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Every church should be engaged in continuous self-reformation.

—JOHN R. W. STOTT

We are not entitled to infer from the fact that a group of people are drawing nearer to each other that any of them is drawing nearer to the truth.

—JAMES I. PACKER

## MUSICAL INTEGRITY IN THE CHURCH

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*Kenneth Laudermilch*

Next to the spoken word and the corporate prayers of the saints, music is fundamental to worship. It is no doubt our most expressive vehicle of singular and corporate praise. It is the language of the soul.

David must have fallen upon this truth quite naturally as a lad on the hillsides of Judea as he sang and accompanied himself on a stringed instrument. Years later as a man he penned Psalms (poetry set to music) which are unsurpassed expressions of beauty, truth, and praise.

The Scriptures are replete with references to both vocal and instrumental music in worship. In 1 Chronicles 23:5 we read that ". . . 4,000 were praising the Lord with the instruments which David made for giving praise." Psalm 33 speaks to us of praising the Lord with harp, voice and stringed instruments and playing skillfully with a loud noise. Christ and His disciples sang a hymn before leaving for the Mount of Olives on the night He was to be betrayed (Matt. 26:30). Paul counsels us to be speaking continually to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). And in Revelation 5 we read that one day the saints will sing a new song of praise in glory in heaven.

Music must occupy a special place in the heart of God. He has created it to span time and eternity and to reflect something of His own splendor, majesty, power, excellence, tenderness and beauty. How blessed are we to have been endowed with the ability to participate in His creative

nature, returning to Him the glory while at the same time bringing encouragement and consolation to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

A brief look at the history of music in the church will help us to better understand the elements that have most influenced our present musical culture.

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#### THE AGE OF MUSICAL MAGNIFICENCE

Magnificent musical expression reached a zenith in the church in the century immediately following the Reformation with the music of Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. Someone once said that had there never been a Martin Luther there never would have been a J. S. Bach. Bach was singularly devoted to glorifying God with the

totality of his life. His manuscripts bear the inscriptions: "Soli Deo Gloria" ("To God Be the Glory"), or "J. J." (abbreviation for "Jesu Juva," "Jesus help me"). The depth and breadth of his output laid the foundation for all of western music. Wagner once said that Bach was the most stupendous miracle in all music.

The music of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century church set the artistic standard for the music of the world. Even today we find it to have an unmatched freshness and deep seated joy about it. Man saw perhaps more clearly than at any other time in history meaning and purpose in life, and whatever he set his mind or hand to reflected this view. The arts flourished and the church led the way.

#### THE AGE OF MUSICAL CONTEMPLATION

But by the nineteenth century the church was no longer the forerunner in the arts. Even the Christian world view was tainted by philosophers of the day who, in truth, would have embraced any alternative to the sovereignty of God. Rookmaker accurately observes that "Man, being human, tries again and again to evade the logic of his own position, and searches for his true self, his humanity, his freedom, even if he can do so by means of sheer irrationality or completely unfounded mysticism."<sup>1</sup> Evolution and the scientific method became the more enlightened and pragmatic approach to the universe. Creationism and faith were branded "old fashioned." The dignity of man was berated and the musical magnificence of the two previous centuries fell into obscurity.

Amidst great social, political, and industrial upheaval, revivalists like Charles Wesley and servants such as Fanny Crosby wrote hymns of incomparable greatness. Although musically less formal than the compositions of a century earlier, their hymns were heaped with the zeal of personal assurance of God's faithfulness and steadfast love. The seeds

Luther had planted two centuries earlier with his chorales reached fruition with the hymnists. Each believer became a participant in worship. Congregational hymn singing was central to worship both here and in England well into the 1950s.

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#### THE AGE OF MUSICAL SPONTANEITY

Our own century has contributed to the heritage as well mainly in the area of praise songs and Scripture songs. The far swing of the charismatic movement in the 1970s was felt by churches throughout America. Their music woke us from the sleep of musical routine and encouraged spontaneous praise. Much of the music from this period was a result of the church wanting to reach out to the drug culture and to the unchurched. Even today new Christians love this music and need it, too. There seems to be a certain healing power in its strains. It enhances informal worship, particularly family worship. I fondly recall that standard

gear on all of our family camping trips through the Rockies in the 1980s was a cassette deck and a box of favorite praise albums.

