laity sought increasingly to emulate monastic piety, the Hours of the Blessed Virgin offered a convenient and religiously satisfying way of sharing in the monastic round of prayer. The Little Hours included some of the most beautiful and accessible parts of the psalter, notably the gradual Psalms, whose humane and tender tone was accentuated by the Marian antiphons, lessons, and collects celebrating the beauty, goodness, and merciful kindness of the Virgin...<sup>35</sup>

Primers included other psalms besides the gradual and penitential. With the Office for the Dead, “the Dirige,” the Psalms of Commendation (119 and 139), and the early development of the “devotional manual” (which had the Little Hours of the Virgin as core repertory), there was great variety. Yet the Psalter was still the cornerstone of Catholic piety, and the connection between what happened in private devotion and the public prayers of Mass and Office in Latin was vital. A sharp duality, of course, occurred between private prayer and the learned corporate psalmody, but did not destroy the powerful relationship between the individual’s psalmody and that of the Church. In a seminal study of the primer, Edmund Bishop asked, “If a man took the [vernacular] *Primer* to church, would he hear the same service or set of services in Latin?” His tabulations of materials show that for the lion’s share of the texts, the answer to the question is a resounding “yes.”<sup>36</sup> The poor man’s psalter, the lay man’s psalter, the litany of the Blessed Virgin, the rosary—the learned culture that once produced the vast and complex repertories of gregorian chant, and that sustained the life of the monastic and cathedral Office, existed in parallel with something related, yet different, as people learned to read in far greater numbers than ever before, and wished to have their own access to the religious life they yearned for and yet did not have ample time to indulge in fully.<sup>37</sup>

Such popular and domestic efforts to have the psalms at home made reading liturgical texts more widespread than ever before, not only in church, of course, where tradition insisted on it, but on the road, in the ship, in the place of commerce, in the bedroom—the read Psalter could go anywhere, and it did. The religious reformations of the sixteenth century were not to diminish the importance of the psalmody; rather in many ways, and in many places, the singing of psalms was renewed by those reforms, and every stripe of early modern religious life has at its very heart a psalmody and a theology of the psalms.

### Psalmody Today

So if we squint our eyes and look back at the history of musicians and their training from late antiquity to the reformation—if we think of all those years of memorizing that individuals submitted to, of all the boys who were whipped by grammar’s rod so they might learn the psalter, of all those books and the hands cramped from copying them, of all the thousands of little Books of Hours stained by the lunches of shopkeepers, of the running of early presses, of Sternhold and Hopkins, Tate and Brady, the Bay Psalm book, printed and printed and printed—the message is fairly clear. This ultrahuman effort was expended so that musicians might know the psalms and how to sing them; so that they might render them to God, not only for the congregation, but with it. The common thread running through the history of the medieval cantor and his/her mission is the Psalter, and this was so not for just a few decades, or in one or two areas, but for centuries, and everywhere.

Two things are clear from the abundant literature on psalmody and worship and numerous present efforts to translate texts and prepare liturgical psalters: there is general agreement among many denominations that psalmody should be central to worship; and there is a general outcry from all quarters that it is not at present central, even in denominations whose official documents proclaim it to be so, and that something needs to be done about this state of affairs. A 1982 issue of *The Hymn* which evaluates psalmody in several denominations and demands greater attention to the singing of the psalms in the churches, demonstrates the emphasis that a group of religious leaders saw as central to the restoration of psalmody in the churches, and this was soon followed by yet another group of essays in a similar vein.<sup>38</sup> Recent essays on the nature of Catholic liturgy and music since the Second Vatican Council are symptomatic of the cries for “reformation” which may be anticipated in the future of this denomination alone.<sup>39</sup> The push toward a strengthening and reevaluation of psalmody has not diminished, and the plea for greater emphasis on psalmody

in our churches has grown to a din in recent years.<sup>40</sup> And numerous people are responding to this push to reform Christian psalmody. There have been many new translations, several of which have aimed at producing psalms for liturgical singing.<sup>41</sup> There is renewed attention to the ways in which the psalms and the common lectionary are to be related in worship.<sup>42</sup> Several new attempts at restoring congregational singing of the psalter have emerged as well. Paul Ford’s *By Flowing Waters* exemplifies these attempts and the importance they attach to the psalms. According to Ford’s introduction:

This volume attempts to reintroduce the singing of the psalms in the eucharistic service. It employs psalm verses with great variety and freedom of choice. It reestablishes the antiphon as a refrain and the response or alleluia as a true response. It presumes an orientation of the people toward psalms, which includes an understanding of the imagery and the historical and cultural background of the psalms. Preparation for the use of *By Flowing Waters* should not be merely musical but requires a study of religious values of the psalms or psalm verses. In addition, those who sing the texts must appreciate that the words of different speakers are placed on their lips—now the words of the Lord, now the words of the psalmist, etc.<sup>43</sup>

But the psalmody of the churches relates not only to the Sunday service of Word and Eucharist. The problems caused by the loss of the Hours of public prayer with its attendant psalmody in the Roman Catholic tradition have long been recognized.<sup>44</sup> Restoration of the Hours of public prayer has been one of the goals of the liturgical movement, of the Second Vatican Council, and of official pronouncements written in its aftermath. The collected *Documents on the Liturgy* is filled with calls to restore the Office in some form, and to make it integral to parish life. The Hours of daily prayer are not important only to Roman Catholics, but also to Lutherans and Episcopalians, and Arlo Duba has written recently about their place in reformed liturgies as well.<sup>45</sup>

The office of cantor, the primal church musician in ecclesial organizations for centuries, embodied a vocation that existed primarily for the rendering of the psalter within Christian worship. The contemporary situation suggests that if we are to restore psalmody within our churches we need to restore the responsibility of psalmody to the musician, and to make him/

her a teacher not just of music but of sung texts, the psalms. To be a teacher of psalmody, church musicians will have to continue to have the finest skills as organists and choir directors—and, it should be added, as singers. This comes first—now, then, and in the future. In order to accept this kind of role, however, musicians will need a particular kind of training, and it will include the following things:

1. A course in the styles of psalmody and an ability to perform in each of them. Encouragement to adapt the best of the past to the needs of the present.
2. The ability in organists to accompany and lead various styles, and to be creative in techniques of improvisation suited to the singing. Dedicated instrumentalists of other sorts need the same kind of sensitivity and training in styles of psalmody favored by their denominations, and this from plainsong accompaniment to praise choruses. The rejuvenation of psalmody can lead to renewed interest in the pipe organ, for no other instrument is so well suited for the accompaniment of long blocks of texts to particular tones.
3. A set of tones appropriate to the styles of worship favored by each denomination or congregation. If congregations are to be able to sing the psalms in their entirety, and know them through singing them, some sort of congregational chanting is needed. Eric Routley in his small and very personal discussion of psalmody advocated experimentation in the chanting of psalms by Protestant congregations:

The easiest method for those not inhibited by Protestant prejudice is undoubtedly plainsong, using the Gregorian tones. These are always simple — hardly more than stylized speech. A good musician at the organ can make the accompaniment very beautiful in a modest way. Since these accompaniments are never written out and must always be improvised, it is necessary for the musician to know the rules and the opportunities of the modal scheme that governs these settings.<sup>46</sup>

Musicians need to know how to point psalm texts and lead them congregationally, and this is true for any denomination and worship style.

4. In most cases, musicians are responsible for the choice and ordering of the psalm texts rendered and their settings. They must have studied the psalms with professionals, and themselves have worked with various theories of biblical scholarship and translation.
5. The psalmody of any congregation is never divorced from its operating theology and ecclesiology. Musicians need the sophistication to work actively with these constructs and need to be articulate defenders of the theological reasons for their actions.

I do not have time here to work in detail with specific curricular goals, but one can already imagine what kinds of things could begin to happen when musicians trained as psalmodists work as activist cantors in churches throughout our communities. Just as the medieval cantor and the psalmody went hand in hand, so too today. We simply will never restore the psalms to Christian worship without a learned and able cadre of church musicians. And the only way to harness the talents of these people is first, of course, to train them, and second, of course, to pay them and let them do their work. Their work is not to entertain, not to provide atmosphere, but rather to teach, and to teach things that their congregations must know to participate in the offering up of our canonical songtexts. We have no other way to get the Psalter back than to learn it by heart, together, in our churches, and to take this learning into our homes. A famous passage, once attributed to John Chrysostom, describes a state of psalmody in earlier times. Even though it is well-known, I would quote it one more time:

In the churches there are vigils, and David is first and middle and last. In the singing of early morning hymns David is first and middle and last. In the tents at funeral processions David is first and last. In the houses of virgins there is weaving, and David is first and middle and last. What a thing of wonder! Many who have not even made their first attempt at reading know all of David by heart and recite him in order. Yet it is not only in the cities and the churches that he is so prominent on every

occasion and with people of all ages; even in the fields and deserts and stretching into uninhabited wasteland, he rouses sacred choirs to God with greater zeal. In the monasteries there is a holy chorus of angelic hosts, and David is first and middle and last. In the convents there are bands of virgins who imitate Mary, and David is first and middle and last. In the deserts men crucified to this world hold converse with God, and David is first and middle and last. And at night all people are dominated by physical sleep and drawn into the depths, and David alone stands, by arousing all the servants of God to angelic vigils, turning earth into heaven and making angels of us all.<sup>47</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This text is an adaptation of two series of opening remarks, first those presented to the ISM “Think Tank on the Formation of Church Musicians,” and the second, the keynote address for the Workshop for Catholic Church Musicians, “At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing,” held at St. John’s University in Colledgeville, and organized by Professor Anthony Ruff. I am grateful for the comments and encouragement of Professor Ruff, Paul Ford, Karl Prassl, M. Francis Mannion and of many participants in this excellent conference.

<sup>2</sup> The text can be read in English with a superb introduction and copious notes: *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land*, trans. and notes, John Wilkinson, 2nd rev. ed. (Warminster, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> The lesser doxology which “seals” the psalm in many chanted traditions of the Christian churches is a public proclamation of the trinitarian interpretation that has characterized both the study and proclamation of these texts.

<sup>4</sup> For a concise claim for the appeal that unexpurgated psalmody, with its range of emotions, can offer for contemporary Christian congregations, see William L. Holladay, “Songs for Christians: Using the Whole Psalter,” *Christian Century* 111 (1994): 12-14.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Westermeyer’s “Prospects of Psalmody in the American Church Today,” in *The Hymn* 33.2 (1980): 74-79, is almost 20 years old, and was not known to me when I first wrote these talks. I was pleased to find many statements which resonate with the present work, including the following:

The theological *dictum* leads to a practical corollary. At the practical level the parish musician bears the fundamental responsibility for psalmody. Psalmody is the parish musician’s stream of consciousness. The parish musician controls the song of the people of God, is controlled by it, and becomes the real corporate voice and representative of the people....The parish musician is first of all responsible to what the people sing, and the matrix of that song is psalmody.

The need for the restoration of psalmody has been overshadowed by other problems now dominating in discussion of worship and church music, but it is a basic need and goes deeper than concerns with style

and even with religious culture. In fact, it touches them profoundly if allowed to do so.

<sup>6</sup> The claims of Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura to have reconstructed the original melodies of the psalms (*The Music of the Bible Revealed: The Deciphering of a Millenary Notation*, tr. Dennis Webber, ed. John Wheeler (Berkeley, 1991), originally published in French) have been critiqued by Peter Jeffery in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18/4 (July/August, 1992):6.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Dahood, who was able to use his knowledge of Ugaritic to bring new understanding to the texts in the Anchor Bible edition, said:

The timeless nature of many of the psalms makes it impossible for us now to trace the history of these collections or the process by which they were combined. Though direct evidence enabling us to date the completion of the entire collection is lacking, the vast difference in language and prosody between the canonical Psalter and the Qumran Hodayot makes it impossible to accept a Maccabean date for any of the Psalms, a position still maintained by a number of critics. Nor is a Hellenistic date more plausible. The fact that the LXX translators were at a loss before so many archaic words and phrases bespeaks a considerable chronological gap between them and the original psalmists.

*Psalms I: 1-50*. The Anchor Bible 16 (Garden City, 1996), xxxii.

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Gunkel, in his posthumous *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, argued for the liturgical purposes of the psalms, and, indeed, of all sacred poems in the tradition. The thematic categories are described in his work.

<sup>9</sup> James Sanders says of the knowledge first and second century Christians generally had of scripture:

A word of caution is in order. Modern readers of the NT should not attribute their possible ignorance of Scripture, that is the Scripture of the first-century church, to either the NT writers or to their congregants. There is every reason to believe that common to all programs of instruction upon conversion in the early churches was assiduous reading of Scripture, what we call the OT, as well as the Jesus traditions. Scripture for them was not so much Jewish as it was sacred, especially the Septuagint in the Hellenistic world, but also other less formal-equivalence, more spontaneous translations such as those evidenced in some NT literature, as well as in much Jewish literature of the period. Such readings were typically done aloud in groups for the benefit of the illiterate, who were perhaps a majority of early Christians.

James A. Sanders, “A New Testament Hermeneutic Fabric: Psalm 118 in the Entrance Narrative,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, ed. Craig Evans and William Stinespring (Atlanta, 1987), 178.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Daley of the University of Notre Dame is preparing a large-scale study of patristic commentaries on the psalms.

<sup>11</sup> Several quotations from the fathers given in this paper are as found in the useful compendium of texts assembled by James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge, 1987). This, from Clement’s *Paedagogus*, II, iv, has apparently been translated by McKinnon, see pp. 32-33. From a text such as this, which moves from actual sounding instrument, to an allegory of the human person, we can move back again to the pipe organ, the great breathing instrument, whose stops offer all the moods appropriate to corporate prayer.

<sup>12</sup> See James W. McKinnon, "Liturgical Psalmody in the Sermons of St. Augustine," in *The Study of Medieval Chant: Paths and Bridges, East and West*, ed. Peter Jeffery (Woodbridge, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> For discussion of public prayer in various Eastern liturgies in the ancient world, their formation, and their choice of psalms, see Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville, 1986). An instructive essay on the development of a single tradition from the medieval period is Peter Jeffery, "The Irish Monastic Office," in *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages: Source Studies and Methodology, Regional Studies, Hagiography*, ed. Margot Fassler and Rebecca Baltzer (New York, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Jerome's letters are filled with musical allusions, especially to making instruments of singing persons — and to the disdain of secular instrumentalists. In a letter to his compatriots Paula, Eustochia and Marcella, Jerome claims to have been taken by the penetration of psalmody into daily life in the region of Bethlehem where he spent much of his later life:

As we said above, in the village of Christ all is simple, and aside from psalms there is silence. Wherever you turn, the farm hand grasping the plough handle sings Alleluia, the sweating reaper cheers himself with psalms, and the vine dresser sings something of David as he prunes the vine with his curved knife. These are the lays of this province, these, to put it in common parlance, its love songs...

See McKinnon, 140-141.

<sup>15</sup> For recent scholarship see Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Bouluéc, eds. *Origeniana sexta: Origène et la Bible* (Louvain, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> For discussions of early Latin psalters, see Bernard Capelle, "Actualité des anciens psautiers latins," a review of P. Salmon, *Richesses et déficiences des anciens psautiers latins* in *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique* 55 (1960): 492-98; and Colette Estin, "Les traductions du Psautier," in *Le monde latin antique et la Bible*, ed. J. Fontaine and C. Pietri (Paris, 1985), 67-88.

<sup>17</sup> The twelfth century was a dividing line in biblical scholarship within Christian communities because this was the period in which Christian biblical commentators began the serious study of Hebrew. The scholars at the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris were leaders in this new style of exegesis. See F. A. Van Liere, *Andrew of St. Victor (d 1175): Scholar between Cloister and School* (Leiden, 1995), and J. W. M. van Zwieten, "Jewish Exegesis within Christian Bounds: Richard of St. Victor's *De Emmanuele* and Victorine Hermeneutics," *Bijdragen* 48 (1987): 327-335.

<sup>18</sup> The passage cited here is from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, II, lix, 1-3, as translated by F. X. Funk. See McKinnon, 110.

<sup>19</sup> As found in McKinnon, pp. 154-155.

<sup>20</sup> The promulgation of the monastic rule attributed to St. Benedict by Carolingian reformers was to have a major impact upon the ways in which psalmody developed in the Latin Middle Ages. For an edition and translation of this Rule into English with useful notes and essays on the subject, see Timothy Fry, ed. *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> For an influential series of essays on this subject, see Kenneth Levy, *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians* (Princeton, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> For an introduction to the vast bibliography on the transformation from an oral to a written musical culture in the Middle Ages, see Peter Jeffery, *Re-envisioning Past Musical Cultures: Ethnomusicology in the Study of Gregorian Chant* (Chicago, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> For recent evaluation of the "Ut queant laxis" hymn's place in monastic education, see Susan Boynton, "Glossed Hymns in Eleventh-Century Hymnaries" (Ph.D. Diss., Brandeis University, 1997). For the system of notation taught by Guido, see Dolores Pesce, *Guido D'Arezzo's Regule rithmice, Prologus in antiphonarium, and Epistola ad Michaelem: a critical text and translation* (Ottawa: The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> For discussion of the role of hymns and psalms in monastic education, see Boynton, "Glossed hymns."

<sup>25</sup> For discussion of the training of children for music particularly, see Susan Boynton, "The Liturgical Role of Children in Monastic Customaries from the Central Middle Ages," *Studia Liturgica* 28 (1998): 194-209.

<sup>26</sup> For discussion of the sequence as commentary on the Alleluia, see Margot E. Fassler, *Gothic Song: Victorine Sequences and Augustinian Reform in Twelfth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, 1993). For an accessible introduction to the trope repertoires and methods, see William Flynn, *Medieval Music and Medieval Exegesis* (Lanham, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed study of various monastic populations and the significance of their shifts at Cluny, see Isabelle Cochelin, "Enfants, jeunes, et vieux au monastère: la perception du cycle de vie dans les sources clunisiennes (909-1156)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Montréal, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> The bibliography on medieval tropes and sequences is vast. Researchers should begin with the volumes produced by the Corpus Troporum in the last two decades. Trope texts now are available in critical editions, and several volumes of important essays have appeared. Calvin Bower of the University of Notre Dame is preparing a massive data base of sequence incipits, and his article, "The Alleluia and the Early Sequence: A Re-evaluation" (forthcoming in the *Gedenkschrift* for James McKinnon) will serve as a useful introduction to several repertorial problems.

<sup>29</sup> See my paper "The Office of the Cantor in Early Western Monastic Rules and Customaries: A Preliminary Investigation" in *Early Music History* 5 (1985): 29-51.

<sup>30</sup> For discussion of these varying aspects of the office, see Fassler, "The Office of the Cantor."

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the choir schools and their role in music education during the thirteenth century, see the recent work by Katherine Grace Zieman, "Reading and Singing: Liturgy, Literacy, and Literature in Late Medieval England" (Ph.d. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> See especially *Sources of the modern Roman liturgy; the ordinals by Haymo of Faversham and related documents (1243-1307)*, ed. S.J.P. Van Dijk (Leiden, 1963), 2 vols.

<sup>33</sup> For the history of the psalms as sung in the Dominican liturgy, see William R. Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy* (New York, 1944), especially pp. 130-147.

<sup>34</sup> For a fine and lavishly illuminated introduction to late medieval Books of Hours, see Roger S. Wieck, *Painted Prayers: The Book of Hours in Medieval And Renaissance Art* (New York, 1998). Wieck describes each of the most important sections of the books in some detail. See also his *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York, 1988); and Henk van Os, *The Art of Devotion in the late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500* (Princeton, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven, 1992), 210.

<sup>36</sup> Edmund Bishop, "On the Origins of the Primer," in *Liturgica Historica* (Oxford, 1938), first printed in 1897, 211-237.

<sup>37</sup> For a recent study of the rosary and the piety which sustained its use, see Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: the Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> See *Psalms: Songs from Life, Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 27/1 (1984), which contains articles directly relevant to the subjects addressed in this paper: Ralph L. Smith, "The Use and Influence of the Psalms"; W.H. Bellinger, Jr., "Let the Words of My Mouth: Proclaiming the Psalms;" Edward R. Dalglish, "The Use of the Book of Psalms in the New Testament;" and Bruce H. Leafblad, "The Psalms in Christian Worship."

<sup>39</sup> See for example, Francis Kline, "The Snowbird Statement On Catholic Liturgical Music," *Worship* 71/3 (May, 1997): 221-235.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Robert Alter, "Returning the Psalms," *First Things* 58 (Nov, 1995): 45-48.

