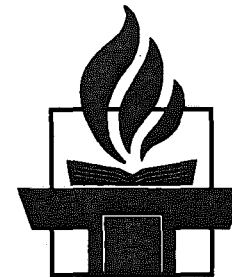


Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 3, Number 4 • Fall 1994

The whole world is a theatre for the display of the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power, but the Church is the orchestra ...the most conspicuous part of it.

John Calvin

God exalts His Church to preeminence by ways and means unknown to men, in order that His power may be magnified in this weakness.

John Calvin

The church is born of the Word of promise through faith, and is nurtured and preserved by this same Word. This means that the promises of God make the church, not the Church the promise of God; for the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church. In this Word the church, as a creation, has nothing to establish, ordain, or make, but is only to be established, ordained, made.

Martin Luther

Although it may not be in our power to cleanse the Church of God, it is our duty to desire her purity.

John Calvin

He who would have, and is in search of, a church in which no dissension and no difference exist among preachers, no insincerity against the First Table, and no outrage, and wickedness against the Second Table, will never find his church.

Martin Luther

The Chief Musician Is a Pastor-Teacher

Leonard R. Payton

There are two bases for the assertion stated in my title.

Music has a psychological power to teach. We can often remember the music, sometimes word for word, and yet forget most of what the pulpit minister—even the very best—has said. This is not to denigrate the quality or role of discursive preaching. It does, however, point up the fact that music has greater power to inculcate.

Music has a scriptural mandate to teach.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Eph. 5:18-20).

In a similar passage Paul says:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16).

An honest reading of these passages makes it difficult to escape the didactic function which the apostle Paul accorded to singing. What about “psalms?” The addressee would have reasonably understood it to mean “The Psalms,” not rhymed psalmody in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English to tunes composed in Geneva in the sixteenth century. Setting aside the debate over strict psalmody, this much is abundantly clear: The Psalms embrace a very wide range of subject matter, and as such, should be our paradigm in contemporary church music practice.

It appears then that the chief musician bears the same load and responsibility of teaching as the pulpit minister, yet with different means. Therefore, the chief musician must be prepared and examined as thoroughly as the pulpit minister. The

particulars will differ in obvious points, and will intersect in others.

What is the profile of a competent chief musician?

The chief musician knows what to teach, having one finger on the pulse of the congregation, another on the pulse of Holy Scriptures, and is a partner with the pulpit minister in every way. Indeed, his power to inculcate sets the table for the work of the pulpit minister. Conversely, the cool reasoning of the pulpit minister applies what has been inculcated by the musician. Together they edify the body.

Not only does the chief musician know what to teach, he is able to furnish music necessary to that wide range of teaching. The simple fact is, not even the best prefabricated materials will fit his congregation exactly. In the same way that God places a specific man in the pulpit to minister to a congregation with his unique personality, so the musician must be able to furnish uniquely tailored music.

Big Caveat: This may very well mean that the congregation sometimes will dislike the music in much the same way that good preaching should displace us from our comfort zone from time to time. That is a necessary feature of growth. The music must embark upon verbal teaching which may not feel good musically but must, nonetheless, be spoken to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. This is truly relevant, truly contextual church music.

In the same way that a pulpit minister must design messages to meet the needs of a specific congregation, so the chief musician must be able to compose specific music. Many Christians recoil at the thought of a preacher reading a sermon from A to Z by someone else. And yet, strangely enough, this is the normal practice in church music. This is not to assert that music by other musicians and from other ages has no place. A good sermon embraces the wisdom of other Christian thinkers but remains the product of a unique individual whom God uses to minister to a unique congre-

gation. Music composition is to music what homiletics is to preaching.

The chief musician must not only know what to teach and be able to compose music to furnish that teaching, *he must be able to perform or organize performance of that music so that congregational singing will succeed.* Because of the command to “speak to one another,” congregational singing remains supreme. Solos give the parishioner extra opportunities to “check out” or to be distracted (usually by idiosyncratic performance). A word of caution: If the chief musician is introducing unfamiliar music which is necessitated by the teaching, the time dimensions of corporate worship will need to accommodate learning. There are ways to reduce the shock of this such as teaching choirs first, using soloists to introduce the music to the congregation, singing the new music casually during a prelude time, etc. Nevertheless, there does come a time when the congregation must brace itself for learning. And the leadership of that congregation must be supportive because the congregation, often, will not initially be so.

One final observation: the points above are in descending order of importance. And yet the overwhelming pervasive practice in the broad visible church is the opposite. While I cannot claim music as a first cause, it comes as no surprise that the overall visible Western church is growing neither in size nor in ethics. What else should we expect when we so easily squander such power of inculcation on worldly blandishments and on texts with a narrow range of teaching? What would our divorce rate in the church be if twenty times a year we turned to look each other in the eye singing, “You shall not commit adultery?”

Author

Dr. Leonard R. Payton has served as a pastor for music and worship in a Presbyterian Church and has studied the subject of sacred music extensively. He currently resides in Paradise, California.