#### PRAISING GOD IN THE NINETIES

Our generation will undoubtedly be remembered for its busyness. We tend to be a shallow people, always playing catch-up, running after information, experiences and things, looking to take on more and more territory rather than exploring the depths of what is already ours. That which takes time, nurturing, and understanding, including marriage, children and the pursuit of excellence, falls lower on the list of priorities than it did in past generations. We prefer the quick fixes that entertainment and leisure offer to the intensity of life than the introspection of quiet and meditation.

As the arts have always reflected the culture, so the music of the modern church reflects the tenor of our times. It should not surprise us that shallow expressions of praise come out of shallow hearts and commitments to Christ. In our haste we have time for only so much worship and praise, telling ourselves that it's not the amount of time but the quality of time that pleases God. We want the "bottom line" of praise for the hour spent in church on Sunday mornings. Tell us the correct words and the right feelings and we will do them. To ponder the magnificent and more contemplative forms of musical praise of preceding generations requires too much time and understanding.

Ours is a culture highly influenced by technology, entertainment, and affluence. Like the world about us, we Christians have grown more accustomed to material comforts, the routine and safety of mediocrity, and the mindlessness of entertainment than we care to admit. We have obliged, condoned, and then embraced many of the world's standards and even brought them into the sanctity of worship.

Our musical offerings all too frequently smack of commercialism and clone the latest trend of religious entertainment. It is really not uncommon to find syrupy, sentimental, pop-oriented, and mindless expressions of praise framing the exposition of God's excellent and Holy Word.

### LOSING THE HERITAGE

With such a rich musical heritage dating back to the Reformation one would expect to find worship today to be a mosaic of truly great music, saturated and vibrant with the magnificence of the masters, the inspiration of the hymnists, and the simplicity and spontaneity of contemporary writers. But as modernists we seem to care much about how things were done in the first-century church and in the church today and little for what has occurred in between. At best we are indifferent to musical excellence and expressions of praise wrought in the crucibles of life in times so unlike our own.

We can only conjecture whether the simple compositions that dominate our worship week after week truly magnify the Creator God, whether they nourish spiritual growth, and to what extent they will exhort us to faithfulness and endurance in difficult times that lie ahead. All the while our children, as Wormwood might have it, are kept safely distant from four hundred years of rich musical inheritance.

### JUDGING VALIDITY

We realize that no one can accurately judge whether or not a particular song or hymn is glorifying to God. He looks at the heart, we at the outward appearance. But as Francis Schaeffer has said, we may not see all of truth, but we see enough to act upon. Different cultures, regions and even neighboring congregations within a city adopt widely different styles and approaches to music worship. Within

each of these there is a line dividing becoming and unbecoming praise according to the gifts He bestowed upon the particular gathering. It falls to each of these gatherings to make definite choices regarding the content of musical worship. To ignore these choices and simply fall in line with what everyone else is doing is to eventually fall into unbecoming praise and mediocrity.

One criteria for judging the validity of praise all believers will agree upon has to do with scriptural integrity. The text, if not Scripture itself, must reflect the lordship of Christ. A second, and understandably less significant, criteria would have to do with the integrity of the musical accompaniment. One must ask, "Is the accompaniment appropriate to and/or in support of the text?" Rock accompaniments in a "rock"-oriented gathering may well be pleasing to Him as they relate to and effectively draw souls into the kingdom. But the medium is hardly appropriate in an upper middle class gathering. There, even a cymbal accompaniment to "From the cradle to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky . . ." is offensive to the solemnity of the text.