<sup>41</sup> In the recent reflections upon the ISEL psalter can be found a general introduction to many of the arguments regarding liturgical psalters now prominent not only among Roman Catholics, but within other denominations as well. For a representative selection of opinions, see Mary Collins, "Glorious Praise: The ICEL Liturgical Psalter," *Worship* 66 (1992): 290-310; Nathan Mitchell, "The ICEL Psalter," published in 3 parts in the author's "Amen Corner," *Worship* 69 (1995): 361-370, 447-456, 556-565; Roland E. Murphy, "Reflections on 'Actualization' of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,'" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 26 (1996): 79-81; Kathleen Norris, "The New ICEL Psalter," *Cross Currents* 46 (1996): 97-104; John R. Page, "ICEL through Twenty-Five Years," in *Disciples at the Crossroads*, ed. E. Bernstein, 63-80; Patrick Henry Reardon, "Christology and the Psalter: How 'Inclusive Language' Emasculates the Psalms," *Touchstone: A Journal of Ecumenical Orthodoxy* 7 (1994): 7-10; and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, "The catechetical role of the liturgy and the quality of liturgical texts: The current ICEL translation,"

*Communio* 20 (1993): 63-83. Arguments range from the sharply polemical to the generally aesthetic, but the latter give the most pause. One must be careful not to confuse political problems having to do with inclusive language with poetics in general.

David Frost has written a witty account of the creation and liturgical use of a new version of the psalms in *Making the Liturgical Psalter*, the Morpeth Lectures 1980 (Bramcote, Notts., 1981). The "Liturgical Psalter" is used in *An Australian Prayer Book* (1978) and in *The Alternative Service Book 1980*.

<sup>42</sup> See Horace T. Allen, "The Psalter in *Common Lectionary Revised* (1992)," *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 26 (1992): 84-85.

<sup>43</sup> *By Flowing Waters* (Collegeville, 1999), xvii. Ford's work relies heavily upon *The Simple Gradual: An English Translation of the Antiphons and Responsories of the Graduale Simplex for use in English-speaking Countries* (Washington, DC, 1968).

<sup>44</sup> See for example, Kathleen Hughes, "The Changing Face of Roman Catholic Worship," in *The Changing Face of Jewish and Catholic Worship*, ed. Paul Bradshaw, 71-87, and Jan Michael Joncas, "Calls for Reform of the Breviary on the Eve of Vatican II," in *Liturgical Ministry* 2 (Summer, 1993): 82-88.

<sup>45</sup> See his "Liturgy of the Hours: The Perspective of the Reformed Tradition," *Liturgical Ministry* 2 (Summer, 1993), 89-97.

<sup>46</sup> See his *Exploring the Psalms* (Philadelphia, 1975), p. 166. To be fair to him (and his heritage) he also says "The easiest musical way for Protestant congregations to use the psalms is to sing them metrically, as the Scots do." But the problem is that only the shortest psalms, or a small section of a psalm, can be done this way (p. 166). Routley also discusses the psalmody of Joseph Gelineau.

<sup>47</sup> McKinnon, p. 90. From the *De poenitentia* of Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graecia*, 64, 12-13.

# Information vs. Formation in the Training of Church Musicians

QUENTIN FAULKNER

**T**he inexorable erosion of purpose in the formation of U.S. clergy—which is of course a reflection of the current malaise in U.S. religious life—is both well established and well-documented. An article by Paul Wilkes in *The Atlantic Monthly* reveals the uneasy situation in U.S. seminaries of all denominational stripes:

The issue of personal spirituality of Protestant clergy has traditionally hardly ever been addressed in seminaries, and has not until recently been considered especially relevant. ...faculty appointments are often made on the basis not only of scholarship but also of outlook. Religious beliefs are hardly considered. As for religious practice—attending or working in a local church? Please!... The curriculum is said to be driven not by what congregations might need but by what the seminarian wants or demands or thinks he or she needs to be an effective professional, as well as by faculty members' interest in areas of their own specialization (Wilkes, 72-86).

Dr. Donald Webster expressed one effect of this malaise on church music and musicians in a lecture at the 1997 Three Choirs Festival in Hereford, England:

...of more immediate concern to musicians has been the fact that a high proportion of recent recruits to the ministry... have been either unaware of or are unsympathetic to the Church's great musical traditions or are unconcerned about standards of linguistic beauty (Webster, 19).

That same erosion of purpose is apparent in the formation of church musicians. Church music curricula impart information and teach particular skills: they offer organ and voice lessons, choral conducting, instruction in worship, and so forth. But spiritual formation is, if anything, less addressed in the training of church musicians than in the training of clergy. By "spiritual forma-

tion" I mean nothing less than the fostering of Christian faith as understood from a musical perspective, the framework that gives the "information" both matrix and meaning. It may be the case, therefore, that church musicians embark upon their careers and ministries with a love of music, both organ and choral, but with either a weak sense of their calling as church musicians, or with a profound religious naïveté that, by its refusal to countenance ambiguity, blocks growth in faith and can result in rapid burnout. This is truly a regrettable state of affairs, for in times such as ours even the most committed and astute church musicians are constantly confronted with situations and demands that threaten their standards and try their sense of calling. The words of a writer to the editor of the most recent issue of the Westminster Choir College Alumni Newsletter will illustrate what I mean:

In a 10-year stint as director of music at All Angel's Episcopal Church in New York City, it became necessary to meet and master "The Praise Song." Over the years, I read through more than 4,000 of the creatures, discarding about 3,600 instantly for sins of lyric, melody, and/or theology. The other 400 or so entered my database, and about 250 showed up in worship services at least once. The following is a short list of 20 songs I consider to be among the most palatable; it might serve as an introduction to the genre and/or a quick and easy way to locate a few songs which might bless and inspire your congregation, get the clergy and lay leadership off your back, yet allow you to maintain some musical standards in your program.

Perhaps a brief examination of earlier types of Christian formation as related to church music and musicians could lend a sense of perspective to the present situation. Among the traditional types of Christian spiritual formation—i.e., private prayer, individual spiritual direction, the class or cell, and communal worship—the last, continual participation in communal worship (the liturgy, the Eucharist and the offices) has been most significant for Christian church music. The institutionalization of that concept of formation was the maîtrise, or choir school, that provided large churches with the

---

*Quentin Faulkner is the Steinhart Distinguished Professor of Organ and Music Theory/History at the University of Nebraska/Lincoln.*

choral forces necessary for the vitality of their liturgical life, but also (and, for purposes of this essay, more importantly) accomplished the education, both general and musical, and the spiritual formation of the children entrusted to its care.

As an institution, the choir school flourished from about the tenth until the eighteenth century. Its curriculum was of course centered on the daily conduct of the liturgy, and it served to ensure not only a central role for music in education and character formation, but also an intelligentsia in medieval and Renaissance Europe that was both literate in and appreciative of liturgical art music. More important than any of these, however, the incessant involvement in the breadth and depth of the liturgy—the fortuitous conjunction of prayer, scripture, and artistic stimulation—throughout the formative years from childhood through adolescence provided an incomparable matrix for the germination of a rich and subtle Christian faith, a faith all the more profound and tenacious in that it was forged not merely individually, but communally.

As the most talented and committed choir-school students matured in their musical training, they would typically apprentice themselves to skilled church musicians at the same time that they assumed growing responsibility for the musical conduct of the liturgy. These students in turn became the church musicians—singers, composers, instrumentalists—of the next generation. Thus we have the choir-school/apprenticeship system to thank both for the age-long procession of saints who have devoted their lives to the music of the church, and for the extraordinary gifts to music that we enjoy as the legacy of their creative endeavors. Perhaps the last and greatest product of this system was J.S. Bach, who took part in the choir school of St. Michael's Church in Lüneburg from 1700 - 1703, probably studying organ with Georg Böhm during his stay there.

Not that the choir-school/apprenticeship system was any more a bed of roses than what today's church musicians have to endure. Then, as now, the clergy and musical establishment had their fair share of misfits, misanthropes, charlatans, martinets, frauds, crooks, and cheats. Neither were congregations then any less demanding, insensitive, indifferent, or deaf. Over against all of those disappointments and discouragements, however, stood the ceaseless, dependable round of the liturgy—the Mass, Eucharist, the offices—constantly validating itself, reminding, nourishing, refreshing, comforting, inspiring, and shaping faith. During my three-year tenure

as assistant organist of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City, I also underwent the choir-school experience, though as an adult. The profound effect that experience had on my own faith and understanding of my calling has only become apparent to me in recent years, in my later adulthood.

The choir-school/apprenticeship system formed church musicians right up through the middle of the eighteenth century. Thereafter, the profound shifts in European thought and politics sent the institution into precipitous decline. An account from 1831, for example, states:

The invasion of Italy by the armies of republican France, in 1796, followed as it was by an almost total destruction of the power, and dissipation of the riches of the Church; by the suppression of monasteries and hospitals, and the sale of the lands destined for their support, destroyed at once the schools which educated the young and the retreats which fostered the adult musician. (From *The Harmonicon*; quoted in Weiss, 347.)

When the churches regrouped in the nineteenth century, new and quite untraditional methods of forming the clergy made their appearance. That was the era that witnessed the birth of the modern Protestant seminary, the child of both the Enlightenment and of pietism. It was not until the early twentieth century that similar institutions were founded, both in Europe and the U.S., for the training of church musicians. In these institutions, both for the training of clergy and of musicians, worship, while not necessarily daily, was nevertheless a seminal component—until the general cultural and religious rebellion and unrest of the 1960's pushed it ever more to the periphery. Furthermore, the appearance of programs of religious studies and of church music in large state universities meant that church musicians could be trained without any regular involvement in the practice of worship. Almost all institutions involved in the training of church musicians are by far more concerned with informing their charges than forming them. Schools do indeed hope that Christian formation takes place within their courses of study, but they take it largely for granted; elements of the curriculum that foster it are much outweighed by elements that impart information.

This state of affairs is especially anomalous, since the philosophy and practice of church music is experi-

*Does Christian formation belong  
in the curriculum of schools  
that train church musicians?*

encing a crisis unparalleled except for the waning years of the eighteenth century. The evidence from all sources reveals that church music at the end of the twentieth century is fraught with immense challenges, uncertainties, and discouragements. Given the situation that present-day church musicians must deal with, attention to spiritual formation—the fostering of Christian faith as understood from a musical perspective—would seem to be more necessary than ever before. Again to lend a sense of perspective: the rebirth of the choir school in England during the nineteenth century enabled the apprentice system once more to flourish in the Anglican Church, and with it (according to Dr. Donald Webster) the spiritual formation of apprenticed musicians:

The question of training church musicians is an ongoing problem. Those artiled pupils [i.e., those trained through apprenticeship] known to me suffered from no lack of musical skills or sympathies, and their vocational devotion was frequently greater than that shown by graduates from universities and music colleges (Webster, 19).

Does Christian formation belong in the curriculum of schools that train church musicians? The obvious relevance of such a suggestion, juxtaposed against the near impossibility of achieving it, clearly reflects the magnitude of the crisis facing the church music profession. Are there any viable ways to realize the fostering of Christian

faith, through the natural union of music and worship, in church music curricula? What are the most fruitful avenues to explore in this regard? What are the advantages of the venture? What are the dangers?

Surely a minimum effort would involve an exploration of the theological basis of music-making in the church, in order to help church musicians understand the value and appropriateness of what they do, and to enable them to speak the same “language” as the clergy. Church musicians need also to understand that adorning what one loves is profoundly right, that the impulse to adorn worship with gifts of great skill, with activities requiring rare and/or expensive gifts, much time, and much creative energy, are intrinsically and primally human, some historic and present-day Christian attitudes notwithstanding. These are, however, only tentative and insufficient measures. The problem of adequate spiritual formation of church musicians remains, and will continue to haunt the practice of music in the church until it is adequately addressed.

---

#### WORKS CITED

- Webster, Donald. 1998. “Towards the Millenium: Ten Decades of Church Music.” *The Organ*, 77:19ff.
- Weiss, Piero and Richard Taruskin, eds. 1984. *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*. New York.
- Wilkes, Paul. 1990. “The Hands That Would Shape Our Souls.” *The Atlantic Monthly* :59.
- Westminster Choir College of Rider University Alumni Newsletter*. 1998.

# Training Church Musicians as Pastoral Liturgists

JOHN D. WITVLIET

**F**rederick Buechner once quipped that the best proof of God's existence is how "year after year he survives the way his professional friends promote him" (Buechner, 187). Our job as teachers is to do all in our power to make sure that tomorrow's church musicians don't qualify for this reproach. I take our purpose here to be to imagine well-grounded and creative ways to educate and form musicians for the church who will be musically proficient, theologically astute, historically knowledgeable, culturally savvy, and pastorally sensitive. I take my purpose in this paper to be to propose ways of forming church musicians in the liturgical dimension of their vocation.

## I Some Working Assumptions

I begin with several musical, liturgical, theological, and pastoral assumptions that I will state but not elaborate. These are all straight-down-the-middle-of-the-fair-way, post-Vatican II, Liturgical Movement assumptions. I have written about these themes elsewhere, and I will refer readers to these other sources, providing here only succinct summaries of my basic assumptions. This essay is a condensed version of a modestly comprehensive approach to the philosophical underpinnings of church music education. It intends to paint the bold strokes of an approach to training musicians, leaving the finer details to be filled in elsewhere.

Liturgical musicians must be good musicians. Nothing here is meant to suggest a substitute for first-rate musical training. Liturgical musicians should know how to chant a pointed psalm and how to improvise their way out of a stalled processional. They should know the difference between ornamentation in Bach and Brahms, or between the percussion required to accompany the hymns of Pablo Sosa and Boniface Mganga.

Given the still-sad state of liturgical education for clergy, musicians often know more about liturgy than anyone else in the local parish. Church musicians serve in more than a strictly musical vocation; they frequently serve as de facto liturgists, and even liturgical educators. They not only need to know how to plan and lead worship effectively, but also how to be able to instruct

worshippers, both deductively and mystagogically, about the meaning and purpose of liturgical action, and its concomitant music.

Liturgical music finds its highest purpose in the enactment of the liturgy. A primary criterion for liturgical music is whether or not it serves or enables liturgical action. Liturgical music is not an end in itself. It is a means for enabling corporate prayer. The highest purpose of liturgical music is to enable full, conscious, and active liturgical participation at the deepest level possible for people of all sorts.

Christian liturgy both embodies and shapes the lived theology of a community. Dutch theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw commented that "one can't tap the finger of liturgy without immediately getting the whole hand of theology." In his provocative work *Sacred Games*, Bernhard Lang concludes his phenomenological survey of Christian ritual by observing that "two fundamental attitudes govern behavior in Christian worship" (Lang, 419). According to one view, God appears as the distant, majestic Father who must be approached with solemnity, ceremonial, and awe. According to the other, God appears as a benign, understanding, friendly spirit with whom people can establish a close relationship. Even Lang's detached analysis of worship practices concludes by arguing that a worship service paints a theological portrait. Liturgy is an embodied theological icon.

If worship is like painting, then church musicians function as lead artists. Church musicians, to the extent they shape liturgy, shape the lived theology of a worshipping community. Liturgical, pastoral musicians have the important and terrifying task of placing words of prayer on people's lips. This happens every time they choose a song and accompany a hymn. They also have the holy task of being stewards of God's Word. Choices of which scripture readings, anthem texts, and theological themes will be featured in worship represent a degree of control over people's spiritual diets. For holy tasks like these, the church needs pastoral people to plan and lead worship.

Given this assumption, I would argue that good church musicians constantly ask whether the "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" of the church's worship are sung "so that the Word of God may dwell in us richly" (the forgotten purpose clause of Col. 3:16). Good liturgical musicians worry about the link between theology and worship: whether worship in their church depicts

---

*John Witvliet is Director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

God as only indifferent and far removed; whether it gives the impression that prayer is simply an act of cognition or, conversely, an act of pure emotion; whether worship in their congregation makes it clear that the Bible is central to the life and faith of the church. The good ones, as I describe more fully elsewhere, know that worship expresses the deepest theological convictions of the community and that it reveals as much about the belief of the community as do catechisms and confessions (Witvliet, 1998).

In order to lead others in worship, or, in the words of Thomas Troeger, “to make our prayer and music one” (Troeger and Doran, 22), pastoral musicians must themselves be worshippers. Martin Luther knew this. He once chided liturgical leaders thus:

We have stuck to founding, building, singing, ringing, to vestments, incense burning, and to all the additional preparations for divine worship up to the point that we consider this preparation the real, main divine worship and do not know how to speak of any other. And we are acting as wisely as the man who wants to build a house and spends all his goods on the scaffolding and never, as long as he lives, gets far enough along to lay one stone of his house. (Plass, 1:302)

Like the best clinical psychologists, basketball coaches, and factory floor managers, the best liturgical leaders model what they teach.

Service as pastoral musician-liturgists requires not only theological and artistic conviction, but also hospitality. The fourth-century *Constitutions of the Holy Apostle* advised bishops:

When you call together an assembly of the Church, it is as if you were the commander of a great ship. Set up the enterprise to be accomplished with all possible skill, charging the deacons as mariners to prepare places for the congregation as for passengers, with all due care and decency (Roberts and Donaldson, 7:421).

The craft and coordinating and “performance” in the work of the church musician finds its ultimate goal and purpose in welcoming the people of God to experience the power and joy of profound and communal liturgical participation. Would that the purposes of God be accomplished through professional leadership, rather (as Buechner notes) than in spite of it.

## II Some Present Dangers

These assumptions have strong implications for the training of church musicians. At the very least, such training demands certain knowledge (e.g., basic liturgical literacy), certain competencies (e.g., the skill of choosing repertoire for liturgical purposes), and certain virtues (e.g., pastoral discernment, humility). But all of this is enormously complicated because we live in a period of great flux, a period of crisis for liturgical musicians. And this must influence how we go about this training. Consider three areas of present challenge.

First, we face an aesthetic crisis, a crisis of when and how we may speak of musical taste. We do not live in an age with a shared aesthetic. In this post-modern era, comments about musical excellence or music that is better than other music elicit either blank stares or looks of hostility. Most modern-worship wars are really aesthetic-taste wars. Somehow we need to chart the muddy waters between dogmatic elitism and indiscriminate relativism.

The aesthetic issue is also not very much under the surface in many of the essays in this volume, and in many recent publications in the field. The *Milwaukee Symposia* feature an essentially functional theory of liturgical music, which I have discussed elsewhere (Witvliet, 1996/1). The *Snowbird Statement* is, in its turn, very suspicious of this approach, and argues for the value of music (and beauty) in and of itself. Terms like “ritual music,” “popular culture,” and “high art music” have all generated high blood pressure in participants in many recent liturgical conversations. At stake are the fundamental assumptions that guide working church musicians in their week-to-week tasks. Though training in the technicalities of philosophical aesthetics has never been a staple of church music education programs, somehow we have to equip future church musicians to understand and respond to this challenge.

Second, we face tremendous challenges and opportunities in the area of liturgical inculturation. Fueled by the post-modern concern for cultural particularity, many communities have now awakened to the fact that they, just like their counterparts in third world countries, are products of culture. Cross-cultural encounters, intentional programs of liturgical inculturation, and even church growth theories of cultural relevance have all, often independently, raised these cultural issues. Consider the following vexing questions:

1. How do we make use of musical, liturgical, and textual resources from other cultural contexts?
2. When do oppressing communities have the right to sing the songs of the oppressed?

3. Why do so many who support broad programs of liturgical inculturation overseas, lament it at home?
4. Do we live, as Quentin Faulkner has argued, in a period of secular religion?
  5. How do we evaluate the arguments of pastors who are planting new churches and conducting sociological surveys of their new suburban communities, so they can narrow and define a “target audience” for their Saturday evening contemporary service?
6. How are the Zaire rite of the Roman Catholic church or the Seeker Services of Willow Creek Community Church different? How are they alike?
7. How do we evaluate John Calvin’s claim (or that of Vatican II) that “the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age” (McNeill, IV. x. 30, p. 1208)?

As I have argued elsewhere, all of these questions concern the complex relationship of cult and culture (Witvliet, 1996/1 and 1996/2). Church musicians, in order to be effective pastoral liturgists, need to be able to understand these issues, and to shape liturgical practice in specific cultural contexts in ways that demonstrate awareness of the social, cultural, and political ramifications of their action. Christendom, if it ever existed, is gone. We must educate church musicians for a post-Christian age.

A third challenge is distinctly theological. At issue is what might be called the sacramentality of music. Arguably, Christian communities cannot live without a language that is, in some sense, sacramental. Those who mock supposedly simplistic theories of sacramental realism wind up preserving sacramental language for preaching or for music. Speaking simplistically, one might say that medieval Roman Catholics reserved their sacramental language for the Eucharist, Reformed Christians reserve theirs for preaching, and the Charismatics save theirs for music. Not long ago, I received a call from a pastor asking advice on finding a worship leader. I asked, “What are you looking for?” The answer? “Someone who can make God present in our midst” (a rather loaded expectation). We might call it “musical transubstantiation”: no medieval sacramental theologian could have said it more strongly.

