

# THE NEED FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC

by Mr. Gerald Kulper

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The main purpose of this paper is to point out the very real need for a sequential music program in our schools. In this paper I will attempt to arrive at a definition of music for the Christian by examining certain existing attitudes toward music, and by discussing what we at the summer workshop believe are basic requirements of music in the life of the pilgrim. The second part of this paper will concern itself with the need for a well-defined place for music in our curriculum.

## What is music?

To answer the question "What is music?" is indeed very difficult. This is true for several reasons. In the first place, music is understood by some only in terms of what they hear on their radios and phonographs. Others look at music as a form of self-expression, or as a medium used to convey ideas to those about them. Still others go beyond the compositions and songs available and speak of the rippling of a brook, or the roaring of a jet airplane, as music. Others say that music is primarily a means for the Christian to glorify God.

Music, according to Webster, is the "art and science of combining vocal or

instrumental sounds or tones in varying melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre, especially so as to form structurally complete and emotionally expressive compositions." Music in this sense includes that which we hear daily on our home and auto radios, at concerts, on phonographs, and through loudspeakers at work or in shopping centers. All types of music, rock music, classical music, jazz, and church music would fit into the above definition.

But the very existence of tones and the combination of them to produce what we know as music had its beginning with God. God created all things, and in His creatures He created the ability to make sounds which have come to be known as music. Man was given by God the unique ability to express ideas through music and the words which sometimes accompany it. The Bible speaks in many places not only of man praising God through music, but also of praise by all God's creatures. As with all the other gifts man has been given, he is to use the music in praise to God, thus glorifying Him.

The fall of Adam did not take away man's ability to express ideas through music, but instead made it impossible for fallen man to use this gift for its intended purpose. He has instead molded this gift to his own purpose, so that music more than any other art form is everywhere about us. The one-year old child can respond to the sounds of music, and all men, no matter what their intellectual abilities may be, react strongly to the music which they hear. Man has made music a powerful tool through which he can express tenderness and roughness, peace and conflict, or sadness and joy. Every phase of man's life and activity has

music as a part of it. He has written compositions for entertainment, work songs, play songs, fight songs, love songs, and devotional songs. He has exploited this part of God's creation to serve his every need and purpose.

But yet the child of God is in the world and he has this special gift to use. So special is this gift, that we are told in Scripture that there will be music in heaven. The church, beginning officially with the sons of Korah, has been a singing church. King David went through great pains to establish a place for music and musicians in battle, in tabernacle worship, and in his Psalms he often wrote words for the chief musicians that were to be part of the music used in the worship of God. The Israelites had their own harps which they hung on willow trees rather than obey their captor's demands that they sing for them a song. Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn in His last days on earth. The church-controlled medieval universities placed great value on the cantor who was to teach the church music liturgy. The cantor was, in fact, often second in importance only to the university head. During the time of the reformation emphasis was placed on the singing by all the congregation of the Psalms and hymns. And the church of today has a great heritage of music produced in the past for church use.

There are three basic requirements for music that is to be used by the Christian. Music must first of all be to the glorification of God. Secondly, music must be a means of speaking messages of comfort, courage, and exhortation to **one's self**. And finally, music must be a medium of teaching and admonishing **one another**.

Regarding the first requirement of music, that it must be to God's glory, there are many places in the Bible which point out this fact. Psalm 100:2 says, "Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing." Also in Psalm 95:1-3 we read the following:

O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

The last Psalm summarizes the idea of much of the book when we read in verse 6, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." This music must then reflect God's attributes—His orderliness, His power, His majesty, mercy, and loving kindness. God is so great that we cannot know Him in all His power and majesty, but we are to praise him, and play of His might on the trumpet and cymbals, and of his beauty and lovingkindness on the harp. The use of music will not make God greater, but will serve as a medium or means through which the child of God can render glory to God by his singing and playing on instruments of music.

The second requirement of music is that it must be a medium of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, worship, and supplication, a medium of speaking to one's self messages of comfort, courage, and exhortation. In James 5:13 we read, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing Psalms." Psalms 13:1 and 2, and verses 5 and 6 also show that music was intended for this purpose:

How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemies be exalted over me? But I have trusted in Thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because He hath dealt bountifully with me.

By listening to and participating in the making of music, the child of God can have a new and better awareness of the presence of God and of all His great works. Scripture commands us to sing to God the **provider** in Psalms 13:6, 108:3 and 4, and in Psalm 147:7 and 8. We are to sing to God who **does marvelous things** according to Psalms 57:9, 98:1, and Isaiah

12:5. In Psalms 18:48 and 49, 27:6, 30:1, 59:16 and 17, and 144:9 we are commanded to praise God our Deliverer. These examples show that the child of God can find in Scripture material for any need he has or for expression of praise to God and His many works.

The third requirement of music is that it must be a means of teaching and admonishing one another. Colossians 3:16 states, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." We also read in Ephesians 5:18 and 19, "and be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Singing must create a bond among believers. This is done first of all in the congregational singing. Hebrews 2:12 speaks of this: "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee." In connection with this, David appointed chief singers to prophesy in song (see 1 Chronicles 25:1 and 2, and Nehemiah 12). Singing of the law and of God the righteous judge in church certainly follows the commands quoted above from Colossians and Ephesians. Ministers often will choose songs for that very purpose, especially those songs following the reading of the law and the sermon. In another connection, think of the use of Christian carols as an expression of joy, or think of the comfort which can be derived by singing Psalms and hymns in times of sorrow.