Simplicity and complexity are not always reliable tests of integrity. Noted theologian and author, Dr. Karl Barth, was once asked, "Out of all your great understanding, what is the single most important thing you know?" His reply was, "Jesus loves me; this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Haydn told a friend, "When I was working on *The Creation* I felt so impregnated with the Divine certainty, that before sitting down to the piano I would quietly and confidently pray to God to grant me the talent that was needed to praise Him worthily."<sup>2</sup>

### DEFINITIONS

It will be helpful for us to define, as best we can, the difference between songs and hymns before moving ahead.

Philadelphia theologian and musician, Dr. Stuart Sacks, notes a pertinent distinction for us between the two. Hymns celebrate the attributes and work of God. The music has a certain classical, formal quality to it. Songs tend to emphasize the singer's devotion to Christ or exhort a closer walk. The music is of a looser construction, not as strict in flowing. Scripture songs may fall into both categories.

### THOUGHTFUL VS. MINDLESS PRAISE

We know of course that both songs and hymns are pertinent and revelant in adult worship. What is not revelant in worship is the habitual (not casual) use of shallow compositions (in terms of text and musical expression) in whatever forms they come. "Lord, We Praise You" adequately demonstrates this shallowness which when sung habitually can easily result in a superficiality of praise. Repetition discourages thinking. It is also a major characteristic of the mantra.

#### *Lord We Praise You*

Lord, we praise you,  
 Lord, we praise you,  
 Lord, we praise you,  
 Lord, we praise you,  
 Lord, we praise you,  
 Lord, we praise you,  
 We praise you, O Lord.

While others are not quite as blatantly repetitious (although in practice the entire song is usually repeated several times), their shallowness invites thoughtlessness. Songs or hymns of this nature may be well suited for painting the house or passing the offering plate but hardly for bringing us thoughtfully and reverently before the throne of grace of the omniscient God.

#### *You Are My God*

You are my God, You are my King,  
 You are my Master, my everything;  
 You are my Lord, that's why I sing to You,  
 Hallelujah, hallelujah!

—M. Delevan, Integrity Hosanna Music, 1984

#### *Worthy Are You, Lord*

Worthy are You, Lord; worthy of praise.  
 All glory and majesty to Thee we raise.  
 Worthy are You, Lord; worthy are You, Lord.  
 Worthy are You, Lord, worthy of praise.

—Nelson/Fettke, Straightway Music, 1986

It is difficult to find this same degree of repetition or shallowness of meaning in a standard hymnal. Hymns usually embody far more food for thought and praise worthiness. They are like well-made garments that wear well. Consider the gravity and depth of several standard hymn texts.

#### *O for a Thousand Tongues*

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,  
 The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,  
 To spread through all the earth abroad, the honors of Thy  
 name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows  
 cease;  
 'Tis music in the sinner's ears, 'tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner  
 free;  
 His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for  
 me.

Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb, your loosened  
tongues employ;  
Ye blind, behold your Savior come; and leap, ye lame, for  
joy!

—Charles Wesley

*All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*

All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall;  
Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all!

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race, ye ransomed from the fall;  
Hail Him who saves you by His grace, and crown Him Lord  
of all!

Let every kindred, every tribe, on this terrestrial ball,  
To Him all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of All!

O that with yonder sacred throng we at His feet may fall!  
We'll join the everlasting song, and crown Him Lord of all!

—Edward Perronet

*O Worship the King*

O worship the King, all glorious above,  
O gratefully sing His power and His love;  
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,  
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.

O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,  
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.  
His chariots of wrath the deep thunder clouds form,  
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,  
Almighty, Your power has founded of old;  
Has established it fast by a changeless decree,  
And round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?

It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,  
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,  
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;  
Thy mercies how tender! how firm to the end!  
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend!

O measureless Might! Ineffable Love!  
While angels delight to hymn You above,  
The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,  
With true adoration shall lisp to Your praise.

—Robert Grant

*And Can It Be That I Should Gain?*

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For, me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love, how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all! Th' Immortal dies!  
Who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine!  
'Tis mercy all, let earth adore,  
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace;  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race;  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
 Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke,  
 The dungeon flamed with light;  
 My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
 Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
 Alive in Him, my living Head,  
 And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
 Bold I approach th' eternal throne,  
 And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Amazing love! how can it be  
 That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
 —Charles Wesley

Of the contemporary works that have depth of meaning, *O Lamb of God* is perhaps my favorite.