*What the church needs most are discerning, prayerful, joyous people who treat their work as worship planners and leaders as a holy, pastoral calling.*

Language like this is increasingly present in want ads for parish musicians. More and more, churches are looking for people whose creativity, personal testimony, and charismatic personality can turn an ordinary moment into a holy one. This tendency is not limited to the charismatics. Both Community Church of the Happy Valley and Tall Steeple Presbyterian Church may be as likely to hire musicians who can make holy moments such as these. One does it with a general piston no. 8, the other with microphone and drum set, but both are striving to make God present, in some true, if elusive, sense.

Certainly this concern for attending to holy moments is important. Yet no one, no matter how charismatic, can make a moment holy by their own creativity, ingenuity, or effort. Scripture records a long line of those who tried: the prophets of Baal at Carmel, the servant who wanted to support the ark as it moved, the magician Simon Magus. At the dedication of the concert hall and chapel at Luther College, Westin Nobel chose the anthem on the Pauline text “God does not dwell in temples made of human hands,” a powerful reminder that God’s presence is to be received as a gift. It cannot be engineered or produced. Somehow church musicians must be trained to understand both the prospects and limitations of their role.

In sum, we live in a changing and complex world. We can no longer assume the stability of ritual practice in a given congregation or tradition. Nor can we assume a shared body of musical repertoire, nor even a shared aesthetic, within a tradition, or even within most congregations. My primary thesis is this: more than ever, we need self-reflective, critical thinker-practitioners who

can unite week-to-week practice and self-critical reflection on the purpose of their work, its cultural resonances, its aesthetic implications, and its theological outcomes. We don’t need musical robots, who can merely choose literature and play the liturgy competently. That might be sufficient in periods of liturgical constancy. The church today needs critical thinker-musicians who can perceive and articulate the genius of Christian rites, educate everyday worshipers, and imagine musical forms that have both relevance and integrity.

### III A Recipe for the Liturgical-Musical Formation of Church Musicians

In light of these assumptions and challenges, I want to conclude with some nuts-and-bolts specifics for the training of church musicians. I will offer suggestions that

have to do with the liturgical, not the musical, side of a curriculum. My recipe for the training of church musicians has four ingredients: interdisciplinary courses, mystagogical pedagogy, interdisciplinary scholarship, and scholar-practitioner mentors.

First, interdisciplinary courses. Most courses on liturgy are historical surveys, mostly of liturgical texts. They function well to provide church musicians with the ability to write a decent set of program notes. Sometimes, these courses have the feel of propaganda—the survey of historical data to justify the liturgical preferences of an instructor or a tradition. The classic case of this historiographical problem is the one that often surrounded the study of the Reformation period. Protestants were experts at painting a bleak picture of Catholic superstitions. Catholics were experts at painting a bleak picture of Protestant iconoclastic hubris. Today, many have moved beyond that. We have simply saved our propaganda for our treatment of the genesis of the Frontier tradition or of the church growth movement.

But now, try to imagine a course that would provide a foundation for addressing the complex sacramental, aesthetic, and cultural questions I have raised—a course that would nurture a way of thinking, a “worldview” that provides a basis for negotiating the aesthetic, cultural, and sacramental challenges of the present age. What I imagine is an interdisciplinary course that provides in-depth reflection on liturgical case studies. Imagine looking at a given worshipping community, past or present, to discern how its liturgical life embodies theological commitments, social relationships, cultural values, linguistic patterns, implicit aesthetic judgments, and kinetic patterns. Liturgy (and liturgical music) cannot be studied in isolation from biblical and systematic theology, cultural anthropology, social and intellectual history. Interdisciplinary treatments of liturgical-musical case studies have the potential to alert students to the complexity of the cultural, aesthetic, and theological issues I have raised in a way that historical surveys do not.

Prospects for such case studies are numerous: Bach in Leipzig is one obvious choice. But so is I-to-Loh in current day southeast Asia (Hawn, 1998). My list of instructive examples would also include: Thomas Hastings (Charles Finney’s musical counterpart), Pentecostal phenom Aimee Semple McPherson, and Richard Allen (founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church). Prospects for course readings lists are also numerous: Bernhard Lang, *Sacred Games*; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*; Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum*; Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*; G. A. Pritchard’s Northwestern University dissertation, *Willow Creek Seeker*

*Services*; and Harry Stout’s *The New England Soul*. The point here is to include not only classic church music texts (e.g., Westermeyer), but also works that will expand our imaginations to set liturgical celebrations in much broader social, historical, and theological contexts.

Second, this type of course needs to be supported by a new (and possibly emerging) type of liturgical scholarship, what I will call “liturgical scholarship with a wide-angle lens.” Traditional liturgical scholarship has focused a great deal on archival tasks. To choose but one example, traditional studies of the Genevan Psalter tend to describe the theological justification for its genesis, chronicle its multiple editions, and catalogue its texts and tunes. What is needed is liturgical scholarship that asks a much broader range of aesthetic, theological, musicological, economic, social, historical and cultural questions. On the Genevan Psalter, for example, we need to understand how the Psalters were used in everyday life, how they functioned liturgically, who owned them, what rationale was used to defend them, what social implications they embodied, and how they contributed to the religious identity of a people, a project which I have attempted elsewhere (Witvliet, 1997). Books like Leigh Eric Schmidt’s *Holy Fairs* and Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars* are good examples of liturgical scholarship that has moved well beyond the days of critical editions.

Consider another telling example. In almost every course I teach, a student will ask or assert “Well, didn’t Luther and Wesley use tunes from the bar-room?” Almost everyone answers this question almost entirely on the basis of which argument they want to advance in the contemporary situation, with total disregard for historical facts. It is very difficult to give an honest answer to that question, one that does justice to all the implications of vernacularization, without confusing it with unrestrained popularization. Here is a case where a really good, interdisciplinary, social-intellectual-cultural-aesthetic book is needed.

This type of scholarship demands that we engage sympathetic conversation partners from beyond the realm of typical church musicians and liturgists. We need the help of scholars in these other fields who know more about them than we church musicians will ever know. We need philosophers like Frank Burch Brown and Nicholas Wolterstorff and historians like Schmidt and Harry Stout, who, without prompting, are inclined to include liturgical case studies in their own work. The kind of scholarship we need is most likely to come from collaboration between liturgist-musicians with interests in theology, aesthetics and social history, and theologians, philosophers, and historians with interests in liturgy.

Third, we need a pedagogy appropriate to our goals. Wise patristic pastors knew that an abstract sacramental

theology would mean little to new Christians. One had to experience eucharist to understand it (Mazza, 1989). Their post-experience, mystagogical approach to formation provides a helpful model, I would suggest, for training church musicians. We are not training robots in liturgical techniques. We want to do something more than teach people how to prepare ashes for an Ash Wednesday service. Nor are we training contestants for liturgical Jeopardy. We need to do more (though not less) than impart a body of facts. Nor are we training academic liturgical historians. The point of teaching the Anaphora of St. James, for example, is not so that students can date the document. The point of teaching a text like the Anaphora of St. James is to enable tomorrow's church musicians to understand the shape of the rite, the implicit meaning of its form, and what might be required to bring that form to musical life in their parish.

We are talking about training savvy, self-critical pastoral musicians for real churches. For this, I believe that the pedagogical pattern of liturgical participation and subsequent reflection is best. The best assignments in worship courses demand participant-observation in real worshipping communities. Course discussions and written assignments should have as their goal to develop in prospective church musicians the eyes of a cultural anthropologist, the ears of a music critic, the voice of a prophet, and, importantly, the heart of a pastor. At its best, this pattern of pedagogy can cultivate not only the skills, but also the virtues and attitudes required for parish ministry.

Mystagogical pedagogy is also possible, I would suggest, in a slightly different sense, with respect to the history of liturgy. On the basis of even a modest library collection of resources, we can recreate actual liturgical events from nearly every century and many continents. Immersed in a world of comprehensive original sources, we can "experience" and then reflect on the meaning of actual, historical liturgies, a vicarious participant-observer exercise of sorts.

Finally, we need scholar-practitioner mentors. My rhetoric will amount only to pious whims without the teachers to implement this pedagogy in these courses on the basis of this scholarship. The integration of theological, liturgical, and musical concerns is finally caught as much as it is taught. We need more people like Don Saliers and Paul Westermeyer (who, I note with great respect, can have a musician-pastor-theologian committee meeting by themselves in front of a mirror). We need musicians who can improvise a fugue and know the structure of the eucharistic prayer. We need liturgists who know the difference between the monastic and cathedral offices and the varieties of secondary dominants. Actually, there are only modest requirements for such mentors: impeccable musical competence, broad theological

training, extensive parish experience, and deep-rooted personal virtues. (There is some doubt as to whether the angel Gabriel would qualify.) Seriously, in addition to our concern for training church musicians, we must also be concerned about training and encouraging such scholar-practitioner mentors.

In sum, we need interdisciplinary courses that do not relegate the complex issues of our time to footnotes; scholarship that looks for conversation partners among cultural anthropologists, philosophers of aesthetics, and systematic and biblical theologians; pedagogy that challenges students to become perceptive participants in actual liturgical events; and mentors who are practitioner-scholars. In short, what I am after is an approach to the training of church musicians that will cultivate the virtue of discernment. Discerning liturgical leaders have an instinctive way of telling the difference between evangelistic zeal and personal aggrandizement, between aesthetic critiques that are spiritually astute and those that are simply pretentious, between changes in worship that are wholesale capitulation to market forces and those that are a breath of spiritual fresh-air after years of stagnant, routine Christianity.

Indeed, what the church needs most is not another hymnal, larger choirs, more technology, a revised prayer book, or another set of published scripts. What the church needs most are discerning, prayerful, joyous people who treat their work as worship planners and leaders as a holy, pastoral calling. May these essays help us generate exactly that.

---

## WORKS CITED

- Brueggemann, Walter. 1995. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Minneapolis.
- Buechner, Frederick. 1987. *Listening to Your Life*. San Francisco.
- Duffy, Eamon. 1992. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*. New Haven.
- Hatch, Nathan. 1989. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven.
- Hawn, C. Michael. 1998. "Sounds of Bamboo: I-to Loh and the Development of Asian Hymns." *The Hymn* 49, no. 2: 12-24.
- Lang, Bernhard. 1997. *Sacred Games: A History of Christian Worship*. New Haven.
- Mazza, Enrico. 1989. *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*. New York.
- McNeill, John T., ed. 1960. *John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia.
- The Milwaukee Symposia For Church Composers: A Ten-Year Report*. 1992. Washington and Chicago.
- Plass, Ewald M., ed. 1959. *What Luther Says: An Anthology*. St. Louis.
- Pritchard, G. A. 1996. *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church*. Grand Rapids.
- Roberts, Alexander and James Donaldson, eds. 1951. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids.

- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. 1989. *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period*. Princeton.
- Stout, Harry. 1986. *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England*. Oxford.
- Troeger, Thomas H. and Carol Doran. 1992. *New Hymns for the Life of the Church*. New York.
- Westermeyer, Paul. 1998. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis.
- Witvliet, John D. 1996. "Toward a Liturgical Aesthetic: An Inter-disciplinary Review of Aesthetic Theory." *Liturgy Digest* 3/1:4-86.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. "Theological and Conceptual Models for Liturgy and Culture." *Liturgy Digest* 3/2: 5-46.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. "What Has America Contributed to Reformed Worship?" *Reformed Liturgy & Music* 30: 103-111.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. "The Spirituality of the Psalter: Metrical Psalms in Liturgy and Life in Calvin's Geneva." *Calvin Theological Journal* 32: 273-297.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. "Planning and Leading Worship as a Pastoral Task." *Reformed Worship* 49: 30-33.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The Restructuring of American Religion*. Princeton.

# Tomorrow's Church Musician: Artisan or Artist?

## The View from an English Conservatoire

PATRICK RUSSELL

Historically, England has educated its leading church musicians through an apprentice-style training, delivered via choral or organ scholarships at major cathedrals and churches, and most famously in the chapels of Oxford and Cambridge colleges. This highly effective system still flourishes, though it has weaknesses. Inevitably the scholarship focusses almost exclusively on the practice of the host institution. Wider liturgical and pastoral issues are rarely if ever part of the formal curriculum of such scholarships.

Where do the conservatoires come into the English picture? In the past they taught the traditional practical church music skills (organ-playing, choral direction and composition) to high levels, often, until recently, as a preparation for an Oxbridge scholarship and degree course, but no English conservatoire course set those skills in context or set the repertoire in wider perspective.

Then in 1987, the Royal Academy of Music's Principal of the time, Sir David Lumsden, in part influenced by his experience as a Visiting Professor at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in 1974/5, decided the time had come for an English conservatoire to run a Church Music course and invited the present writer to set it up and direct it. In 1998, the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) is still the only British conservatoire systematically teaching church music.

Three founding principles were adopted:

- 1) the course was to be ecumenical, or at least multi-denominational—essential in an international conservatoire, but also reflecting to a certain extent the *status quo* at the highest levels of English church music as regards aspects of repertoire, personnel and sometimes of rite;
- 2) the development of skills was to be balanced by development of the liturgical and pastoral understanding needed to put those skills into practice;

- 3) the course was to attempt to take into account the widening (even bewildering) range of musical styles and cultural references encountered in today's church in the UK and elsewhere.

Even in 1987, that third principle presented a dauntingly large canvas, and I am not ashamed to admit that this highly idealistic part of my original brief was only imperfectly covered. Now in 1998, the range is so diverse that it is simply not possible, sensible or logical for the RAM, as an international Western art-music conservatoire sited within the English tradition, to attempt to offer a comprehensive, stylistically inclusive vocational course.

This conclusion does not camouflage a crude traditionalism, nor does it seek to preserve some comforting, inherited *status quo*. Far from it. I have been privileged to work as musician and subsequently as teacher across denominational borders for 25 years, and I am profoundly moved by any tradition which is culturally coherent, which unifies and embraces the generational spread of its members, which balances the needs of intellect and emotion, and which has the strength both to conserve and renew its spiritual and corporate life. I affirm too the pastoral role of the musician, the role that opens up to the church generally that uniquely articulate conduit of corporate expression. The effective church musician must indeed be a skilful, multi-disciplined artisan.

At the same time, however, I must affirm the essential role of the musician (as developed in the Western tradition) as "prophet," one whose admonitions and visions expressed in musical art not only maintain their relevance with the passage of time, but also accumulate resonances that deepen with reacquaintance and which (paradoxically) may actually be intensified by the disjunction between the culture of the composer and that of the performers and listeners. For the English, such prophetic statements include rich achievements in medieval Latin chant and later vernacular psalm-tune, an extraordinary period of polyphony from the Eton Choirbook, started in the late 15th century, Thomas Tomkins' *Musica Deo Sacra* in the mid-17th century, the baroque rhetoric of Purcell and Blow, and music of the modern era from Stanford and Parry through Britten

---

*Patrick Russell is Professor of Music at the Royal Academy of Music in London.*

and Howells to the present day of John Tavener, Jonathan Harvey and James MacMillan.

All these achievements stand naturally within the wider perspective of the Western European sacred tradition and within the dynamics of ordered ritual and communal devotion. It is here, I believe, that the RAM's current headline postgraduate Choral Direction and Church Music course must bring its energies to bear, developing the traditions of composition and performance associated with a coherent repertoire and exploring the contexts which nourish and illuminate it.

This belief has been fuelled by three major concerns: First, by the character and effect of current liturgical and musical trends; secondly, by the improvement and influence of performance styles and standards in England; and thirdly, by the character of the RAM itself.

A year after the RAM course started, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York commissioned a report on the state of church music in England. Entitled *In Tune with Heaven*, this 1992 report is by far the most substantial piece of thinking-out-loud by the Church of England on music in the liturgy, and it highlighted two major issues: the need for better funding and better training both for musicians and clergy in musico-liturgical matters; and the call to musicians to experiment with and broaden the frontiers of style. Clearly the commission felt that it was possible (or it felt it had at least to say that it was possible) to hold the extreme liturgical wings of the Church of England together.

For example, cathedral musicians were exhorted, in view of their vocal and instrumental expertise, [to] explore some of the many worship songs in contemporary style. In this way they would identify with those congregations which use them and would set standards of performance, and maybe of composition as well. There could also be room for experimentation with modern religious music with a jazz-rock feel to it. Coming from the negro-spiritual tradition, it represents the spiritual music of anger and liberation. (*In Tune with Heaven*, 217)

This is well-intentioned, but breathtakingly naïve and patronising. One may savour its shifting nuances of anxiety, condescension and superficial socio/historical analysis. It hints, in its well-mannered, tentative, English way at deep tensions in the Church with regard to liturgy and music, and suggests the skimpiest of diplomatic plasters to cover a profound wound. It articulates the confusion

and uncertainty of a middle-ground in the English church, which hopes that out of a mixture of diplomacy, tolerance and procrastination will emerge something (a new tradition?) combining, in that much-loved English cliché, 'the best of both worlds'.

This unhappy tension is not essentially between 'art-music' and 'popular music' (in its many forms). Nor is it essentially denominational. No, the real distinction is liturgical, though it is not without theological implications and musical ramifications. One side is based on a traditional, rubrical foundation—perhaps prone to torpor. The other, sometimes unhelpfully labelled 'evangelical', is based on spontaneity and informality—perhaps open to chaos. The resulting contrast seems dramatic, though close examination would surely reveal profound similarities of primal ritual organisation

*Most seriously under threat from current liturgical trends is the power and complexity of memory.*

and dynamics in the worship patterns of these radically contrasted groups.

However, these divergent attitudes work profoundly on the character of liturgy and music. One depends on an historical perspective which works in reverse: by looking backwards, liturgy and music can subtly suggest our future, our destiny willed for us by God, giving us a visionary glimpse of eternity, of the numinous. The other stresses the centrality of the experience of Christ's love for us (more often expressed as 'me') in the present, 'now'. In this attitude, the accumulation of generations of Christian experience stored up in art, in composed prayers, in ritual worship activity, in an ordering of ministries that appropriately empowers everyone in ways rich with symbolism, all this is relatively insignificant.

The polarisation between these two extremes is undoubtedly hardening. My concern, as a church musician formed by ancient traditions, is not for the vigorous evangelical wing, whose worship and music are often highly coherent, consistent, and expert, but is more for the anxious middle-ground, under pressure to move away, partly or entirely, from traditional structures and modes of expression, and so slipping instead towards cultural incoherence and tokenism. Clearly the members of the Archbishops' *In Tune with Heaven* Commission felt that musical creativity could be steered in the direction of a classic/pop/rock fusion or accommodation.

Now one of the unique features of the Western tradition (as opposed to the Orthodox or Oriental traditions for example) is that it has permitted and often encouraged the development of sacred art. That art has been subject to various external influences—sometimes from the secular world, sometimes from another sacred tradi-

tion. But an external influence has not been the result of diplomatic pressure, nor a response to some stylistic marriage broker; rather it has come about through the creative imagination of the artist, the composer who can perceive some beneficial congruence between the host tradition and another one. Within the English tradition, I think especially of John Tavener's Anglican liturgical music (for essentially English it undoubtedly is) and its deep nourishment from Orthodox features and thought-processes. Or I think of Britten's *Missa Brevis* and the extraordinarily thought-provoking and moving tensions it generates between the ancient Greek and Latin texts on the one hand and the almost playground motivic material so blithely presented by a boys' choir on the other—both elements fundamentally related by primal ritual activities and instincts. Such creative marriages of apparently conflicting materials cannot be forced. They cannot be successfully demanded of a musical artisan. They can only arise out of creative artistic imagination fuelled by a lively engagement with tradition. This engagement has been going on for centuries, and it falls to us to study it and to understand its power for the future. The sort of "cross-over" or token accommodation suggested by *In Tune with Heaven* surely does none of the traditions it mentions any favours and accords none its due integrity or dignity.