Based on the above requirements we can say that music is a gift of God intended for His glorification, and consists of an active response of thanksgiving to God, and an active expression of praise by the believer. The focal point of all music is the glory of God and the edification of His

people here on earth. On the other hand, for worldly man, music is a response to man and his greatness, and thereby an expression of rebellion towards the creator and ruler of the universe. Music which the Christian selects will fit the above requirements, but worldly man does not concern himself with these.

There is, however, a place in the Christian's life for music written and performed by non-Christians. Think for example of Handel's "Messiah". The composer may or may not have intended the oratorio as God-glorifying, but this piece of music has comforted, strengthened, and encouraged thousands of Christians since it was composed. Think also of the power and majesty of "Finlandia" by Sibelius or the beauty of expression in the "Grand Canyon Suite". These are a few examples of music written and performed by non-Christians which can serve the Christian both in individual and collective worship and through which he can better glorify God. Most of the world's music, however, must be rejected by the child of God. The evil lyrics of rock music and of country music make clear the allegiance to the devil which is paid by performer and composer. But even the bulk of instrumental music of today is admittedly intended to arouse evil emotions, and to express the disjointed futility which exists in the world today.

#### The need for music in the curriculum

It would seem that based on what has been said in this paper about music in the Christian's life, instruction in music would have a prominent place in our curriculums. This, however, is not the case. The duty of the Christian school concerns the equipping of the covenant child for his life on earth as a pilgrim, being in the world but not of it. The school is working with children who have in them the inclination toward music and its various elements, and have the mechanics, ability, and the desire to produce music. All creatures

have this created in them, but man as image bearer has a special duty, not only to make sounds, but also to communicate by words the truth that God is great. Psalm 96 speaks of the "trees of the wood rejoicing." Isaiah 44:23 speaks of the lower parts of the earth praising God, and in Isaiah 55:12 we read of praise proceeding from the mountains and the hills. To these texts can be added what we find in Psalm 150:6; "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord." Man's possession of breath naturally holds him answerable to God's command that He be praised. In Psalm 51:10-15, the Psalmist prays that God will create in him a clean heart and renew his spirit, so that his lips may be opened to sing of the joy of his salvation. And finally, in Psalm 104:33 we read, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."

The schools must do more than offer an opportunity for students to sing in the choir and play in the band; the school must do all it can to see to it that all the students are equipped to follow God's command in Psalm 150, namely that they are to sing and play upon instruments in praise to God. This must be done, as with the other subjects, with the constant teaching and reteaching of the elements of music, throughout all the grades. Only if this is carefully done will the student be able, by the grace of God, to direct his inborn love for music into a knowledgeable love for good music that is edifying for him and for his fellows. One reason that we teach math and reading is that the students will have to use these again and again in their later lives. Most children of God will have perhaps more association with music which they hear and have opportunity to sing than with any other things they may have learned in their school years. As has been pointed out earlier, music is all about us. If it is still said that there is no room in our curriculum for another extra "fringe"

subject, consider the following thoughts.

In the first place, man is given a spiritual mandate to praise the Lord in song through singing and upon instruments. God doesn't accept intentional sloppy singing, nor does He desire ignorant participation in music done in a careless manner, but this praise must be proper praise. The proper means and modes of praise, and education regarding selection of these means, is the responsibility of the church, home, and therefore of the school.

In the second place, as we have already said, God has equipped the covenant child with the talents and abilities for making music to His glory. The school must develop these talents, not just because they exist, but because they involve man's chief means of praise and adoration to God.

Thirdly, since music is an integral part of the devotional life of the children, and will continue to be so, the school affords an excellent place for group work in vocal and instrumental music. In the school, the students will be taught that all music must be to God's glory, and will learn that music does indeed give answer to many needs which arise in the life of a saint.

Fourthly, since music is all about us in the world today, the school affords an excellent place for group work in listening to a variety of music, thus enabling the students to become more discriminating in their choice of music. The student will most often enjoy the music which he hears and understands. The home and the school, therefore, must provide direction in the selection of a positive alternative for the music of the world to which our children are constantly exposed.

And finally, the church today has a great heritage of music. Much of this music is good music and fits the requirements stated earlier, but may be difficult for the average person to understand without some training in

school. In addition to this, much of modern hymnology, especially Romantic hymnology and what followed, should have no place on our radios, stereos, or pianos. Before the individual Christian can realize this, however, he must understand what music is, what music is proper for various occasions, what rules govern the composing of music, and especially he must understand that the music must be music that serves to better bring out the meaning of the lyrics. The student must learn to appreciate the good church music which we have. Our heritage includes many songs actually sung by the church

fathers in time of strife, joy, and uncertainty. It also includes songs which were added at the insistence of John Calvin and Martin Luther, who both prescribed definite time periods for music instruction in their schools.

It is our belief that the acceptance by school boards and faculties of the proposed curriculum outlined in the rest of this booklet, with review and revision, will better equip the covenant child to fulfill the mandate God gives him in Psalm 150, and to say with the Psalmist, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."