#### *O Lamb of God*

Your only Son, no sin to hide,  
 But You have sent Him from Your side  
 To walk upon this guilty sod,  
 And to become the Lamb of God.

Your gift of love they crucified,  
 They laughed and scorned Him as He died,  
 The humble King they named a fraud  
 And sacrificed the Lamb of God.

I was so lost I should have died,  
 But You have brought me to Your side  
 To be led by Your staff and rod,  
 And to be called a lamb of God.

Chorus: O Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God,  
 I love the holy Lamb of God.  
 O wash me in His precious blood,  
 My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.  
 —Twila Paris, Straight Way Music, 1985

#### THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM

Again, lest I be misinterpreted, no one can say for certain that any one song or hymn is more or less pleasing to God. Undoubtedly the simple ones are sheer delight to Him coming from the lips of children, and also from the hearts and lips of adult believers from time to time. But a steady diet of them dominating worship to the elimination of the magnificent and deeper forms of praise may well be a great disappointment to the Creator God when one takes into account the unspeakable glory of His most precious Gift to us and the excellence of gifts with which He has endowed us.

One cannot help but ask, does our music reflect a people captivated by such magnanimous grace? That the omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God of the universe should not only create and sustain but bring us redemption through the death of His only Son should strike us with overwhelming awe. Music, particularly music that surrounds the exposition of Scripture, demands the very finest use of gifts under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, ours should be an "awe-full" art, never commonplace or ordinary, never trendy or flippant or having anything to do with commercial interests.

Certainly there is an appropriate time for lighter, recreational music of the faith that swings and sets people to clapping and dancing. Miriam, we will recall, led the women in song and dance with castanets by the Red Sea. David the king danced through the streets leading the pro-

cession to the temple. But the grace of our Lord also demands a certain prostrate state of mind and heart before Him as we enter times of formal worship. It is no coincidence that the most significant and lasting works to His glory (be they sermons or music) have been authored by those who have prostrated their lives and gifts before Him.

It is not uncommon in evangelical worship services throughout our nation to sing a lighter fare of songs directly into prayer or Scripture reading or into the preaching of the Word itself. When a hymn does precede the exposition of the Word there is typically too little time to sing all the stanzas. The congregation will be asked to stand (stretching a bit before the sermon to get the juices flowing is implied) and sing the first and last stanzas of a hymn like "A Mighty Fortress," while the visitor cards are passed to the center aisle. All this is preparation for teaching and preaching of God's Word. From a studied comparison of texts one can easily see that we are majoring in the shallows and minor-ing in the depths when it comes to the musical framing of the exposition of the Word of God.

#### *Holy Ground Medley*

We are standing on holy ground,  
And I know that there are angels all around.  
Let us praise Jesus now. We are standing in  
His presence on holy ground.  
(Repeated several times with instrumental interludes)

#### *You Are My God*

You are my God, You are my King,  
You are my Master, my everything;  
You are my Lord, that's why I sing to You,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
—M. Delevan, Integrity's Hosanna Music, 1984  
(Repeated several times)

#### *Our God Reigns*

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him  
Who brings good news, good news;  
Announcing peace, proclaiming news of happiness.  
Our God reigns! Our God reigns!  
Our God reigns! Our God reigns!  
Our God reigns! Our God reigns!

—L. Smith, Jr., New Jerusalem Music, 1974  
(chorus repeated)

#### *Praise You*

Praise You, praise You, let my life praise You;  
Praise You, praise You;  
Let my life, O Lord, praise You.  
—Newspring Publishers, 1992  
(repeated several times)

#### *I Love You, Lord*

I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You.  
Oh my soul rejoice!  
Take joy, my King, in what You hear.  
May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear.  
—L. Klein, House of Mercy, 1978  
(repeated)

#### *A Mighty Fortress*

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be  
losing,  
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own  
choosing.  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He;

Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.

And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to  
undo us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph  
through us.