Most seriously under threat from current liturgical trends is the power and complexity of memory. For any child attending, say, the Holy Week services in the liturgical tradition, it is the simple ritual and symbolic elements that are indelibly imprinted in memory—processions, foot-washing, palms, fire, oils, water. In succeeding years these memories will be renewed and strengthened and will acquire a theological and nostalgic resonance—a resonance both personal and shared with the community. Music is an essential element in this suggestive brew that, carefully tended, will ferment throughout a lifetime. Not just religious devotion, but even psychological health demands that these doctrinal, devotional and emotional sites are regularly revisited, and the elements of ritual tradition powerfully help to fix them in memory, in an ever-deepening *anamnesis*:

The archaic is not the obsolete; it is to the human story what the unconscious is to the human psyche. Tapping the archaic is to release unrecognized reservoirs of memory, the power of which may well be as overwhelming as it is difficult to control ... The liturgy exists to conjure such power and to channel it into incandescent intensity for the life of the world. For this reason the liturgy especially resists that sort

of change which would so adapt it to contemporary culture as to make it seem indistinguishable from a meeting of the PTA or a political caucus. For this same reason those who hanker after Latin or the English of the Authorized Version should not be dismissed as lightly as some have done. Christian worship, it must not be forgotten, is deep *anamnesis*, remembering. It exists to tap the power of the assembly's memory about events, words, persons and deeds which jerked the world definitively onto new courses, to conjure that power in the present where it confronts nothing less than the powers resistive to such new courses—the powers of death and darkness, which do not accept being undercut, overturned, or reversed gladly. (Kavanagh, 41)

Anyone who has experienced the Easter Vigil rites of the Western Church, or even more the literally incandescent Orthodox rites of Easter, in Jerusalem above all, will attest to the truth of Kavanagh's observations. The particular power of the traditional West's approach is that, through its ordered exploitation of a wide historical range of art-music within ordered ritual, the music itself can materially assist the psyche in the powerful process Kavanagh describes. Indeed, of its own nature that musical tradition partakes something of the same pattern—its roots are in the past, it is renewed in the present, and it possesses the capability for future development. Without rolling back the tides and cross-currents in English church life and its music of the past three decades—that is hardly possible—the patrimony of liturgical and musical activity in England strongly encourages me to argue that the creative engagement with tradition must be reaffirmed.

Remarkably, these recent decades of liturgical ferment and debate have at the same time seen a notable rise in the performance standards of many English church choirs and a huge increase in the public appetite for sacred art-music on record. It is true that the presence of a formal, robed choir is no longer as general in church as it was in the 1950s and '60s, but the standard of those expert choirs which still remain (both amateur and professional) has never been so uniformly high. The current international reputation and influence of English concert chamber choirs (such as the Tallis Scholars, Monteverdi Choir and the Sixteen), their qualities of musical literacy, ensemble discipline, clarity of sound and stylistic acuity, derive directly from the church tradition—indeed many of their members maintain a regular involvement in church service. The proficiency of

the choirs of the great Oxford and Cambridge colleges and London cathedrals is not isolated: the choirs of provincial cathedrals and other major churches often reach standards fully worthy of international exposure.

Important developments have included a significant widening of the repertoire beyond the historic English tradition, a marked revival in the interest of major composers to write choral music for the regular liturgy, and in particular increased integration of girls and women. Provision of collegiate choral scholarships for young women at Cambridge and elsewhere, which occurred mainly in the 1980s, has in the '90s been followed by the establishment of significant numbers of girl choirs in cathedrals to augment what previously were exclusively male music establishments.

Thanks to international tours (now commonplace) and the media (CDs above all), the standards, style and repertoire of English church choirs are more widely accessible than ever before. However, this artistic achievement is not reserved solely for high profile exposure, but is routinely harnessed to the liturgy on a regular, local basis and there appears no likelihood of this diminishing.

The perception of the RAM is that the importance of this vibrant indigenous tradition warrants a specialist musical focus, a technical and interpretative training for choral directors which relates the repertoire to its spiritual and cultural context and which is available both to a home and international studentship.

The RAM's post-graduate Choral Direction and Church Music course thus displays a fundamentally different emphasis to the locally focussed, vocationally-designed, state-validated church music courses to be found, for example, in German and Scandinavian conservatoires. This is consistent with the character of the RAM. It is a relatively small institution of about 600 students, of whom Government funding permits only 400 to be citizens of the European Union. It receives no financial support from any church. (In the same way, despite its officially "established" status, the Church of England receives no funds from government, local or national, nor does any other church—much to the surprise of many foreigners used to the church tax system of many other European countries.) My two-year course is designed for a maximum of three students per year, of whom only two may be EU citizens at any one time. Added to this, the RAM is, when all is said and done, a secular, art-music performance institution in the European tradition. Logically therefore, it should properly concern itself with the rich freight of Western art-music and its performance to the highest standards. Indeed, that is our mandate from the British state.

Nonetheless, the persistent academic thrust of the RAM in recent years has been to make all its students more keenly aware of and better informed about the historical context of the music they perform and the social context in which they perform it. In church music this is key and is one of the reasons why the RAM feels church music is naturally sited within the broad spectrum of its studies. So, a compulsory part of the Choral Direction course comprises study of rubrical liturgical structures, the dynamics of ritual and ritual spaces, and theology as related to the liturgy and repertoire. In addition, students examine what one might call the traditional 'folk-music' of the European church—Gregorian chant, metrical psalm-tune and chorale—a resource which has had major impact both on the musical and spiritual *anamnesis* of the people and on the sacred art-music repertoire itself.

In taking the English sacred art-music tradition as the basis for study and as the creative springboard for study of related traditions, repertoire and styles, the RAM does so not just for its native students, but also for those students from other traditions who specifically come to London to benefit from our artistic heritage. Our experience is that this approach often sharpens their perception of their own traditions, encouraging a revaluation of the strengths of their own heritage and a more insightful engagement with it.

If I say, within the English context, "a conservatoire's gotta do what a conservatoire's gotta do," I do not underestimate the importance of purely artisanal skills for the practicing church musician. Nor do I suggest that my students will be insulated from them in the long term. What I do suggest is that these skills need to be developed so often in direct response to locality and circumstance that surely this sort of formation properly falls to the care of the church. Recent developments at the Royal School of Church Music, the ecumenical Sarum College for Liturgy and Mission, the Churches Initiative for Music Education and elsewhere would seem to indicate that the church itself increasingly recognises its need to assume responsibility in this area of expertise, understanding and Christian commitment.

---

## WORKS CITED

- In Tune with Heaven: The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church Music.* 1992. Hodder & Stoughton. London.
- Kavanagh, Aidan. *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style.* 1982. Pueblo. New York.

# No Assembly Required: Why Church Music for the Twenty-first Century is an Ecclesial Concern

THE REV. FRANK STOLDT

“No Assembly Required!” The large sign at the hardware megastore suggested that the new and fully assembled grill would cost only \$197. Next to the price, however, was a very, very small asterisk, and in minuscule letters at the bottom of the sign was the catch: “Assembly \$40 Extra.” Often it seems that those responsible for the formation of church musicians place an asterisk next to the task: “Assembly is extra” for the church musician’s training. If the correct repertoire is mastered, high standards of beauty and excellence are upheld, and quality performance skills in organ or choral conducting are achieved, success as a church musician is implied. Unfortunately, many young and not-so-young parish musicians have been rudely awakened in the past few years to the reality that their specialized and expensive educations don’t match current employment requirements. Fulfilling positions in established Gothic churches with paid choirs are rare. Rather, ads in church newspapers and pastoral journals read more like this:

WANTED: Minister of Music  
We seek a worship leader with the giftedness to bring our 1,000 worshipers—Builders, Boomers, and Busters alike—into God-honored, meaningful, heartfelt, participatory worship ... The successful candidate will draft services of worship meaningful to young and old alike, and be a team player ... [Presbyterian/Colorado]

WANTED: Minister of Music  
Multi-cultural, evangelical, inner-city church of 1000 seeks a qualified, versatile musician to provide full-time leadership for diverse music program. [UCC/Minneapolis]

WANTED: Director of Music Ministry  
Full-time position to direct traditional and contemporary liturgies. Must be knowledgeable in alternative worship, seekers, and the unchurched as well as traditional worship. Skill in worship teams, choirs, organ, synthesizer, and piano required. Competitive salary in the low \$40,000s. [ELCA/Philadelphia]

Each of these very real ads suggests that it is not business as usual in the church music profession. At this end of the millennium, church and culture seemingly have less and less in common, with the result that the church’s mission, as well as its music, is radically and rapidly changing. Outreach is replacing maintenance; diversity has overtaken uniformity; spirituality is as important as highly developed musical skills; and participation by the assembly is the central task of both evangelical and liturgical musicians.

The changing face and role of the Christian assembly is transforming the manner in which church musicians practice their *vocatio*—and also their formation. Pastoral and practical musical experience, not the academy or conservatory, seems to be the touchstone for a knowledge base and skill set quite different from those fostered by many undergraduate and graduate programs in church music. This is occurring simultaneously with the North American Church’s serious reengagement in the task of evangelization and catechization of people with few or no Christian roots and within various cultural contexts. Both contemporary culture and Christian mission, then, are forcing the church to examine its use of music with an eye to its ecclesial and faith-forming natures.

Before I suggest why sacred music will be an ecclesial, not musical, concern in the twenty-first century, let me make three assertions. First, it is crucial to look at the role of assembly in the vocation of church music, including not only the liturgical life of the gathered community, but also the task of assembling one’s education, career, and performance skills. Since it can be argued that the assembly is the primary musical instrument of Christian liturgy, then its role in shaping the education of its musical leadership is critical. Second, it is important to review principles that guide the role of song in the liturgical assembly. A brief look at Oskar Söhngen’s *Theologie der Musik* (1967), as well as two recent Roman Catholic documents (the *Milwaukee Symposia for Church Composers* of 1992, and the *Snowbird Statement on Catholic Liturgy* of 1995), will provide grounding for musical decision-making. Third, chal-

---

*Frank Stoldt is Director of Worship and Education at Augsburg Fortress Publishers in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

lenges of contemporary culture have a direct impact on the assembly and its music. It is especially important to understand the relationship of the Church to its culture, if competing claims about the nature of beauty, diversity, and mission are to be understood. If we grant these assertions, it is reasonable to argue that the Church, not the academy or conservatory, is ultimately responsible for forming its own leadership. With no apologies to Tertullian, church musicians are made, not born—and this formation process is our question.

## I Assembly and the Church

The role of assembly is the beginning point for any discussion regarding the church's music. It is important, however, to look at various ways that assembly functions in the vocation of a church musician. The gathered assembly is the *Sitz in Leben* in which liturgical music-making happens and the center from which the church musician's work flows. In his book *Holy People: a liturgical ecclesiology*, Gordon Lathrop suggests that the "assembly, a gathering together of participating persons, constitutes the most basic symbol of Christian worship" (Lathrop 1999, 74). This definition is certainly congruent with various denominational traditions. For centuries, Lutherans have held that the church is "the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached ... and the holy sacraments administered" (Augsberg Confession, VII in *The Book of Concord*, 32). For contemporary Roman Catholics, *Lumen Gentium* states that "the local church is a true expression based on Word and Meal and one in which the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated" (*Documents of Vatican II*, 50). For Episcopalians, the church is "the congregation ... in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments be duly administered" (*Articles of Religion*, 19, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 871). In each case, the essence of the church is the very assembly itself, gathered around word and meal.

Lathrop also warns, however, that there are several ways that assembly can become misfocused. His first concern is that it be reduced to a choosing, consuming audience in which the content of Christianity is reduced to that which can service the customer. In David Hare's play *Racing Demon*, an Anglican bishop suggests to the aging parish priest: "Just put on a good show and they will come." This market-driven approach to assembly uses a particular musical or liturgical style in order to attract a targeted audience interested in anything from professionally sung plainchant to country western masses, soft rock entertainment evangelism, or Generation X postmodern riffs. The result, however, is consumption, not communion.

Another temptation that Lathrop suggests is the archaic, imagination-bearing event. This is an escape from

present culture in which the assembly enters an age of dreams and romanticism complete with historic or mythic pageantry, architecture, music, and clothing that covers up the reality of present life. Re-creation of the past overshadows present reality. In this experience, musicians are tempted to select a canon of highly stylized music that transports the worshiper to another reality of time and place. Escape replaces engagement.

Another fascination is the gathering of non-dominant communities. Here we have the community of various oppressed or marginalized persons who, through their unique experience, find solace and strength with each other apart from the larger community. Such is the experience shared by many feminists, gays and lesbians, immigrant communities, and others who have felt injured by society or the church. Song that affirms a unique experience or worldview dominates this community, often to the exclusion of musical or theological breadth. The fringe replaces the center.

A fourth type of assembly is the local, national, or ethnic group. Here is a civic gathering of people in which religion serves to forge a people into a *volk*. Various language-based cultural groups as well as American civic religion create a structure that gives meaning or identity to a particular community of people. Musical homogeneity and exclusive ethnic folksong become musical trademarks of this assembly.

Lastly, there is familial community—a gathering of friends and lovers in a caring, but exclusive, family (Lathrop 1993, 40-43). The music of many small congregations exhibits these marks when their canon of song becomes so tightly closed that only the family itself is able to sing it for its own self-pleasure. If this happens, the private has replaced the public nature of liturgical song.

Lathrop concludes by urging that, at its best, the assembly is none of these options, but rather a deeply symbolic reality that bears two marks: continuity and transformation. It stands at the intersection of the ancient biblical hope and the current social and cultural reality. By looking both over its shoulder as well as straight ahead, the assembly is able to connect past with future, memory with hope, sin with grace. With regard to its music, the assembly sings its unique experience while also seeing beyond itself to a new reality.

It must be acknowledged, however, that these misfocused secondary assemblies exist simultaneously along with the deeply symbolic reality the assembly longs to be. The task, then, is to bring their insights and strengths to light by being an audience that participates, a pageant that tells the truth, a gathering in which everyone is welcome, a community granted a radically new identity, and a place where there is shared participation

in the symbols of God's mercy. Music for this assembly, then, is nothing less than participatory, honest, welcoming, identity-bearing, and invitational into the life of God's love.

### Assembling the Skills

The context of the liturgical assembly is just the start, however. Any church musician worth her salt knows there is an unwritten job description that requires the assembly of additional skills. Let's review what a church musician really does!

First, there is the task of being cantor. This is by far the hardest work. It requires infusing the assembly with breath so that it is led and sustained in singing (General Instructions on the Roman Missal, *Documents on the Liturgy*, 1454). This is both a physical and spiritual task in which the body and soul are "jump started" into song by bells and drums, voices and bodily gestures, toccatas, and fanfares. Then there is the role of performer. Today's church musicians are called to be like the "First Reed" player in a Broadway pit orchestra, only instead of playing the flute, oboe, soprano sax, and clarinet, they are expected to be more than proficient in organ, piano, choral conducting, jazz improvisation, 4-in-hand bell ringing, and to have a faultless 12/8 gospel beat at a moment's notice! It must also be acknowledged that musicians serve as preacher, whether they know it or not. Texts that are chosen—and instrumental music that supports them—inherently send words of hope and comfort, or despair and judgment. This part of the job description, perhaps, is the most misunderstood, and certainly has the most potential for altering people's lives.

And the job description goes on. Parish musicians are called upon to be pastoral liturgists who know how music opens up or shuts down ritual action. They are deacons who lead the assembly in prayer and service. They are counselors engaged in the care of souls as they meet and guide people through life's liminal stages. They are teachers who help the assembly and its leaders learn to sing. They are caretakers of tradition who hand on with love the church's treasures that have formed generations of people in faith. They are administrators who handle fund-raising, advertising, and schedules. They are recruiters who rely on charisma and seduction to gather other musicians around them. They are cultural exegetes who strive to understand the secular experiences of people in order to open the richness of grace. They are master mechanics who need to be able to fix broken handbell clappers, stop ciphoning diapasons, and assemble music stands. They are entrepreneurs who must build their own careers and programs from the ground up. Finally, they are presiders, strong, loving, and wise

people who lead the assembly of musicians as they enliven the entire assembly.

### The Voice of the Assembly

In addition to one's own skills and roles, there is also that almost unmanageable musical instrument, the assembly's voice. As delicate, unpredictable, and beautiful as an oboe, the communal voice is a living, breathing instrument with unique mechanics and physics. Not only can a poor environment or repeated abuse so bruise the vocal instrument that it can't function, worse yet, it can be damaged forever.

What would happen if schools offered not only an emphasis in choral conducting, composition, or organ, but also one in the song of the assembly? Clear objective techniques for encouraging healthy congregational singing in a variety of settings and cultures can be identified, described, and taught. These skills can be practiced and evaluated much like any other performance medium. Since the foundation of many church musicians' musicianship is the keyboard, the church would be well off to help its leaders learn what works and what doesn't with the untrained communal voice. The voice of the assembly, with its own "natural law" of musical composition, offers challenges unlike those of any other instrument. This is why, as Richard Proulx once instructed a roomful of budding young composers, sometimes one has to change the melody because the repeated mistakes of the assembly can't be wrong!

### Assembling the *Ordo*

The last task of assembly is to put together the songs and actions—the sights and sounds, the rhythms and harmony—of the *ordo*. Here pastoral, as well as musical, decisions are most crucial for encouraging full, active, and conscious participation. Do gathering rites speak to the deep human need for acceptance and community as well as to the ritual task of uniting fragmented people? Does the music of gathering move people from the experience of self to union with others? Does the song that surrounds the word acclaim God-with-us as well as address the need for meaning and self-understanding? Do acclamations at the bath undergird Christian identity as well as the need for human relationship? Do meal songs invite and give thanks for nourishment and wholeness amid thanksgiving? Does sending music forge a shared human purpose and vision? Does the music reflect the assembly's experience while also pointing to a hopeful future?

## II Ritual Song

Grasping the various natures of assembly isn't enough, however, if the formation of musicians for the

church is to meet the changing demands placed upon the profession. Understanding how song functions within a ritual context is also crucial. That is, musicians need to understand how music functions from the standpoint of both theology and anthropology, if the full power of musical liturgy is to be achieved. Close to forty years ago, Joseph Gelineau, S.J., suggested a distinction between several different types of the church's music. He characterized sacred music as "all music which, by its inspiration, purpose, and destination, or manner of use has a connection with faith." Liturgical music, on the other hand, "consists directly in the singing of words of a rite, and indirectly in the instrumental music which may accompany the singing." He goes on to note that music is liturgical only when the Church recognizes it as her prayer. Lastly, he defined religious music as "all music which expresses religious sentiment but which is not designed for use in the liturgy" (Gelineau, 59-63). Thus, for Gelineau, various types of the church's music are defined by their origin, content and function.

Recent scholars and liturgists have further developed Gelineau's distinctions. A current emphasis is ritual music and its role in forming and expressing the gathered community's faith (Afterword, *Milwaukee Symposia*). Rooted in the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary liturgical studies, this term incorporates the insights of anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology, as well as theology and liturgics. Crucial to this understanding is the idea that music is shared prayer. These various terms highlight the need for pastoral musicians to understand different approaches to the role of music in order to make careful and informed decisions. A brief look at three contemporary approaches can complement Gelineau's helpful methodology.

### Theologie der Musik

One of the most comprehensive approaches to understanding how music functions theologically is contained in Oskar Söhngen's *Theologie der Musik* (1967). In it, he constructs a Trinitarian basis for church music. Söhngen begins a theological reflection on the nature of music by understanding its place in the orders of creation. As the product of God's invention, music is a *creatura* endowed with the innate goodness of creation's rich and diverse manifestations. Music is, however, also open to human abuse through evil or ugliness. Sound that creates physical or emotional injury is contrary to music's inherent nature. Söhngen goes on to suggest that

*The Church, not the academy  
or conservatory, is ultimately  
responsible for forming  
its own leadership.*

music is a part of nature's reflective self-revelation of God. As such, music is best understood as *donum*: a gift of the One who created all that is and is yet to be. The human responsibility is to care for the gift of sound so that it offers thanksgiving to and reflection on its Creator.

If one understands music as both *creatura* and *donum*, certain principles arise. All types, forms, and styles of music are inherently good and adoptable by the church, since creation holds a diversity of creatures. No one music is more equal than another. Likewise, since evil or

ugliness can scar the revelatory power of music, damaging both health and faith, abuses of sound are to be avoided. Volume, sonority, and the assembly's preparation to receive various musical gifts are not only musical

issues; they are also theological concerns. Yet for Söhngen, the harmonic series of creation is not enough. The Paschal event—the radical Christian claim and witness to life amid death—changes one's understanding of the world and of self. Not only is all creation remade in a new divine image, but song is modulated as well. The living voice of the Gospel—the *viva vox evangelii*—enlivens both music and text such that faith is created in those who participate by action or hearing. The apostle Paul echoes this idea when he suggests that "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ," so that music participates deeply in this *miracula auricula* that creates hope and forms faith (Romans 10:17). In his lectures on Genesis, Martin Luther notes that "the miracles one sees are less important than those that we hear" (*Works*, 7:71). The remark underscores the idea that musicians are as much preachers as is the homilist.

Finally, Söhngen suggests that in response to the aural miracle, the human soul leaps with prayer and praise—running into the world infused with the *missio Dei*. It is through the power of the Spirit that human music-making occurs, people are joined *una voce* in the hymn of creation. Music, then, is the voice of prayer, both of the individual and of the gathered assembly. When music blocks this prayer, it is no longer the work of the Spirit. Regardless of style, content, or musical worth, music is a vehicle for the response of faith. Thus, for Söhngen, music starts as the created gift of God, is transformed through God's self-giving love, and is the present work of God's lively Spirit. In this sense, one could argue that Söhngen sees music as the work of God's very being.

