

The Necessity for Music Education in the Christian Schools

by Linda Pastoor

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Make a joyful noise unto God all ye lands:
Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious.

Psalm 66:1, 2

Music is a marvelous part of God's creation. God gave us this great gift both for our recreation and for His praise and glory. Thus, John Calvin writes in his preface to the *Genevan Psalter*:

Now among the other things proper to recreate man and give him pleasure, music is either the first or one of the most principal, and we must think that it is a gift of God to this purpose.

Since music is such a significant part of our lives, I believe that music education is a necessity in the Christian school.

The reformer Martin Luther also declared music to be a great gift of God. Like Calvin, he was determined to have the people participate in worship — in prayer and in song. In his foreword to Georg Rhau's collection of part-songs, Luther writes:

This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself of the fact that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God. However, when man's natural ability is whittled and polished to the extent that it becomes art, then do we note with great surprise the great and perfect wisdom of God in music.

Because we have been created "for the express purpose of praising and extolling God," we have an immense responsibility both to praise God and to develop the talents He has graciously given to us.

Further, I believe that we must study music because it is part of God's creation through which He reveals Himself. God is a creator God, and as images of Him, we are also creative. We can express ourselves in art, literature, and music. In order to explore and develop fully the gifts God has given to us, we must study music, as well as art, literature, and the other disciplines.

Music education is for the entire body of Christ. God has given everyone a voice, so all students must develop their vocal talents and praise God by singing in a choir. Besides this, I believe that every student should have the opportunity to develop his talents further by learning to play an instrument.

Since music is "one of the most principal gifts of God for our pleasure," everyone must learn about music. From pre-school through the eighth grade, the basic elements of music must be taught. The content of this early music education is "sound concepts" — isolable and teachable patterns of sound, such as duple rhythm and upward leap. Each grade should meet for instruction at least once per week.

Music is an integral part of God's creation and our lives. Therefore it is imperative that we learn about the genre and history of music. Music is all around us, for man has expressed himself musically throughout history — in art music, folk music, popular music, and even in propaganda and advertising.

Is it not the goal of Christian education to help children to see God's hand in all aspects of creation? I believe that we must also help our children to grow to make responsible decisions — about music in recreation.

Therefore, it is essential that adolescents receive general music education. This general music class would be structured for either the eighth or ninth grade, and would meet two times per week. It is my objective to pry open attitudinal doors at this crucial age. If these young people are not exposed to an abundance of music at this point in their lives, there is a great possibility that they will never develop an appreciation for or knowledge of God's marvelous gift of music.

I have already stated that we must have a choral program in our schools. Many schools have two choirs: an elementary choir, grades four through six, and a junior high choir, grades seven through nine. Do these choirs deal effectively with the problems of changing voices and initiate interest and participation — especially in junior high? I don't think so.

I would like to structure this type of choral curriculum: a treble choir, grades four through six and most of the seventh grade; a girls' choir, grades seven through nine; and a boys' choir, grades eight through nine. For those with special talent and who show extra effort, there must exist a select soprano-alto-tenor-bass choir which would meet before or after school at least twice per week.

I am sure that some will argue that this choral program is difficult to squeeze into the curriculum. Perhaps it is more difficult to

structure, but I firmly believe that it is worth it. The purpose of a choral program is to help children develop their vocal skills and appreciation for music so they can praise God to the best of their ability. The expanded choral structure deals with special problems and needs that exist in the child's musical development.

Involvement in the elementary choral program should be required. However, in high school, choral involvement is better optional. Students have the opportunity to audition for and participate in one or perhaps two choirs.

I believe that it is the goal of a high school choral program to involve as many students as possible in developing their musical skills and in praising God. Therefore, one or even two choirs are not enough. A high school could begin with this type of choral program: a select choir would meet three days per week; a men's chorus and women's chorus would each meet once every other week; and the whole group would meet once per week. A madrigal choir for those who have special talent and show extra effort could meet two or three times per week during recess or before or after school.

Again, some will argue that this type of choral program is difficult to implement. This is true, but I firmly believe that it is the only way to begin adequately to meet the needs of our young people.

I also believe that everyone should have the opportunity to play a musical instrument. This experience is not difficult to provide — the recorder is inexpensive and relatively easy to play. In the third or fourth grade, playing the recorder is ideal for further developing music skills and starting to compose music. All children should have the chance to increase their appreciation and understanding of all kinds of music, and to praise God and enjoy themselves playing the recorder.

Besides recorder training in the third or fourth grade, we should provide an optional instrumental program in our schools. This would consist of a training band in fifth grade, an advanced band for grades six through nine, and a high school band and perhaps orchestra. These groups should meet at least three times per week.

The purpose of an instrumental program is to develop further the child's musical talent and to give the child an even wider experience in ways to praise God.

Martin Luther affirms:

I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy, costly treasure given mankind by God. . . next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in this world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits. . .

Luther's preface to Rhau's collection of part-songs.

Because music is such a “worthy treasure,” it demands a prominent place in our lives and our education. Praising God is indeed one of the most joyful and significant elements of the Christian’s life. Therefore, it is our responsibility to develop our God-given talents and live our whole lives in praise to God.

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