The prince of darkness grim—we tremble not for him—  
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure:  
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers—no thanks to them—  
abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us  
sideth.

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.

—Martin Luther

### SOLID FOOD FOR THE MATURE

Hebrews 6 speaks to us of leaving elementary teachings and moving on to maturity lest we drift further from the truth and suffer the hardening of our hearts. Paul tells us that solid foods are for the mature and that the inability to digest and apply the solid food of Scripture is a symptom of hardened hearts. We are to go beyond the ABCs of the faith, move out into the depths and to bear fruit. Refusing to do this and continuing to consume musical pabulum we risk shabby praise and underdeveloped fruit.

Who among our older and middle-aged generation has not found strength in recalling to mind the great hymns of the faith in times of adversity and joy? "It is Well with My Soul," "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "All to Jesus I Surrender," "Be Thou My Vision," "Blessed Assurance," "Crown Him with Many

Crowns," "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," "Fairest Lord Jesus," "For the Beauty of the Earth," "How Firm a Foundation," "How Great Thou Art," and on and on.

Our children will not find these deep wells of inspiration, simply because they do not hear them frequently enough to commit them to memory. One must ask whether songs like "Alleluia," "Lord, We Praise Thee," "He Is Lord," "Open My Eyes, Lord," "Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts," "You Are My God," "Worthy Are You, Lord," "Something Beautiful," "God Is So Good," and "Sweet, Sweet Spirit," which are so overwhelmingly taking the place of the great hymns will adequately fuel maturing hearts to praise and service in the days ahead.

### IN SEARCH OF A STANDARD

Are we presumptuous in seeking a standard for music in worship? I think not. There are those of course who will object or be offended that anyone should attempt to do so. But why should we be any less discerning with the integrity of music than we are with integrity in the preaching of the Word?

Several years ago, Dr. James Stevens, pastor of Christ Community Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania, delivered a sermon on the nonnegotiables of the faith. There are only two: the lordship of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy of God's Word. Here, in fact, is the standard worldwide for the church of Jesus Christ. All other issues, including doctrinal matters, are subordinate to these. It seems only logical to begin our search for a musical standard with these as well.

It is of course far easier to apply the standard of the lordship of Christ and the inerrancy of the Word to the spoken word over the pulpit than it is to music. Sitting in the pew with the Bible open before us and the Holy Spirit within to guide us, it is a relatively simple matter (over a span of time) to discern whether or not the one who speaks

is in harmony or conflict with the standard. But how does one, even with the aid of Scripture and Spirit, as certainly ascertain the lordship of Christ and the inerrancy of the Word in vocal or instrumental music?

We will need a handle, a workable standard for music. As Christ is the end of all truth and as the Word is the written expression of God's truth, then the pursuit of musical truth may safely be our standard. The very nature of the child of God is to desire truth in every avenue of life.

### WHAT IS MUSICAL TRUTH?

It is important for us to note here that beauty, excellence, and truth (concepts very much at home in music) fall under the umbrella of integrity.

Several months ago a journalist sat in my living room trying to convince me that there was no such thing as truth. Within a few minutes he acquiesced with, "Whatever truth may exist is relative." It was his challenge to find truth in music that caught my interest. What he should have known (if only for the sake of argument) was that this musician/teacher sees the very role of a teacher as one of researching truth, and then by word and example relaying it to succeeding generations. Finding truth in music is easy; living up to it is a different matter. Every fine musician in the world recognizes truth in music, moment by musical moment. We recognize it to be foundational to all music making and speak of it in terms of pure or precise intonation, rhythm, interval, attack, release, balance, style, and "ensemble." Further, every armchair critic can tell you (and usually does) when you've violated one or more of these basic truths.

It is fairly easy to appraise the text for truth in vocal music. We simply ask, does it square with the Word of God? Assuming that it does, there are at least two common snares which will further affect its integrity before God. The first has to do with the attitude of the heart. God loves to

hear truth returned to Him on the lips of His saints. But words, even His words, uttered from an empty heart and mind must be terribly displeasing to Him. "This people honors Me with their lips but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me" (Mark 7:6-7).