### The Milwaukee Symposia

The *Milwaukee Symposia* (1992) take a different approach to understanding how music functions. If

Söhngen saw music in light of creation, proclamation, and response, then *Milwaukee* delves more deeply into the question of the symbolic and ritual role of music. A primary question for the drafters of *Milwaukee* seems to be this: how does music serve the liturgical rite and its actions? This approach understands that ritual music not only expresses the faith of the gathered community, but, in embracing such music, the assembly itself is formed in patterns of liturgy and life that embrace the paschal mystery. The current age, however, with its renewed call to evangelization and formation, demands a new musical form. In response, *Milwaukee* uplifts music that can be sung at first hearing and yet is worthy of repetition. Christian formation of the assembly by the texts, context, and melodies of the music itself becomes the chief arbiter of musical choices.

The document is quick to point out that while there is no intrinsic value of any one music over another, and that an empirical approach to culture determines functional standards for evaluation, it is the collaboration between all the church's musical resources and traditions that is the goal. In other words, the variety of creation and its musical gifts are to be celebrated in a manner that reflects the experiences, history, and context of the local community—many different kinds of music serve to form faith. This vision seems to echo Söhngen and his emphasis both on the goodness of all creation and music's power to enliven the response of faith.

### The Snowbird Statement

An even more recent Roman Catholic statement takes yet a different cut on the question. According to the *Snowbird Statement* of 1995, beauty and excellence are central to church music. The statement urges the church to strive for high objective standards of excellence in composition and performance—and urges, as well, that beauty is essential to the liturgical life as well as the mission of the church (*Snowbird*, 3). Clearly this statement operates with a more normative view of culture when it suggests that some forms and styles of music are of higher quality than others—that standards for the evaluation of beauty are objective, not simply personal, historical, or cultural (*Snowbird*, 5).

*Snowbird's* deep concern for beauty and excellence is the statement's most striking feature, and it echoes Söhngen's emphasis on the power of proclamation and the aural miracle through which faith is engendered. That is to say, this Word which music bears is not simply a reflection of the experiences of this time and this place; it is also a universal external Word which both judges and uplifts our human cultures, musical tastes, and communal experiences. This conviction seems to be a primary reason that the drafters of *Snowbird* underscore the im-

portance of the strophic hymn and the breadth of the western church's musical repertoire.

### A Trinitarian Approach to Music

Söhngen, *Milwaukee*, and *Snowbird*, with their tripartite theology of music, suggest several specific approaches to the formation of the Church's future musical leadership.

First, because of the goodness of creation, there is no value distinction between *volkmusik* and *kunstmusik*, or between various musical styles and forms. All music celebrates the goodness of creation, and students should be exposed to and experienced in the widest range of musical styles, cultures, and forms. To truly be a catholic church musician, barriers of personal style and taste need to give way to expressions of creation's rich diversity.

Second, the relationship between singing and speaking—*sagen und singen*, preaching and song—suggests that both be infused with the task of proclamation and its faith-forming power. When musicians understand that their work over a lifetime can either build up or injure the faith of countless and nameless individuals, questions of musical correctness give way to concern for pastoral care and biblical faithfulness. Music of hope, healing, reconciliation, and God's promised future becomes crucial.

Third, the singing of the church *una voce* is an ecclesiological statement about relationships within the assembled community and the power of music to give voice to prayer. One role of music is to bind up fragmented peoples and help them give voice to common prayer. This means creating space and time within the life of the gathered community for the Spirit to arouse music of response and prayer. This also means embracing the musical gifts of different people, while serving the needs of the whole community and beyond. Music and liturgical rite both belong to the local and universal church, and the prayer needs of both ecclesial expressions must be met.

### III Culture: Eternal or Contemporary?

In light of the role of assembly and the ritual nature of song, we now come to the "culture question." The manner in which the musician addresses this question makes the final difference between ecclesial versus musical song. As the *Milwaukee* and *Snowbird* documents demonstrate, there seems to be a tension between normative and empirical approaches to culture. A normative approach to culture views standards as universal, stable, and objective. This is what philosopher Bernard Lonergan would call a "classicist" view of culture. For musicians, this view means emphasizing one particular musical repertoire as being the

“most appropriate” for all assemblies. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* seems to bend this way when it declares that “all things being equal, Gregorian chant should be given place of pride in liturgical celebrations” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 116, *Documents on the Liturgy*, 116).

On the other hand, an empirical approach to culture regards standards as ever-changing, collective, and concrete. Lonergan would note this as a “contemporary” approach to culture. This understanding suggests that beauty itself is directly related to the webs of significance that connect people. That is, values of beauty and form are clearly culturally influenced. Therefore, depending on which approach to culture one takes, musical decisions can lead in divergent directions. While I don’t here presume to suggest a single choice, awareness by musicians of various cultural methodologies in music as well as politics, theology, and ecclesiology is self-revealing of one’s own thought processes and values.

Furthermore, the socio-political diversity of the United States in the late twentieth century is profound. In the past fifty years, we have had few common experiences that override our geographical, educational, financial, or ethnic differences. Consequently, our society is fragmented into communities with unique viewpoints, experiences, goals, and musical traditions. Sub-groupings seem to be more important in the forming of identity than does the collective whole.

In addition, broad societal religious trends continue to affect the church’s mission and consequently its music. At the 1998 San Diego convention of the Protestant Church Publisher’s Association, Barbara Wheeler, president of Auburn Seminary in NYC, noted the following trends:

Personalism leads society at large to make choices about their religious traditions based, not on birth or education, but on preference. For those who long for strong education in a particular denomination’s musical traditions, this is bad news! Because people are changing denominations at a rapidly increasing pace, realistic expectations for musical memory are declining each year. Localism is another cultural trend in which the unofficial or local is seen as more trustworthy than the official or national. For denominations that look for churchwide standards, uniform practices, and ecclesially-approved hymnals, this is also bad news. The culture is quickly moving toward decentralization in which “make your own hymnal” is an every Sunday

event. Volunteerism is another cultural leaning in which volunteers are accepted as more knowledgeable than those who have profound experience and training. The church experiences this clearly in its debates about theology — but perhaps even more profoundly in the question of musical leadership and repertoire for both large and small assemblies. Individualism and Religiosity are two additional interconnected trends. While, according to Gallup, more than 90% believe in God, it seems that less than 40% participate in a community—and even less are part of a liturgical assembly (“Feast or Famine”).

In light of these trends, Wheeler suggested that the church must become far more intentional about creating its next generation by repeatedly teaching foundational practices of the faith. That is, patterns of faith and images of the Christian life need to be infused in all our tasks from preaching to teaching to music-making. Thus musicians are and must be consciously engaged in “making Christians,” if music is to fulfill its richest faith-nurturing potential.

In conclusion, then, the complex nature of assembly, the role of liturgical song, and shifting cultural patterns all suggest that the church is moving into an age in which “business as usual” won’t work. In liturgy and music, as well as in teaching and preaching, the church itself is the only organization equipped to provide its leadership for the next generation. The academy and conservatory may be “vendors” in the process—that is, they can provide many of the raw goods necessary to form future cantors—but this very formation involves the assembly of a rich and diverse education and a commitment to the ecclesial nature of the church itself.

Because the music of the assembly centers on the task of faith formation and imaging the Christian life, because the music of the assembly is an expression of a particular assembly’s life together as well as the living faith of the whole church, because the music of the assembly requires leadership that is rooted in spiritual maturity and musical giftedness, because the music of the assembly is an expression of creation’s diverse and continually unfolding gifts, and because the music of the assembly is an expression of the symbolic nature of the church and the ritual nature of prayer, church music for the twenty-first century is not only a musical, but an ecclesial, concern. And because the music of the assembly is a bearer of the Logos itself, church music for the twenty-first century is a profoundly ecclesial and inherently musical concern.

---

## WORKS CITED

- The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979. New York.
- The Book of Concord*, 1959. Tr. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia.
- The Documents of Vatican II*, 1966. Ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. Piscataway, N.J.
- Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts*, 1982. Collegeville, MN.
- Foley, Edward, Capuchin. 1995. *Ritual Music: Studies in Liturgical Musicology*. Beltsville, MD.
- Gelineau, Joseph, S.J. 1964. *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship*. Tr. Clifford Howell, S.J. Collegeville, MN.
- Lathrop, Gordon. 1999. *Holy People: a liturgical ecclesiology*. Minneapolis.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *Holy Things: a liturgical theology*. Minneapolis.
- Leaver, Robin A., and James H. Litton, ed. 1985. *Duty and Delight: Routley Remembered*. Carol Stream, IL.
- Liturgical Music Today*. 1982. Washington.
- Music in Catholic Worship*. 1983. Revised ed. Washington.
- Söhngen, Oskar. 1983. "Music and Theology: A Systematic Approach" in *Sacred Sound: Music in Religious Thought and Practice*. Ed. Joyce Irwin. Chico, CA.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1967. *Theologie der Musik*. Kassel.
- The Snowbird Statement on Catholic Liturgical Music*. 1995. Salt Lake City.
- The Milwaukee Symposia for Church Composers: A Ten-Year Report*. 1992. Chicago.
- The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*. 1997. Chicago.
- Westermeyer, Paul. 1997. *The Church Musician*. Revised ed. Minneapolis.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis.
- Wheeler, Barbara. 1998. "Feast or Famine," Address to the Biennial Meeting of the Protestant Church Publisher's Association. San Diego.

# Questions of Excellence: Training for the Music Ministry in a Local Church

LINDA J. CLARK

**F**or the last decade, I have been involved in doing research in local congregations in New England. I was led into this form of scholarship because my questions about the vocation of church music could no longer be answered by reading books in a library. My hazy dis-ease with traditional methods of scholarship received clarity and support from a speech made by Mark Searle, then of the faculty of Notre Dame, at the January 1983 meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy. In this speech, Searle advocated the formation of a new area of liturgical studies, pastoral liturgical studies, whose object of study is “the living, offering, praying Church, which accomplishes the mystery of grace, considered in terms of [her] actual worship in practice and her statements concerning it” (Searle, 1983, 294). What Searle advocated in this speech was the study of lived religion. In studying a worship service, what historical texts were used, what was done ritually, what music sung, its implied theology, were important. What was lacking was an understanding of the impact of any act of worship on the living faith of the people doing it. In commenting on the liturgical renewal of Vatican II, Searle pointed out that historical and theological analysis, the traditional concerns of scholars, were enough to persuade church authorities to reform the liturgy, but they were insufficient to ensure any controlled connection between the reform of the liturgical books and the renewal of Christian life in local congregations (Searle, 1983, 292f).

Searle’s speech and his subsequent work with others at Notre Dame and elsewhere has had an enormous impact on liturgical scholars across the Church. From the perspective of this type of research, a music scholar develops a particular slant on the musical practices in worship. First of all, they are seen as an event, rather than an object, one which derives meaning from its context. A hymn or an anthem has particular meaning in this congregation at this time and place (Geertz, 1976). Further, someone studying music in worship must account for both its “intended meaning” and its “received meaning.” This dual responsibility has important implications. A church musician cannot rely solely on her or his own un-

derstanding of a piece of music, but must seek to understand it from the viewpoints of the people of faith in a congregation. In the next several pages, I will explore the complexity of this responsibility for those who teach and learn in a church music program.

## Training for Music Ministry in a Local Congregation

In the last month I have moved through three distinct worlds: I have negotiated with the faculty of the School for the Arts at Boston University to change the applied music requirements for the Master of Sacred Music degree; I have participated in lengthy and at times acrimonious debate about the creation of a ThD degree in Practical Theology with my colleagues in the School of Theology; I have traveled to Nashville to the General Council on Ministries of the United Methodist Church to discuss the research I have been doing in local congregations. Each of these worlds is indispensable to the MSM degree. Consequently, its students must develop an ability to move with ease among these three, the worlds of music, theology, and the church. In doing so, they develop a broader and more profound understanding of the nature of excellence than if they studied each of these worlds as separate disciplines. Trouble arises when the broader view is sacrificed to a narrower one. I would like to frame our discussion of this broader view in light of an article by Craig Dykstra entitled “Reconceiving Practice.”

Dykstra, a theologian and educator, begins with a critique of the common understanding in theological education of the practice of ministry. He condemns it as abstract, technological, and individualistic. He rails against the view of ministry as practiced *by* someone *on* some person or group: a Lone Ranger type who rides into town, fixes the problem, and then rides out of town. Such an image is abstract: that is, it is ahistorical and individualistic (the Lone Ranger has no ties or commitments to the people in the town) and it is technological (the Lone Ranger is a problem-solver). Once the problem is fixed, there is nothing left to do. Away the Lone Ranger rides.

Dykstra offers another view: rather than focusing on a person—the minister or musician—he focuses on the practice—ministry or music-making. He relies on a definition of practice by Alasdair MacIntyre:

---

*Linda Clark is Assistant Professor of Music at Boston University School of Theology.*

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (Dykstra, 1991, 42)

Under this definition, ministry is seen as a cooperative human activity, rather than the work of one person. The focus of attention is on the practice itself, “socially established” in a particular place; in the course of realizing “the good” internal to the practice excellently, our capacity to achieve excellence and our understanding of the ways to achieve it are extended. The practice itself, within the context of a particular time and place, is what is central. Thus, the minister is but one person in a community, a community with a history in a particular tradition and region; it is the community who practices preaching, praying, singing.

Dykstra would include in his analysis of a practice not only the particular congregation at this time in this place, but other non-contiguous institutions and people: the founders of the religious tradition, its musical life, its past, and the institutions that instill it. And that’s where an institution like Boston University would come to the fore. When I went to the meeting in Nashville, I came from an institution devoted to the educational practices of a religious tradition. People like me play an indispensable role in the extension of the goods and ends of the church’s practices. We train leaders of the church in the history of the tradition and its music, in the bible, in theology, and we sharpen their skills as practicing musicians. We make them better performers and choral conductors. If the Lone Ranger model of music ministry held, we could stop there. But if the practice for which all this training has value resides in a local congregation, then we must also train them in the practice of ministry, in an appreciation of what it means to be a leader in a voluntary institution, and an understanding of the contemporary, multi-cultural religious scene in America.

It sounds so simple from this distance, a step removed from it all. Yet it is not, and the rest of my time will be spent describing and analyzing the contradic-

tions. What constitutes excellence in the practice of music ministry in a local congregation?

### Excellence

Recently a Field Education student of mine conducted John Stainer’s *The Crucifixion* in his church on Good Friday. He wanted to have the congregation sing the various hymns that occur throughout it, and so, to give the congregation some familiarity with them, he scheduled them as the middle hymn in the Lenten Sunday Services, publishing the text in the bulletin Sunday by Sunday. At the March meeting of the governing board of the congregation an uproar greeted him. It seems that this congregation has a very strict policy about inclusive language, and these hymns violated it. When someone expressed the view that consistently using male imagery for people and for God violated his faith as well as the expressed policy of the church, the musician blurted out, “Well, changing the words in a work of art violates my faith!” There ensued a long debate about this work and its appropriateness for worship in that church.

This debate was about different views of excellence. When the student studied conducting at the School of Fine Arts, the language issue never came up, because there, respect for the inviolable nature of a work of art

is a given. But when the student came into the local church, another type of excellence was being assumed, in this case, gender-inclusive language in worship. Neglecting how the music

would “mean” within this community put the Good Friday service in jeopardy. The student backed off and published a long note in the bulletin about the controversy. He talked about his own position, the times in which the piece was written, and the reasons that he was making certain changes in the text, but not others.

Here he displayed the importance of his education both at the School of Fine Arts and at the School of Theology. First of all, he knew both music history and church history. He was able to put the Stainer work in its historical context. Secondly, he was articulate about the value of respecting a work of art in the particular tradition of which Stainer was an exemplar. Thirdly, he understood the theological issues that were involved in the controversy. Fourthly, he could make moral judgments about his behavior as a leader in a church where other values than those of the academy prevail.

Had he only excellence as defined by the SFA to consider, his action would have been unequivocal. However, excellence as defined by his being a worship leader in a church was broader and more complex. This kind

## *What constitutes excellence in the practice of music ministry in a local congregation?*

of excellence entailed several moral decisions on the part of the student. What kind of commitments came with his leadership position as a musician in a worshipping congregation? What was his responsibility to the Board and the people who disagreed with him? This church had been created in the mid-sixties out of three neighboring churches who merged because they shared a strong commitment to social justice. What would such a performance mean at worship on Good Friday in this congregation? What was his responsibility to the history of the congregation in this place? What does it mean for this community to foster a strong music program with trained professionals? What is its commitment to the inviolability of the work of art?

Returning, then, to MacIntyre's definition of a practice, what were the goods internal to cooperative human activity (here, performing Stainer's *The Crucifixion* on Good Friday) at this church? In good SFA fashion, the choir director develops the capacity in a group of singers to perform this work as an event which speaks to the meaning of the Crucifixion. But then, in good STH fashion, he enhances the worshipful nature of the work, involving the congregation in the event. So he put the texts of the "chorales" in the Sunday bulletin each week during Lent and provides "practice time" to familiarize the congregation with the work. Then all hell breaks loose! Why? By disregarding the nature of the community who will gather at worship on Good Friday to participate in this meaning event, he undermines excellence in every category.

By taking on the conflict—by respecting his own leadership responsibilities in a community where democratic forms of governance and work through consensus are paramount—this student provided a "teachable moment" for the congregation. Or, in MacIntyre's terms, he systematically extended his congregation's

powers to achieve excellence, and its conception of the ends and goods involved in doing so. He did not keep his mouth shut; yet he was able to compromise as the others did in order to honor the complex nature of excellence in the practices of a community.

We have here a triangle of concerns: the music, the theology embodied in it, and the context—the way in which it is appropriated for worship by a congregation dealing with issues of justice. None of these values could be neglected; at every point, the excellence embodied in worship through music on Good Friday in this community required a leader who understood them all. The Lone Ranger would not have had to go through all this! But then, that's why they could fit each one of those installments into thirty neatly packaged minutes.

The training of a good church musician is a complex task. The MSM program at Boston University is well situated to accomplish it, housed as it is in a seminary with strong ties both to the church, and to a world-class school of music. However, classroom work is just the beginning. Complexity begins to emerge when students and their teachers move out of the academic precincts into local congregations and their worship practices. Maintaining the tension among the three worlds is essential to both the success and integrity of music-making in the church.

---

## WORKS CITED

- Dykstra, Craig. 1991. "Reconceiving Practice." In *Shifting Boundaries*. Eds. Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley. Louisville.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1976. "Art as a cultural system." In *Modern Language Notes* 91: 1473-1499.
- Searle, Mark. 1983. "New Tasks, New Methods: the Emergence of Pastoral Liturgical Studies." *Worship* 57: 291-308.

# The Imperative of Theological/Philosophical Education for Church Musicians

CALVIN M. JOHANSSON

I preface my remarks with the confession that I am writing as a decidedly sectarian pastoral musician, deeply concerned for the spiritual health of my church. Influenced by the Toronto blessing and the Brownsville revival, the first example I cite comes from within my own fellowship. Hence, as an insider, I feel completely free and at ease to say what needs to be said without worrying if I'm offending anyone. For the second example, I have relied upon the report of the chief musician of a denominational congregation who volunteered the information at her own initiative. In this case, as an outsider, I have attempted to be particularly careful about what and how I present my evidence.

Consider the obvious: scripture is the key to finding guidance about church music. This axiom will not surprise those who regard the Word of God as the "final rule of faith and practice," and even those who are not biblical literalists can agree that special revelation holds a divine Word which illuminates the making of music in the church. Yet neither camp much utilizes this valuable resource to its maximum potential. I will suggest that without the coherent and comprehensive application of theology to the worldview of people, clergy, and musicians, church music will be like the Titanic: it will always be there, but sunk in the waters of a post-Christian culture, it will be helpless, unable to fulfill its purpose.

It was the second chapel of the fall. The president had requested the faculty to be present so they could be introduced to the new students. A strongly insular institution of the Assemblies of God, Evangel College draws its student body from a very narrow segment of the population. Most belong to the fellowship, are largely middle-class, white, and politically conservative. Having taught at the school for thirty-five years, I know them well.

As I entered the chapel foyer, I was greeted by what can only be described as a terrific racket. When I walked into the chapel itself, the noise was so deafening that I thought my eardrums would burst. At the front, the large cross and the silent pipe organ case were covered by a huge projection screen which displayed the words being sung by five singers, each with a mike cranked up to the

level of pain. Accompanied by an amplified band, the overall effect was not unlike several pneumatic drills working on one's timpanic membranes. Few in the congregation were singing. I tried, but I literally could not hear myself utter a sound. Most of the students wore a glazed expression and interacted reflexively with the music in some rhythmic way.

As the music increased in volume, people began to jump. Higher and higher they went. The place began to look like a giant trampoline. One tall, lanky fellow several rows in front of me seemed to be trying to reach the ceiling. When with each jump a greater and greater expanse of leg became visible, my thoughts turned from the divine to the decidedly fleshly: "What long legs he has, and skinny too!" I mused. "No wonder he can soar three feet off the ground." Here is the funky text, repeated *ad nauseam*, that inspired his athleticism:

I went to the enemy's camp  
And I took back what he stole from me.  
I took back what he stole from me.  
Took back what he stole from me.  
I went to the enemy's camp  
And I took back what he stole from me.  
He's under my feet, he's under my feet.  
He's under my feet, he's under my feet.  
He's under my feet, he's under my feet.  
Satan is under my feet.  
(*Hosanna! Music Songbook II*, 898)

It was a portent of things to come. The organ was used only three times during the semester, the other sixty-five chapels featuring a variety of pop combos. Welcome to the world of church music on my campus.

Now let's move to Grace (it could be Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, or Community) Church. The marvelous building—with its Gothic vaulting, stained glass, fine pipe organ (complete with tower echo organ), aisles worn by the steps of hundreds of thousands of parishioners, and memorial plaques by the dozens—is seldom full. The budget has been higher, major repairs to the building postponed, the custodian and musician barely hanging on, and the ministerial staff reduced to one.

The pastor, driven to come up with a current evangelism plan, recently attended a church growth seminar.

---

*Calvin Johansson is Professor of Music at Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri, and an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God.*

The outcome, designed to attract more people, was twofold. First, a task force was convened and further “vagueified” (the organist’s word) Grace’s doctrinal identity. Under the pastor’s leadership, a weak and rather innocuous-sounding mission statement was issued, one which effectively replaced the church’s creedal statement, something of a non-issue with the pastor, whose liberal theological stance could be summed up: “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you believe something.”

Second, an updated worship service was adopted. That meant obtaining a CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) license, a trap set, an electronic keyboard, an instrumental combo, a praise team, a high-powered audio system, and a subscription to “Worship Leader’s Song Discovery” (whose companion periodical, *Worship Leader*, featured the slogan “Pop Goes the Worship” on the cover of its May/June 1998 issue). Because the size of the congregation did not warrant offering both a contemporary and a traditional service, the pastor decided to go with convergence worship, in the hope of having something for everyone.

The music director’s arguments for continuing the exceptionally good and widely recognized musical tradition of the church carried no weight whatsoever. Indeed, she was hardly heard. Overnight, the pastor’s philosophy, bolstered by the board’s fiscal concerns, became the music department’s mandated credo: “It doesn’t matter what you sing, as long as you sing something.”

If you feel insulated from these two scenarios, be advised that it may not be long before you too are asked to provide jumping music for the eleven o’clock mass, or a song from a top-rated praise and worship album of the “Deep Enough to Dream” variety (see *Worship Leader*, 68). Even if not called upon to do something outrageously obnoxious, most church musicians will ultimately be affected by the most radical church music expressions. And when the days of pop worship come, as come they will, it will pay to be prepared.

Hence education. The situations at Evangel College and Grace Church are vastly different. But they share certain similarities which the theologically astute church musician should be able to recognize. One of these is a common worldview concerning the arts; the other is a common obliviousness to scriptural authority. Let me elaborate.

The evangelical approach to faith tends to be orthodox, fundamental, if you will. There are certain boundaries, understandings, and approaches emanating from special revelation which are dogmatically upheld. Christian theism is acknowledged to be an objective worldview, imposed by One who transcends culture. We are indebted to Professor Dale Jorgenson for pointing out that though Evangelicals are quite objective concerning such things

as ethics, they are “unabashedly subjective when dealing with the arts” (Jorgenson, 95). The ensuing schizophrenia fragments evangelical theism. Evangelicals tend to live dichotomized lives, with a spirituality impacted by Christian theism, and an aesthetic impacted by something else. Likely, that something else will be naturalism, a rival to Christian theism. In naturalism, which James Sire contends is the most prevalent and persistent worldview today (Sire, 82), all values, including aesthetic values, are individually invented, none better than another, regardless. Right, wrong, good, bad, better, best do not exist in any conventional Judeo/Christian sense. Everything is equal to everything else.

Now, the path leading from naturalism to pop music worship in the Grace Church example is a bit easier for me to follow. If a theistic outlook is so watered down that it has lost its central identity, it is wide open to becoming something else. In other words, if Grace Church upholds a faith so open it embraces anything in order to accommodate the wider culture, it is not a very big leap to change music programs willy-nilly for the sake of expediency. If a worldview has no “oughtness” to it, why should we care about constraints to the expression of “anything goes” in music?

Both evangelical and liberal groups thus base their musical practices on naturalism’s well-known aesthetic corollaries: “There’s no disputing taste,” and “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” When these are the working premises (acknowledged or not) of a church, there is nothing more to say. All the aesthetic arguments in the world—musical reasoning, decorum, history, tradition, excellence, richness, goodness, liturgical rigor—avail nothing. Church music-making based on naturalistic assumptions is individualistic, democratic, and market-driven. Taste (remember there is no such thing as good taste or bad taste) reigns supreme. The prophetic role of pastoral music ministry ceases, and musicians exist to service the changing preferences of those who pay the bills. In a word, contemporary church music lacks authority. And in the current cultural climate, the likelihood of finding a common authoritative frame of reference for church music is virtually nonexistent.

*Except* (and here I add a cautious note of optimism) . . . *except that when everything is said and done, God has spoken in Christ as revealed in divine revelation.* The Bible, as Routley and others have intimated, speaks to all situations, either directly or by inference (Leaver, 5-8). When my congregation and pastor can be shown theologically that a certain musical course of action is supported by scripture, the central figure in the argument changes from me to God. And in most churches, God still has some sway!

What this means for church musicians is the absolute necessity of their being able to extrapolate from scrip-

ture credible guiding principles, of being strong enough to carry the day within their own communion. Church music matters taken from the arena of human opinion and securely anchored to divine revelation have a better chance of adoption than those perceived to have come from the feelings, preferences, or musical scholarship of the musician. This means, of course, that musicians need theological study. And study of a particular type. Perhaps the term “applied theology” would be appropriate for what I have in mind. The theological studies I took at Union Seminary were both theoretical and practical, but they did not inform the discipline of music as far as basic issues were concerned. The advent of Vatican II, the decline of membership in many mainline Protestant churches, the phenomenal rise and influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships, the church growth movement, the advanced secularization of society, the decline of music educations, a virtual revolution in worldview, the twentieth-century phenomenon of commercial popular music becoming the normative music of the average person—all these have made it necessary for musicians to understand basic issues.

Even as a student, I realized that I needed insight to deal with the polarities looming on the horizon. On the one hand were those who believed that “Whatever music brings people into the church and keeps them there is all that is important.” On the other hand were those like Robin Leaver for whom “The true worship of the Creator demands . . . the highest fruits of our creativity, not merely anything that ‘works’” (McGrath, 393). In church music, the polarities have now become as deeply entrenched as the frontlines of the First World War:

Contemporary vs. Traditional  
 Low Art vs. High Art  
 Pragmatism vs. Aestheticism  
 Pop vs. Classical  
 Subjective vs. Objective  
 Accommodative vs. Prophetic

Such otherwise irreconcilable extremes require the application of what I have elsewhere termed “biblical counterpoint” (Johansson, *passim*). Knowing the difference between law and grace, transcendence and imminence, election and free will is not enough, nor is it sufficient to study church history without addressing the necessity of history as a working Christian concept. Applied theology takes theistic formulations and broad theological topics (creation, *imago Dei*, incarnation, eschatology, stewardship, and so forth) and finds in them principles that will guide the church’s music-making, principles that are able to be contextualized without giving in

to alien worldviews, principles dynamic enough to deal with the realities of twenty-first century culture.

I am not unaware of some of the difficulties such a proposal holds. As always, things are not as neat and packaged as they might seem. It is true that musicians, pastors, and churches from the liberal side of the aisle will need a heightened respect for scripture as truth. Their penchant for viewing church music trivia as but another example of cultural pluralism needs serious rethinking. And evangelicals will need to regard musical expressions from a holistic scriptural perspective. Their practice of divorcing a conservative theology from the most radical pop music expressions imaginable must be altered. But I think scripture offers a hermeneutic sufficiently broad so as not to get bogged down in minutiae.

Christian theism and church music belong together. But that unity can no longer be taken for granted. Deliberate effort will be needed if theology is to remain the basis of church music, its “queen of the sciences.” More than ever, I would suggest with Luther that “*Next* to theology, music deserves the highest praise” (Plass, 979).

The prophetic mantle belongs to musicians of the coming century. The liberal and conservative wings of the Christian church have become strange bedfellows when it comes to music, following a similar pattern and aesthetic in spite of vast theological separation. Such a situation points out better than any other single thing the present divorce between theology and musical practice. Only the gospel has the power rightly to inspire a renaissance in church music. And that is the musician’s prophetic ministry. Standing amidst the flotsam and jetsam of a culture needing the light of Christ as never before, the church musician must follow and dispense the immutable laws of God as found in the Word by applying them to the church’s music.

*In a word, the problem  
 is authority.*

---

## WORKS CITED

- Johansson, Calvin M. 1998. *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint*. Second ed. Peabody, Massachusetts.
- Jorgenson, Dale. 1983. “Axiological Schizophrenia: Inconsistency in Evangelical Values.” *Christianity Today*. March 4:95.
- Leaver, Robin A. 1989. *The Theological Character of Music in Worship*. St. Louis.
- McGrath, Alistair E. 1993. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*. Oxford.
- Plass, Ewald. *What Luther Says*. 1959. St. Louis.
- Sire, James W. 1988. *The Universe Next Door*. Downers Grove, Illinois.
- Worship Leader*. 1998. May/June.

# Training Church Musicians: What Are the Appropriate Methods?

EDWARD FOLEY, CAPUCHIN

Church musicians, as their title implies, are accountable to two worlds—church and music—and they must receive both ecclesial<sup>1</sup> and musical training. Multiple methods are available for each of these aspects of the church musician's vocation. To the extent that church musicians receive training in both, however, that training is ordinarily inadequate because it takes what could be characterized as a “theory-practice” approach to both church and music. Neither church (especially the church's liturgy) nor music are first of all “theories,” but rather are practices. This inadequacy can only be redressed, therefore, if church musicians receive musical-ecclesial training which requires the mutual, critical correlation of practice and theory.<sup>2</sup> In short, adequate formation of church musicians requires the employment and acquisition of methods which take the liturgy and its music seriously as a public, shared, ritualized theological event. Two prime methods for accomplishing this goal theologically and musically are practical theology and ethnomusicology.

## Two Underlying Presuppositions

*Worship is a faith event and theological act of the first order.* The ancient tradition (asserted by Protestants,<sup>3</sup> Roman Catholics<sup>4</sup> and Orthodox<sup>5</sup> alike in this post-conciliar era) is that the act of worship is the church's first theology, a prized expression of faith. The two-edged sword in this realization is that worship not only expresses the church's faith, but also creates it.<sup>6</sup> In consequence, those trained in any liturgical ministry (e.g. presiders, preachers, and musicians) must be equipped to acknowledge and comprehend what faith and belief they both express and create.

*Liturgical music is not only in worship; it is worship.* Music, variously wed to text and/or ritual action, is one of the languages of worship. Liturgical music, however, is not only a language spoken in the liturgy but is an essential language of the liturgy, to use the famous axiom of Joseph Gelineau.<sup>7</sup> Roman Catholicism goes so far as dogmatically to acknowledge music as the *only* art integral to the church's official worship<sup>8</sup> and to assert that the

very act of liturgical music-making is a fundamental expression of the very presence of Christ.<sup>9</sup> Thus, music in the liturgy is never theologically neutral, and church musicians never simply “make” music in the liturgy. Like the liturgy itself, authentic liturgical music (which is not the same as sacred music)<sup>10</sup> is always about the expression and creation of belief and faith; broadly speaking, liturgical music can be considered a sacramental act.<sup>11</sup> Thus, church musicians must reckon not simply with their artistry, but also with their musical “sacrament” and the kind of faith and belief this music expresses and creates.

## General Methodological Considerations

In a recent address,<sup>12</sup> Professor David Tracy of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago identified what he considered to be the three great separations of modern Western culture. According to Tracy, these three fatal separations are 1) the separation of feeling and thought, 2) the separation of form and content, and 3) the separation of theory and practice.<sup>13</sup>

Tracy convincingly argues that these separations are based on an originally helpful distinction that has become an unhealthy disjunction. Both the ancients and the medievals (Tracy notes) were capable of distinguishing among these categories without severing relationships among them, and he suggests that we must “face and heal these separations which modernity has bequeathed and postmodernity is happily undoing.”<sup>14</sup> While it would be valuable to explore all three of these distinctions become separations from the viewpoint of liturgical music, it is the third, the interplay of theory and practice, which especially needs to be addressed when considering the formation of church musicians.

Tracy suggests that there are three possible paradigms for the interplay of theory and practice.<sup>15</sup> The first of these he characterized as a theory-practice approach, in which the theory is worked out in one arena (for example, music history) and applied in another (for example, worship). Tracy considers this an inadequate model for a variety of reasons, of which the most compelling is that theory is never affected by any practice. Anyone whose vocation engages art and religion must be aware that our life perspectives are all culturally conditioned: a theory-practice approach, however, empha-

---

*Edward Foley is Professor of Liturgy and Music at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and an ordained presbyter of the Capuchin Order.*

sizes universalization unchallenged and uncritiqued by cultural particularity.

Tracy's second model for the interplay of theory and practice (also inadequate) allows no place for critical reflection. He characterizes this as a practice-practice model which "does not sublimate theory but simply negates it." In this model, "concrete actions and commitments to a particular cause supply all the criteria necessary for truth in theology. This second model ... does correctly affirm the primacy of praxis for theory ... [but it] fails to see that all praxis, like all experience, is in fact theory-laden."<sup>16</sup> Just as it is inadequate to cede primacy to theory to the exclusion of practice as a credible dialogue partner, so is it unacceptable to validate practice without critical reflection. Musically speaking, to play the notes without understanding is to give an unreflective and inadequate performance. While practice is essential to the performer, practice-practice-practice models of training are clearly inadequate.

Tracy proposes that an authentic model for theology is one which calls for "the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian fact and the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation."<sup>17</sup> This image calls for a "collaborative dialogue ... in which each can challenge the other and contribute both descriptive and normative statements, coming to a deeper understanding through their essentially equal dialogue."<sup>18</sup>

### Mutual Critical Correlation and Theological/Liturgical Methods

Classic methods in theology since the early medieval period and, by extension, emergent methods in liturgies which developed out of classical theology, have generally prized theory over practice, metaphysics over experience, and universal abstraction over the pastorally particular. Recent developments in theology, however, have begun to reverse these trends.<sup>19</sup> Not only are an increasing number of late twentieth-century theologians thinking about theory and practice in terms of mutual regard, but some are even attempting to demonstrate that such mutual regard is at the heart of authentic and "traditional" Christian theology.<sup>20</sup>

More particularly, there is an emerging field of theology which prizes, at its center, the mutual regard of theory and practice: the broad umbrella term for this field is practical theology. The methods of practical theology are the appropriate vernacular for liturgists in general and church musicians in particular. This is not practical theology in the sense of applied theology,<sup>21</sup> but rather prac-

tical theology as defined in the works of David Tracy, Don Browning, James Fowler, Bernard Lee<sup>22</sup> and others who, in their redefinition of the field, demonstrate that practical theology is a series of methods. It requires critical and constructive reflection. This reflection is done in communities of faith. This reflection takes local practice seriously. This reflection requires the interpretation of normative sources such as scripture and tradition. But this reflection also requires interpretation of emergent challenges and new situations. This reflection leads to the ongoing modification and transformation of practice, enabling a more adequate response to God's call to partnership.<sup>23</sup> Practical theology is especially capable of systematically making a place for ignored and unheard voices in the theological enterprises<sup>24</sup> and for reckoning seriously with cultural context and social location in the critical reflection on practice.<sup>25</sup>

Church musicians should study church history, the theology of the liturgy, and develop ministerial skills. The metamethod, however, which can most effectively wed these different disciplines together,

is a practical theological method in which church musicians are trained as musical-ecclesial hermeneuts: attending to present practice, engaging in serious reflection on that practice, and so better assessing and shaping the theology and faith their music creates. If we want to train church musicians (or, indeed, any ministers for the church), let us train practical theologians.

### Mutual Critical Correlation and Musical Methods

It is not only in the theological arena, however, that Tracy's methodological assessment and recommendation of the mutual and critical correlation of theory and practice needs to be addressed; it is also in the musical. Just as it is insufficient for any liturgist to receive training in history and systematics but not hermeneutics, ritual studies and other practical-theological methods, so it is insufficient for any church musician to be trained in music history, counterpoint, analysis and the rest without being trained in the musical disciplines which, beginning with contemporary practice, address the social function and meaning of music—an analog to the ecclesial function and ritual meaning of music in worship. Thus, classical musicological studies need to be wed with ethnomusicological studies.

Ethnomusicology can be defined as

an interdisciplinary approach to the study of music, inclusive of the music of all cultures, peoples, classes and repertoires (folk,

*If we want to train church musicians (or, indeed, any ministers for the church), let us train practical theologians.*

popular, and classical) with emphasis on non-Western music. [It] views music as a dynamic aspect of culture and a means of social communication [and] contextualizes musical realities (forms, structures, genres, styles) in the social organization of music and in processes of composition and performance. Music making in ritual contexts is an important focus. Theory and methods [are] drawn from anthropology, musicology, sociology, linguistics, semiotics, history, folklore and emerging cross-disciplinary fields. Field research and analysis are considered primary tools.<sup>26</sup>

While there are innumerable contributions that ethnomusicological studies can make to current studies of liturgical music, two need to be stressed. The first is the development of a deeper understanding of the function of music in ritual. Like the worship which serves as its context, music is not neutral: as a powerful cultural medium, it shapes us individually and socially. How many church musicians are trained to consider not what a musical practice “should” mean, what function it “should” have, or what results it “should” produce, but what meaning, function and results it actually produces? Sometimes it is shocking for the church musician to discover what communities think of their music; the perceptions of the community are often very different from those of the musician! In one exercise in my seminar on ritual music, for example, I require church musicians to pursue field work in the worshipping communities where they serve. Field observation is wed to interviews on a few basic questions, such as: “What piece of music in today’s worship was the most effective for you?” or “What piece of music in today’s worship did you like the most?” Students are required to fill out the questionnaire before they interview others. How surprised they are when they discover that the music they perceived to be the most effective, the most beautiful, the most prayerful is not similarly perceived by their assemblies. A little field work can shatter innumerable, unexplored presuppositions.

A second contribution of ethnomusicological training concerns the growing cultural diversity of the United States, now the second most multi-cultural country in the world. The Roman Catholic Church in the United States, for example, is currently experiencing an unparalleled expansion in its Hispanic population. Concurrent with this expansion is the development of Hispanic litur-

gical music. The instinct of liturgical musicians in this country is to judge all such music according to the nineteenth-century compositional standards embodied in most theory textbooks. This ethno-centric approach is heartily challenged by the precepts of ethnomusicology which does not allow for such a bias. As Helen Myers cautions, “Ethnomusicologists are great egalitarians. They avoid value-judgments that would rank the music of society A over that of Society B. They prefer to report a society’s own ratings of its musicians than to impose judgments from outside.”<sup>27</sup> And if one thinks that the music of Hispanic communities provides such a challenge to today’s church musician, how about the music of the Vietnamese, Chinese and Koreans who are flooding into Christian churches across this land?

Ultimately, a discipline like ethnomusicology seeks not to remove cultural bias (this is not possible), but to reveal it. In the interplay of praxis and theory, it challenges the dangerous universalism to which musicians, like other artists, are prone. Universal, objective standards of “beauty,” for example, are simply disallowed, for the ethnomusicologically trained are at least prepared to ask “beauty according to whom?”

And if they can do so in view of ethnic and linguistic diversity, maybe they can learn to do so in terms of social and economic diversity as well. As Nathan Mitchell pointedly notes, “Secretly, many of us believe that God loves the poor, but hates their art. Surely, we suspect, God prefers Mozart to Randy Travis.”<sup>28</sup>

Liturgical theology has fundamentally changed over the past thirty years. So has the field of church music. Speaking from my own tradition, there has been a clear reckoning with ritual practice and the liturgical function of music. Thus, official principles for evaluating worship music in this country are not simply concerned with what the music or composer “intends,” but with what ritually transpires, not simply with the proposed “theory” but with the actual practice.<sup>29</sup> In my view, it is paramount that we attend not only to the topics but also to the methods; not only to what we impart, but also to how we impart it. Church musicians must not only be artists in sound, but also sound theologians, ministers of and not obstacles to the church’s worship.