It is wise not to overuse hymns and songs that either through too great a familiarity or shallowness of meaning bring us to a state of mindless repetition. They may make us feel warm and good all over but that is really not the purpose of worship. One worshipper said, "How I love these songs. I don't have to think, and so I'm free to worship." Nowhere in Scripture can we find justification for such a statement. God never intended for us to take leave of our senses. Quite the contrary, we are to worship Him with our "whole heart . . . mind . . . soul . . . and strength." The worship leader can help us guard against such mental atrophy by changing the pace of worship with the reading of a stanza or a passage of Scripture relating to the text. Sometimes even relaying the circumstances under which a song or hymn was composed causes our hearts and minds to awaken or focus more clearly on the truths before us.

A second snare unique to vocal music involves accompaniments. Instrumental or tape accompaniments that do not compliment the text or that draw attention away from the text onto themselves or onto the player(s) are simply inappropriate. Pretentious, showy, and sentimental "show-biz" styles and techniques have no place in worship. They represent the antithesis of truth, honesty, and integrity.

Taped accompaniments present a particular challenge. Users should be aware that while the tape may place them in a more favorable vocal light, it will eventually discourage live accompaniments. Tapes are professionally recorded and honed to perfection. While the understandable intent in using them may be for the sake of excellence, in reality a standard of perfection is imposed upon live music-

making within the church. It should be noted that even in the secular world a performer's goal is better beauty than perfection. If he aims at perfection he may well miss beauty. But having aimed at beauty he often finds himself to have achieved perfection as well. And in the church we know that beauty, not perfection, is on the road to truth.

There is nothing wrong with an occasional taped accompaniment, but one must ask, "Who is it glorifying?" Better not to risk the Hollywood connection if a reasonably proficient pianist and a reasonably in-tune piano are available. It falls upon the minister of music to monitor and advise worship participants in these matters.

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*There will of course be strengths and weaknesses within each gathering of which God is well aware. He looks upon the heart, and the heart that is set on Jesus is one that over time is moved toward greater truth, beauty, and excellence.*



#### EXCELLENCE, BUT NOT PAGEANTRY

Mature musicians who treat their talent as a trust grow to be self-effacive. They lay the music before God and the people of God without distraction and without any sort of self-aggrandizement. In all fairness, most distractions are not intended. Wrong notes or rhythms, poor intonation,

tone or diction are unintentional but distracting nonetheless. Interestingly, the sometimes awkwardness of a child's music is easily overlooked—in fact, it can add to the worship experience as we observe the innocence of expression and are reminded of the hand of God at work in springtime of life. But the frequent musical stumblings of an adult are a different matter. They are out of place and should not be regularly condoned. Believers should strive to frame Scripture or related text with excellence. Frank Gaebelien, noted scholar, teacher, and musician, has pointed out that when error-free worship music does not occur, "not only does the mediocre drive out the good; there is also a certain intolerance of the excellent that refuses to see that great music can be a far more true expression of biblical theology than piously sentimental music."<sup>3</sup> There will of course be strengths and weaknesses within each gathering of which God is well aware. He looks upon the heart, and the heart that is set on Jesus is one that over time is moved toward greater truth, beauty, and excellence.

#### THE TASK OF THE MUSIC MINISTER

Those entrusted with the planning, selection, and execution of music in worship have a responsibility second only to the one who preaches the Word. The pursuit of truth, excellence, and beauty in music, even under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will be a constant challenge. He/she needs to be skilled in the craft and discipline of music, be focused and yet patient, and have a teacher's heart. A fine teacher is "process oriented," and cares not where students enter the curriculum but only for their progress from step A to B to C and so on. Moving a body of believers toward maturity and excellence of musical praise is both the challenge and the call.

"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of

good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

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#### *Notes*

1. H. R. Rookmaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (London: Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., 1975), 196.
2. Henri Boyle, *Haydn, Mozart, and Metastasio* (New York: Grossman Publications, 1972), 140–50.
3. Frank Gaebelein, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth* (Portland: Multnomah, 1985), 53.