*Classical musicological studies  
need to be wed with  
ethnomusicological studies.*

---

ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As the term is employed here, “ecclesial training” encompasses both theological and ministerial formation, both of which are essential for the church musician.

- <sup>2</sup> See David Tracy, "The Foundations of Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology*, ed. Don Browning (San Francisco, 1983), 76 (hereafter, Tracy, "Foundations.")
- <sup>3</sup> See e. g. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things* (Minneapolis, 1993), 5; Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology* (Nashville, 1994), *passim*; and Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology* (New York, 1980).
- <sup>4</sup> See e. g. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York, 1984), 3, 8; and David Power, "Cult to Culture: The Liturgical Foundation of Theology," *Worship* 54 (1980), 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, 1985), 12.
- <sup>6</sup> For Roman Catholics, this is dogmatically defined in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (hereafter, *CSL*) which calls worship the "fount and summit" of the church's life (n. 10).
- <sup>7</sup> Joseph Gelineau, *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship: Principles, Laws, Applications*, trans. Clifford Howell (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1964).
- <sup>8</sup> *CSL*, n. 112.
- <sup>9</sup> *CSL*, n. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> For a taxonomy of terms surrounding worship music, see Edward Foley, "Liturgical Music" in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minnesota, 1990).
- <sup>11</sup> See Edward Foley, "Toward a Sound Theology," *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993), 121-139.
- <sup>12</sup> David Tracy, "Traditions of Spiritual Practice and the Practice of Theology," Address at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago, 1996), hereafter "CTU Address."
- <sup>13</sup> In the address at Catholic Theological Union, Tracy simply used the terms "theory," and "practice," while in his earlier writings, he had distinguished between "praxis" and "mere practice"; (see e. g. Tracy, "Foundations," 61, n. 2, above). Technically, "practice" and "praxis" are not synonymous. The great disparity in usage among various writers makes it difficult to generalize with any accuracy about the differences between the two, but it might be helpful to think of "practice" as virtually any experience, whereas "praxis," in the classic sense given by Aristotle, is "the action of moral agents guided by some goal of the good and virtuous life and directed to the development of a character possessing *phronesis*, or practical wisdom" (Tracy, "Foundations," 75). Liberationists like Gustavo Gutierrez have defined praxis as "the lived faith that finds expression in prayer and commitment to social transformation" (*A Theology of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, Maryknoll, New York, rev. 1988, xxxiv), while James Fowler has more recently translated Aristotle's concept as "a pattern in which action and ongoing reflection continually interpenetrate" ("The Emerging New Shape of Practical Theology," Address at the International Meeting of Practical Theology, Berne, 1995). Tracy has provided a useful overview of "Theologies of Praxis" in *Creativity and Method*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb (Milwaukee, 1981), 35-51. Where I use the term "practice" here, the overtones of reflection and ethical intent contained in "praxis" should be understood.
- <sup>14</sup> CTU Address, n. 12, above.
- <sup>15</sup> Tracy, "Foundations," 61-82.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>18</sup> See James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville, 1985), 31.
- <sup>19</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, for example, has noted that the shift from a philosophical to an anthropological approach comprises one of the major changes in sacramental theology in this century; see *Eucharist* (New York, 1968).
- <sup>20</sup> See e. g. Randy Maddox, "The Recovery of Theology as a Practical Discipline," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 650-72.
- <sup>21</sup> In his *A Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (1811), Friedrich Schleiermacher divided the theological disciplines into philosophical, historical, and practical theology. That division gave rise to a standard fourfold division of theological studies that continues today in many seminaries: Bible, church history, systematic theology and practical (or sometimes pastoral) theology. While this outline represented a radical shift from the past constructions of theological education, this frame yet presents practical theology as a form of applied theology for clerics. See Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia, 1983), 73-98.
- <sup>22</sup> Aside from the works of Tracy, Browning, and Fowler I have already noted, see Bernard J. Lee, *The Future Church of 140 BCE: A Hidden Revolution* (New York, 1995).
- <sup>23</sup> This definition, with slight modifications, is drawn from Fowler; see n. 13, above.
- <sup>24</sup> Noteworthy here is James N. Poling, *The Abuse of Power* (Nashville, 1991).
- <sup>25</sup> See Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York, 1985).
- <sup>26</sup> See Mary McGann's entry for "Ethnomusicology" in *Worship Music: A Concise Dictionary*, ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville, Minnesota, forthcoming).
- <sup>27</sup> See Helen Myers, "Ethnomusicology," *The New Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Denis Arnold (Oxford, 1988; orig. pub. 1983), 1:646.
- <sup>28</sup> See "Amen Corner," *Worship* 70 (1996), 3.
- <sup>29</sup> The *CSL* moved away from the ancient tradition of judging worship music as though it were an objective reality that could be virtuous or immoral in and of itself. As late as 1903, Pius X required that music must be holy and "exclude all profanity not only in itself but also in the manner in which it is presented" (*Tra le sollicitudini*, no. 2). Though this directive recognized the possibility of a profane performance, it also presumed that music, apart from any usage, had the potential for profanity in and of itself. From this perspective, the only appropriate music for worship was "sacred" (i. e., holy) music. Such has been the standard view of the Church since the patristic period. The result has been an aesthetic approach to evaluating the Church's music: Gregorian chant and Palestrina are the prime measures of beauty. A significant departure from this approach, foreshadowed in *Musicae sacrae disciplina* (nos. 34-35), was made explicit in *CSL*, which did not rely heavily on abstract philosophical or theological criteria for evaluating worship music, but instead emphasized the function of music in worship. *CSL* notes that it is in the wedding of music to words that music forms an integral part of the liturgy (n. 112). Even more significant is the statement that sacred music will be the more holy the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite (n. 112). While the language of holiness is reminiscent of Pius X, *CSL* clearly moves towards a functional definition of sacred music, stressing that its holiness is not only or essentially a matter of ontology, aesthetics or ethics, but is instead related to whether or not it weds itself to text and rite.

# The Budapest Academy of Music: Its Course of Study and Philosophy of Sacred Music Education

LÁSZLÓ DOBSZAY

*Do you hear the foolish bawling under the vaults of the cathedrals? What is it? Is it meant to be the song of praise and blessing addressed to Jesus Christ by his mystical Bride? And can you hear the organ these days, this pope of all musical instruments, the mystic ocean that had once flown so magnificently towards Christ's altar and put down the laments and prayers of past centuries when it prostitutes itself by fashionable Schlagers and even with dance melodies? (Franz Liszt, *Revue et Gazette Musicale*)*

**T**owards the end of his life, Franz Liszt said of the Esztergom Mass, "I declare in the knowledge of good conscience that I composed this work from the first bar to the last with the greatest devotion of a Catholic and the utmost care of a musician." So saying, he affirmed his commitment to excellence in church music not only in his own work, but also in the musical education of others. The Budapest Academy of Music which this same Franz Liszt founded in 1875 included in its curriculum both the standard composition and piano courses, and courses in church music.

Nevertheless, decades had to pass before Liszt's plan became a reality, and its implementation was short-lived. The department of music began as a two (later a three) year course in 1926, accepting students with at least two years' prior study of composition or organ. In 1948, however, the new political regime abolished the department, which remained closed until 1987. At my instigation, and after the necessary formalities, we started the new course with twenty students in 1990.

The new department differed in many respects from its predecessor. I am going to speak about these differences, dealing first with structural changes, and then with philosophical ones.

## Structural Changes

Like other courses at the Academy, the new course now extends over five years. Furthermore, students in our course must also carry on their studies in another field of music at the Academy, or enter the course with a previously obtained diploma. In other words, the

church music diploma is valid only conjointly with another one obtained in composition, in an instrument, or in choral conducting.

I had three reasons for deciding to accept only students who were pursuing (or had already pursued) general music education while specializing in sacred music. First, I wanted to prevent musically less talented students from choosing church music only because they had little hope of acceptance in other departments. Consequently, we accepted students who had been examined with the other musicians, and we practically gave over to the general music faculty the decision to accept or reject them. Secondly, I wished to prevent (on the one hand) the isolation of the church musicians from their secular colleagues, and (on the other) the distortion of their musical orientation. Thirdly, I wanted to relieve our department of the burden of teaching general music subjects (instrument, theory, music history, and so on) so as to concentrate our personal and financial resources on church music subjects.

The practical results of these policies are that the students in our department average about ten hours per week (in the fifth year only six) of classes in church music, to which the obligatory fifteen to twenty hours of classes in their other area of music study must be added. (Exceptions are made for students who already have a diploma in another field of study.) The credit system in our department is rather formal, and studies are regulated by a *Directorium Studiorum*. Students accepted together at a given time take identical subjects prescribed for the year: we are capable of and want to offer students very limited choices.

The main subject of the course is church music literature. This class covers the entire history of church music, from the early Christian period to the present. It

---

*László Dobszay is a member of the research staff at the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the founder of the Department of Musicology and Church Music at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest.*

surveys the whole repertory by means of singing and conducting; it deals with its liturgical, music historical, and performance implications; it shows students how to find more material about a given period; and it analyzes the adaptation of earlier forms of church music to the liturgical practice of our day.

Church music studies are ecumenical in character. To acquire a basic knowledge of church music, students of different church backgrounds take the same classes. About one-third of our classes are organized according to the students' denominational background. For Catholic students, the Gregorian chant is treated as a basic subject for four and one-half years; Protestants study Gregorian chant for two years, and then proceed to chant in the vernacular, in accordance with the Protestant tradition in Hungary. The congregational hymn is first practiced in groups separated according to denominations, and then a two-year course is organized on the integrated history of congregational hymns in Hungary and abroad.

Both the organ and the liturgy are studied for four years and, in addition, special emphasis is laid on the liturgical practice taught both in services and classroom activity (practice in chant-leading, organ accompaniment, the selection of chants for a given day, etc.).

Apart from the obligatory language studies at the Music Academy, students in the church music department receive instruction in Latin and German for four years to facilitate understanding church music texts. All these fields of study are completed by short courses (speech-training, recitation, knowledge of the organ) and choir. All subjects are treated not only with regard to practice (singing, conducting, and playing), but also from the standpoint of their theoretical, historical and liturgical implications.

The Department of Sacred Music supervises other programs as well. There are many music teachers' training colleges in Hungary, but most are unable to establish a church music department of their own. We have created a college section for students studying at, or coming from, these institutions. They learn church music subjects along with our university students and after a period of four years they get a diploma. The total number of these students is approximately 60, evenly divided between university and college students.

In addition to this program for music teachers, we now have a graduate program for doctoral candidates. Doctoral students pursue their own research in artistic and theoretical subjects, and attend seminars in music and other areas of interest (history, theology, ethnogra-

phy, etc.). At the end of their course work, these students must pass an extensive examination, complete a thesis, and present evidence of artistic achievement in performance. The number of doctoral students is 16.

Most members of our faculty are active performers or musicologists. Three professors are internationally-renowned scholars, one is a composer, and five are regularly performing musicians.

The active musicians on our faculty enable the department to function as a workshop which deals with the actual problems of church music and assists in the training of future musicians for the churches. Our faculty participate in the Hungarian Society of Church Music, and contribute to its periodical.

As for other publications, we have published more than forty volumes, books, scores, and tapes in the last

five years, the chief means of our assistance to church music education carried on at other institutions at the high school and college levels. As the country's only university-level church music department, we are com-

mitted and obliged to support other church music programs through conferences and publications. This means that the department also functions as a Church Music Institute.

### Philosophy and Objectives

The comprehensive activity of our faculty, extending beyond the mere teaching commitment, is all the more necessary as church music experiences a crisis world-wide. Forty or fifty years ago, it was still enough to prepare students for a well-defined life in church music. Today, we have to find our own orientation and help our students find their way among many false paths. Our department thus differs from its predecessor and from its sister institutions abroad not only in its organization, but also in its objectives. I would like to concentrate on two features only.

Our students come from a variety of branches of musical studies and are trained for a variety of possible careers in music. We are glad if they accept jobs in churches, but also understand that some may wish to become simply musicians well-trained in church music. Most of them take jobs in schools and organize choirs in churches.

Taking this fact into consideration, it would be foolish to insist on the ideal of organist-church musician. The people who can probably do the most for improving the present church music scene are those who teach the musicians and priests of the next decades. Musi-

*Musicians cannot do much until  
the prestige of liturgically  
and artistically appropriate  
church music is restored.*

cians cannot do much until the prestige of liturgically and artistically appropriate church music is restored. The greatest obstacle to this task is the gap between the clergy and church musicians. This gap can only be closed if seminaries and theological colleges are filled with young people who are well versed in music generally, and in church music particularly.

Moreover, in addition to good organists, churches need church musicians capable of dealing with church music as a whole: teaching songs in catechism and for the congregation, training chant-leaders, organizing *scholae*, maintaining or initiating a regular service of vespers, lauds, vigils, and so forth. Such people will certainly be unable to perform all this alone; they need other people to cooperate with and assist them. The organist is only one of these colleagues. We need cantors, in the medieval sense of the word—well-trained *regens chori* who know how to plan and to delegate tasks.

Behind this concept lies another. At the dawn of Christianity, there was no isolated “church music.” The liturgy was a great drama with precisely defined roles for the priest, assistants, the congregation and singers. The liturgy determined exactly what should be sung and how: chant combined with liturgy in an ideal unity. The congregations of the faithful participated in the drama of the liturgy according to its proper rules, and with a liturgically appropriate music. The first strophic songs were the ancient Christian hymns, whose precisely worded dogmatic content assumed poetic quality by force of their theology of mystery.

From the 7th or 8th century on, this unity of chant and liturgy started to disintegrate. Though the tropes and the early organa were still closely connected with the chant prescribed by the liturgy, polyphonic music departed more and more from its liturgical context, got torn from its dramatic structure and started to become “absolute” music, an insertion into the body of the liturgy. The last link between music and liturgy was the text defined by the liturgy for a given day or feast. As Latin became incomprehensible to the people, the strophic *cantio* was born. Linked to the Latin liturgical chants without proper liturgical function, without biblical texts, the medieval *cantio* was unable to produce its

free, speech-like prose, and followed increasingly rhythmic-rhymed forms, in conformity with the new European poetic taste.

This *cantio* was created for devotional purposes, not liturgical ones, and (as a result) treated the themes with great freedom. It served a liturgical function in the Protestant churches only, and later in the more or less illegal usage of some Catholic regions as an imitation of the former. The *cantio* of recent centuries has got no liturgical canon at all; there are no rules or conventions defining its themes, function, place, or style. In spite of official statements to the contrary, it is not measured by the Word, or the self-expression of the Church in liturgy. Its standard is the poetic self and the common taste. The path leads thus from the pietistic song poems of the 17th century, through the didactic or sentimental religious poetry of the 18th century, to the Gospel-song and light music of our day.

The recent history of church music is the alternation of further disintegration and of reforms aimed at restoring the original unity. Much of the genuine state of liturgical chant has been preserved in the practice of the Eastern Church. While liturgy and the liturgical chant have remained the most important witnesses of religious life in the East, they have become the cause and expression of confusion in the West. The church musician of the West must learn at least as much from the traditions of the Eastern Church as from his own.

There is no doubt that the long historical process of the disintegration of liturgy and music has produced values both in art music and congregational hymn which cannot be disregarded. The greatest problem for a church musician these days is how to find a compass, how to create an essential, internal unity between liturgy and music in such a way as to integrate the advances and honor the traditions of the last thousand years. How can a church musician find this unity without compromising, especially when endeavors emerge as the will of the community? A solution does exist, but it is not easy to elaborate it, and to make it accepted. It requires intellectual discipline, knowledge, judgment, and steadfastness. It must determine, in the last resort, the contents of our church music education.

# Liturgy and Moral Imagination: Encountering Images in a TV Culture

DON E. SALIERS

*... people who are not accustomed to poetic, artistic or musical language or symbolic acts among their means of expression and communication find the liturgy like a foreign country whose customs and language are strange to them. (Joseph Gelineau, *The Liturgy Today and Tomorrow*, 99)*

*To be unaware that a technology comes equipped with a program for social change, to maintain that technology is neutral, to make the assumption that technology is always a friend to culture is, at this late hour, stupidity plain and simple. (Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 157)*

Christian liturgy has to do with the glory and mystery of the divine-human relationship. Thus the classical definition still holds: liturgy exists for the glorification of God and the sanctification of all that is human. Yet all thinking about Christian liturgy must come to terms with a fundamental fact: liturgy is always culturally embedded, encoded, and sub-culturally embodied. Quite apart from features of the texts, the actual celebration occurring in a particular community employs and activates a complex range of cultural modes and means of communication. Hence the permanent tension indigenous to the public worship of God for any gathering of human beings. If we acknowledge this as fundamental to the study of liturgy—as I think we must—then it is crucial that we interrogate the dominant media-generated culture in which we now live.

What bearing does our electronic, visual culture and its images of the human have upon moral imagination and liturgical sensibility? In particular, I want to discuss the problem of liturgical participation in a “culture of hype”—a projected world of multiple desire, immediate feeling, and dissipated attentiveness. Some of the following reflections have emerged from an experimental course I have taught in which student research groups were asked to study advertising, newscasts, and a select range of popular films. We were especially aware of the shifts in forms of perception (seeing, hearing, and the impact of sound and sight “bites”) and their various implications for liturgical participation.

In his book *Seeing Through the Media*, Michael Warren presents a persuasive account of how, in a TV-dominated popular culture, many people perceive themselves and their social world through commodified images. Not only our view of human reality, but the very means by which we imagine ourselves living in the culture are at stake. To use Suzanne Langer’s older term, the “morphology of our sentient life” is undergoing subtle and complex changes under the impress of the way in which we ingest images from the side range of electronic visual media. I find Warren’s understanding of “cultural agency” especially helpful. This concept owes much to the work of Raymond Williams, who developed a definition of culture from Marxian notions of social construction. Together, Williams and Warren conceive of culture as “a signifying system by which a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored” (Warren, 11). The definition may aptly be applied to Christian liturgy, where the social order in question is the Rule and Reign of God. With this understanding, we might then ask how Christian liturgy can compete with the images and the ritualized mediations of reality that constitute the broader consumerist culture we inhabit.

Our forms of mass communication are, in certain respects, becoming a diffused stream of entertainment. That is, the marketing strategies which determine how images, both visual and acoustic, are presented to us tend to blur the lines between sitcoms, newscasts, on-the-spot reporting, and advertising. The forms of an electronic, media-saturated culture tend to assimilate but also to significantly change the forms of folk or ethnic cultures that have longer histories. One has only to think of the use of African-American music for broad-scale commercial pur-

---

*Don Saliers is Franklin Nutting Parker Professor of Theology and Worship at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.*

poses (one of the great tragedies of our time) to see how easily ritual forms can be co-opted by the marketplace. Classical music and even liturgical forms are increasingly subject to the same process. Mozart and chant can sell cars. A recent Volvo ad suggests the baptism of a car: “This car is safe and saved; it will save you from harm.”

Since Christian liturgy has always employed specific cultural modes—song, speech, gesture, primary symbols both natural and historical—such a powerful media environment makes these forms “relevant” to those who no longer share the substance or performance style of the assumed traditions. If we apply Warren’s definition of culture to media-saturated societies, we must come to terms with the shocks and collisions between liturgical perception and participation, and media which use song, speech, and gesture to nonliturgical ends.

Let us note, first of all, the permanent tension between the technologically-governed sources of human imaging, and the deeper dimensions of the Christian forms of life as a signifying system. At the heart of a biblical and Christian view is concern for transcendence and ultimate human goals—perhaps toward a finally perfected social vision of the human world and the cosmos itself. Part of the glory of early Christianity was that it could be made up of distinctive “families” of liturgy, each bearing the mark of a particular culture, and yet still be identifiably Christian, regardless of culture. Each of these families, in other words, carried its own form of cultural inhabitation and cultural critique, or even cultural transcendence. What is new in our present situation as a fully consumerist culture is this: the ubiquitous power of a media-dominated culture to form a market desire, and the use of visual and musical materials to permeate the sensorium of those who come to worship. These forces steep us in images that most persons in our society do not seem to be able to reflect upon critically. The images cramming the consciousness of most Christian worshippers today tend to be pre-set, borrowed images used in pragmatic ways to name and interpret life. It is as if we are in the predicament of the disturbed young man in Peter Shaffer’s *Equus*, who could only express himself in TV and radio jingles. Not only self-imaging, but self-expression is at stake when the cultural means of conveying them have so shifted.

Recently I had occasion to read again Romano Guardini’s brief classic, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. It so happened that I had also just completed workshops in both Roman Catholic and Protestant parishes where the impact of TV and popular culture had been much in evidence. Each community was struggling with questions of how to make the experience of liturgy “more exciting,” “more relevant,” and “more contemporary.” Here I was, reading a book published over sixty years ago that

seemed to belong to a different century, and yet (to my surprise and delight), finding that it addressed the issues those parishes were struggling with in a way I had not expected. Besides advising that the “seriousness” of Christian liturgy be counterbalanced with “holy playfulness,” Guardini urges something our TV-saturated sensibilities find problematic—restraint.

Guardini’s case for restraint got me to thinking about how we celebrate the Sunday liturgy in a mass-media culture, which is fueled by hype and driven by sports and entertainment industries. Of course he was writing in a very different time and place. But his basic insight about the nature of the liturgy requiring restraint speaks to some of our most contemporary concerns. My “analytic” thesis is this: North American mass culture makes it increasingly difficult to know the difference between *immediacy of feeling and depth of emotion*. Overstimulation of the senses (visual, acoustic, kinetic) at every turn, along with preoccupation with how we “feel” about anything and everything at a given moment, brings this about. We talk about what “grabs” our attention; we complain about diminishing attention spans. Films and TV offer increasingly sophisticated apocalyptic images of human life, and the evening news is like a continual litany of murder, mayhem, and disaster. Does this arouse sustained anger or sorrow? Not if a lively Budweiser or Taco Bell ad comes next! Seasons of our social lives are marked by football frenzy and basketball mania. Entertainment without end is at our channel-surfing, internetting fingertips. How can Christian liturgy possibly compete with the fast-paced, dramatic images which become signifying systems for the way we view ourselves and the world? The question is important because liturgy seeks to form the dispositions and affections of gratitude in season and out, of hope even in tribulation, of compassion over time, of awe and wonder at the created order of things. These are not mere passing episodes of sensations or inner feelings.

Guardini draws a sharp contrast between the objective, communal nature of liturgy, and the “expressive” flow of individual felt experience. While he does not deny the need for immediacy of felt consolation and participation, his accent falls on shared practices and capacious images. The church’s worship is, for Guardini, “full of deep feeling,” and generative of emotion that is “intense,” even vehement at times (think of the emotional range presented by the psalms, for instance, or the *triduum*), but, on the whole, pervaded by a sense of restraint. The eucharistic liturgy does not, in his view, favor excitement or aim at arousing exuberant feeling; rather, emotion “glows in its depths,” as in a volcano’s fiery heart. The need for emotional expression is more suitably met in popular devo-

tions and the many forms of popular piety which flow into and from the liturgy.

Now at first glance this seems an indefensible view for our cultural moment. It seems to make liturgy impersonal, and to control religious emotion and feeling by reason, or at least by ritual structure. It runs counter to our culturally formed need to bring real life to common prayer and liturgical action. When worshippers in so many traditions have been anxious to move away from “control” and excessive emphasis on the forms to a more expressive and experiential mode of liturgical participation, the call for restraint seems either highly oppressive, or simply irrelevant. But I think Guardini has something else in mind that we might easily neglect. He links restraint in liturgical rites with discipline and formation in the mystery of faith *over time*. That is, restraint is precisely a *practice of resistance* against cultural captivities of various sorts. The church is made of many kinds of people with widely diverse sensibilities. Restraint may permit a deeper commonality of experience than expressive enthusiasm.

How can this be so? When each liturgical gathering has to be “more exciting” than the previous one, we run the risk of a kind of emotional imperialism. The faith community needs forms of ritual and prayer that are larger than the expression of local group experience, and more capacious than the immediately accessible cultural images and forms of perception. Many contemporary strategies, by contrast, assume that social-cultural differences within worshipping assemblies require *more* variety and immediate cultural relevance, not less. But when the Sunday liturgy tries to be “lite,” or to create the “folksy informality” and intimacy (usually laboriously produced) of TV, access to the deeper emotions intrinsic to liturgical participation may be diminished. There is a difference between being made to feel comfortable through immediately accessible forms and styles, and being invited to communal gratitude, awe, delight, and hope. How can the liturgy compete? The liturgy should *not* compete with entertainment media, for it is not meant to be entertaining. Restraint and depth of form and language are not opposed to “feeling,” and may well be key to a more profound exuberance than mere entertainments can offer. Restraint is not “against emotion,” but is necessary to worship that is more than therapy, liturgy that is not simply a spiritual talk show.

*There is a difference between being made to feel comfortable through immediately accessible forms and styles, and being invited to communal gratitude, awe, delight and hope.*

Our culture vulgarizes that which is most intensely personal; the audiences of talk shows and sitcoms applaud indiscriminately and jeer as easily as they cheer. What strikes me now is that authentic Christian liturgy permits and confers dignity upon our complicated human life. It offers images not available, with few exceptions, in the electronic visual culture. Liturgy confers dignity upon the human with a grace that requires time and restraint. In a culture of voyeurism, this is an awesome work of God. The liturgy of the word and eucharistic celebration knows human everydayness, and the ambiguities and complexities that most TV and films cannot and will not (for commercial reasons) supply! Christian liturgy, in prayer and song, reading, preaching, and ritual action, does not need to hype or to romanticize the mystery of God’s self-communication.

The relation between restraint and exuberance in liturgical worship requires discipline and attentiveness to the tension between the Gospel and our own cultural location and means of communication. When the Easter Vigil, for example, is celebrated with solemnity and great joy, born of thoughtful planning and faithful participation, nothing can rival its profound, exuberant glory. On the other hand, nothing is more discouraging than a worship service dominated by personalities and forms borrowed from the media to make them “relevant.”

What can we learn from studying the way images are formed, produced, and consumed in a TV-dominated culture? A great deal. Especially we can rediscover how authentic Christian celebration moves against the “saturated self,” the ever-morphing, “multifrenic” personhood celebrated by David Gergen. A culture of distraction finally takes away our human dignity, prevents us from coming to life in its fullness. Emptiness born of dissipated or diffused attentiveness to the real will be filled by the culture. It will be colonized by the extant culture, to use Freire’s language, and this is close to demonic possession, is it not? In TV advertising, surface images create desires for a kind of humanity we cannot finally attain, whereas authentic liturgy offers us a humanity we can receive in and through its practice. The postmodern “decentered” self and society are not to be confused with kenotic patterns of discovery. Liturgy is a practice of resistance and preparation: resistance to the diminishment of ourselves (created *imagine Dei*) by the forces of mass culture, and preparation for participation in the life of God.

Our way forward is to discern what the relation between restraint and exuberance requires of our music, our celebrants, and all the other liturgical ministries within the assembly itself. Some worship services are excessively didactic and devoid of mystery; for these, restraining the verbal midrash and endless commentary on everything is absolutely essential. No more talk show hosts as presiders! Enthusiasm for the quick fixes offered by the entertainment industry will not go away, but liturgy that imitates a culture of hype becomes a mirror, not a living icon. The liturgy must provide images for the long haul in its praying, singing, and sacramental acts. Suffering, joy, death and life are to be named, encountered, and finally transformed there. God desires that we, now captive to a culture that diminishes life, receive life through the dignity of the human im-

age that the liturgy is intended to confer. And not just to people like us, but to all, and not just to the church, but to society, and not just to our society, but to the whole created order.

---

## WORKS CITED

- Gelineau, Joseph. 1978. *The Liturgy Today and Tomorrow*. Tr. Dinah Livingstone. Paramus, New Jersey.
- Guardini, Romano. 1931. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. Tr. Ada Lane. New York.
- Postman, Neil. 1984. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York.
- Warren, Michael. 1997. *Seeing Through the Media*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

# Lights on the Road to Heaven

A sermon preached on November 12, 2000, at Christ Church, New Haven, Connecticut, on the occasion of the annual Choral Evensong in Thanksgiving for the Ministry of all Church Musicians.

WILLIAM PORTER

**W**e have come together this evening to adore the God who made us, who loves us, and who has called us to resurrection life in Jesus our Lord. We do so on this particular occasion through the medium of sung prayer: the evening office and the service of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Now if you are neither Episcopalian nor Roman Catholic, the service of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament may strike you as strange and distant from the patterns of worship with which you are familiar. But I think that it is both interesting and appropriate that this service should take place on a day in which we remember and give thanks for the work of musicians in the church. So let me say a few words about this service and what it expresses about the nature of our God.

It expresses first of all the belief that God is really here. Well, yes, you may say, of course we believe that God is here. But this service holds God to be present in particular ways, through particular things, things which involve the physical world and which say something about the goodness of creation. Bread, for example. If God is content to use bread, sometimes not even very tasty bread, as a way of nourishing us with Godself, then we can hardly say that God abhors bread; if God is content, as it were, to be present in bread, may we not begin to think that indeed, bread is in itself a Good Thing? And *this* bread, which many Christians over the centuries have called the Bread of Heaven, is no less bread for its being heavenly food. It is more than bread, but nonetheless bread. We come to a service like this one not to worship bread but to worship God, of course, but if we are thoughtful folk, such an experience might lead us to consider that perhaps even ordinary bread is just a short step away from being heavenly bread—needing only to be offered by a hungry and hopeful church, and transformed by a loving and generous God, in order to be a means of grace by which we are drawn ever closer to our Creator.

Perhaps we might even be so bold to say that God looks kindly upon bread. But this can be a slippery slope, for if God likes bread, God must like wine, too. And bread and wine are, after all, the “work of human hands.” While the image of eucharistic sacrament as “heavenly manna”

is an appealing one, we know that bread and wine don’t simply drop down from heaven: they are the result of human activity, at best a loving and creative activity, sometimes a purely commercial activity, but an activity that carries the potential for greatness. Somehow, human creativeness—the work of our hands—is bound up with the way in which God comes to us. “Taste and see how gracious the Lord is!” Would we have ever sung this psalm if it were not for the experience of being delighted to our core by the delectability of earthly food? Would we ever find the images to express our delight in God if we found no delight in the created world? Would we ever imagine a God who found creation to be very good, had we not known what it is as human beings to be creative, had we not delighted in the “work of human hands?” But we are fickle creatures, suspicious of gardens of earthly delights—and with some good reason, for we know all too well how easy it is to allow a preoccupation with what we imagine to be mere earthly delights to draw us away from the love of God. You know the reasoning: if the delights of the created world in some way draw us away from God, then God must hold in profound disapproval those very things we find so delightful. A sad reasoning, and those things of the created world that have been particularly subject to this way of thinking are, peculiarly enough, precisely those human activities that both express and satisfy our longing for beauty, especially the beauty of God: the visual arts, architecture and music. How hard it is for us to hold with any consistency a conviction that what is beautiful and delectable in what we create is a result of our deep longing for the beauty and delectability of God, that our created beauty was never meant to be a stumbling block, but rather a light along our path to heaven. How hard it is for human beings to resist the temptation even to demonize such gifts of God, rather than offer them back to the Giver. How easy it is not to recognize God as the giver of joy in creation, as the giver of the creative impulse in humankind.

It seems to me that part of our problem is not simply that we have difficulty with thinking theologically about beauty, although that is certainly a problem in our day; I believe that that difficulty is merely a symptom of the larger problem with thinking theologically about human

---

*William Porter is professor of organ at New England Conservatory.*

creativity, and about skill. Without a theology of human creativity and skill, creativity and skill too easily become—in the church—ornaments for the aesthetically inclined, and their position in the church becomes—understandably—tenuous. When the church relegates artistic skill solely to the purview of the professional, rather than regarding the development of human skill and creativity as a necessary response to the gospel, the whole church is impoverished; it is as if we took to extinguishing the lights along the path to heaven, and refused to nurture the creation of those things that increase our longing for the beauty of God.

Today we remember the work of church musicians, that valiant and faithful band, who are often beleaguered, often discouraged, sometimes arrogant and annoying, and almost always quirky in some way; who, when not exhausted, apathetic, or otherwise distracted, know as well as anyone in the church that the work of developing skill is holy work. We know this in many ways; if you are a musician you might know this as a result of many different kinds of experiences. Perhaps you know yourself to have become more aware of your own longing for God as a result of your own engagement with the transcendent nature of the music you work so hard to play well. Perhaps you have seen transcendent beauty in the faces of your choristers as they realize that as they stretch and grow in proficiency they are able to sense a connection with a realm of beauty they did not know before. Perhaps you have witnessed the spiritual strength of a congregation that sings the faith of the church with attention and devotion, who, having internalized the words of psalms, hymns and canticles, find them to be accessible in times of particular joy or particular grief. We who are musicians do well to remember, then, that our God is a God who uses the created things of this world to draw us to heaven. Christianity is a materialistic religion and music is part of the material.

For God is the generous One who gives us aptitudes to develop, talents to nourish, capabilities to sharpen. It is God's delight to give us the courage, the desire and the resources to develop skill. And it would also seem to be God's delight to let us do these things, so that we may know the joy of creative labor of love, and so that we may learn to desire God more and more. The work of human hands. No polyphonic motets suddenly dropping out of the sky for us, no masterpieces of architecture mysteriously materializing out of nothingness, no bottles of heavenly *Chateauneuf de Dieu* unexpectedly showing up on our front doorsteps. And God did not write the B-minor Mass; God did something even more wonderful in giving Bach the impulse to develop his skills. Praise God for Bach and all those composers of motets, anthems, masses and cantatas, crafted with concentration

and effort. Praise God for giving us the impulse to develop skills that enable us to create beautiful things, by which we sense the graciousness, the *tastiness*, of God.

Among the various Christian traditions where music plays some role in worship, it is perhaps the Lutherans who at various times have had the strongest grasp on the theological implications of skill in music. The orthodox Lutheran centers of the seventeenth century supported the development of art music as a natural response to the gospel. For a musician in this environment, to develop one's proficiency was the way in which one responded in faith to God's gift of ability. For the larger community, the cultivation of a rich musical expression in the liturgy was a mark of a faithful church; not to do so would be to refuse God's gifts, and to refuse to offer back what God has given.

At this point we must stop a moment and acknowledge that simply to talk about art music and skilled musicians in the church raises questions of elitism; we live in a time in which those skilled in music are seen as an obstacle to the vision of a church that has no barriers of class, culture, or race. Here is a legitimate question: does the musical establishment of our church support a structure of power within the church that fails to honor the dignity of cultures other than western, predominantly white cultures? Are you, as I am, made uncomfortable by this question? Let me say that I am often made extremely uncomfortable by this question. The reasons are several, but chief among them is that I, middle-class white male that I am, also dream of a church that knows no such barriers, and don't like being thought of as part of the problem. Perhaps this is true for you also, that what you see as your honest commitment to cultural inclusivity gets you nowhere, and that the music you love and have devoted your life to is seen as a liability in the life of the church you know you still love. Not an easy place to be in. Not when there are so many clergy and other church leaders who are simply scared at the declining church membership and are looking for an easy fix. Perhaps there are times when you even feel like a sitting duck.

Well, I think that sometimes we *are* part of the problem, but I would suggest that it is not for the obvious reasons. Yes, musicians can be intransigent; and yes, musicians may be culturally biased, along with everyone else. I do not mean to gloss over these issues, but rather to focus upon another issue, and it all comes back to the issue of skill. Too often we are concerned with only our own skill and the skill of the choirs with whom we work. We assume that everyone else is incapable of developing musical skill (or uninterested in it), and that their role is simply to listen to what we do and to find it to be the music of heaven. But the development of skill is too

holy an activity to be stingy about. Skill is the result of developing what is there to be developed. For those who already have skill not to be at the service of developing the skills of others is to throw in the towel in the work of lighting the path to heaven; it is to allow God's gifts to languish. How sad it is not to trust the ability of others to learn, to grow, and to acquire skill!

Last year around Christmas time I was waiting for the subway in Boston when a class of grade school children began to serenade us in a vigorous rendition of "Jingle Bells." Led by their teacher, all the kids joined in enthusiastically. Not having anything else to do while waiting for the train, I decided to pay attention to this, and can report that not one single voice that I heard, certainly not the teacher's, was singing anything that remotely resembled the tune of "Jingle Bells." Then I remembered my own third-grade class in public school: two or three among us had pitch problems, but the rest of us could sing pretty well, because we had been taught how to sing, and because our teacher trusted our ability to learn. We sang "Jingle Bells" in parts—and in tune. I believe that the children on the subway platform have been grievously sinned against, and it is our predominantly white, media-driven American culture that has failed to honor the ability of all children to develop a measure of musical skill. From the abandonment of basic musicianship training in public schools to the vapid out-of-tune singing of the theme song on Sesame Street, we have bombarded our children with insult and have stunted their growth. We have failed to water what God has planted.

This is not a cultural diversity problem; it is a problem of commercialism and financial greed. And the problems with church music today are less problems of multi-culturalism and ethnic diversity than they are the problems of our own impoverished theology of human creativity and skill, the numbness of our longing, and our diminished vision of heaven. And they are symptomatic of the tendency to accept crassly commercial solutions to spiritual problems, with the result that our people become even more passive, and less equipped to sing the faith.

As an example, I give you "Synthia": Synthia is a black box, now advertised in various church publications. Synthia is the commercial solution to the problem of the small church without a musical instrument to lead singing, or without a musician to teach it. Synthia has had various hymns programmed into it and, at the flick of a switch, will flood your nave with synthetic music to which everyone, supposedly, will be able to

sing at least their favorite hymns. But beware. Synthia is not a substitute for an organ; she is a substitute for a human being. Synthia does not love her people; she does not listen to their breath; she does not care to teach; she will not help you to listen to each other's voices; she will not be part of your community, or be responsive to its particular identity, and her presence will not help train anyone to lead, to teach, or to love the sound of your community's voice. Quite the opposite; Synthia operates in the realm of illusion, not the realm of reality. Synthia is the quick fix that makes the problem worse. She is the result of the values of a commercial culture, our churches' easy acceptance of them, and—it must be said—of musicians' indolence in accepting our vocation to empower God's people to develop their abilities, and of our churches' long-term failure to pay her musicians adequately.

When those of us in the church who have musical skill do not love others in the church enough to want to develop their musical skill, we dishonor the body of Christ. When those in positions of power in the church (this means bishops and other clergy) do not support the development of congregations that value singing, beginning with young children, they also dishonor the body of Christ,

and contribute to a diminished taste for the beauty of God. Music is not just an aesthetic ornament, but rather a powerful means by which we learn of our need for God, and by which we respond to the impulses toward God that God has placed in us. The potential for making lights on the path to heaven exists in all of God's people: in the poor, in the disenfranchised, in the disadvantaged, and in the privileged as well. We have scarcely begun to discover the potential of all of God's people to be creators of heavenly beauty.

Most of us know from our own experience that music that we call "great," especially when it comes from religious observance, can make God seem irresistible. This is why we often say "nothing but the best for God," because we sense somehow the transforming power of great art, and because we respond to a God-given impulse to offer. This is of course all well and good, but I must confess that, for myself, the term "nothing but the best for God" has been weakened by its use in situations where the "best" may leave our congregations passive and uninvolved. I confess also that, at this point in my life, a more urgent dictum seems to be "nothing but the best for God's people." I believe that God's people are longing for nourishment. The "best" means more than what we may consider to be the best music; it means

*Music is . . . a powerful means  
by which . . . we respond  
to the impulses toward God  
that God has placed in us.*

our best work in caring for their potential to grow, our best love in nurturing their capacity for tasting in music how gracious the Lord is. It means—through prayer and discernment—our best vision of heaven in guiding the work we do in our respective communities.

The children on the subway platform will eventually, God willing, take their place in the heavenly choir, and I make bold to say that they will then—at last—be in tune. What a pity if we do not start them on the way ahead of time; what a blessing if we do, for we would be giving them the possibility of having a role in creating a glimpse of heavenly beauty, for someone else, and for themselves, that they also may say, “I too will something make / And joy in the making.” What those children need is needed by all of us, and it is the whole people of God, the skilled and the not-yet-skilled that we are called to serve. We need all the lights we can get on the path to heaven.

Let us pray in thanksgiving for all those whose vision of heavenly beauty compels them to give of themselves by providing light along the path to God; for all those whose work in the arts allow us to experience the delectability of God.

Let us pray in thanksgiving also for all clergy and others in positions of authority in the church who hold the vision and support us in our work.

Let us pray also for all those who lack an awareness of the holiness of this calling, that the church may experience a renewal of a longing for the beauty of God.

Let us pray for ourselves, for a renewal of energy, of commitment to ministry, and for steadfastness in our love and longing for the Holy One.

And let us pray in thanksgiving to God for honoring the material world, for honoring our senses, for giving us in the work of human hands a taste of God’s own delectability.



Yale University  
Institute of Sacred Music  
Worship and the Arts  
409 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
P A I D  
New Haven CT  
Permit No. 470