

Belhaven University Tenure Paper, Fall 2012
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Recently I had a conversation with a student not returning to Belhaven and not continuing in music. When I asked him why, he first stated that whenever he composed or performed music that it was always an act of self-glorification. Frequently in the private studio I am confronted by students expressing a high level of performance anxiety. I am taking the opportunity of the writing of this paper to offer a biblical worldview as a teacher and pedagogue that addresses both of these positions.

Everything I do is done with an understanding that I am a created being and that there is a God who is creator of everything. This God that I worship loves his creation and has high standards for all that He has created. (Genesis 1:25, 31) This God I worship created beauty, as He is also beautiful. (Ryken, p. 54) It is He that has created the arts, including music. Everything in its original form of creation was beautiful (Genesis 2:9). And we, men and women, were created in His image. (Genesis 5:1-2) According to Schaeffer, creation is the starting point. "Everyone was made in God's image and those blessed with artistic gifts can't help but display that original image in some way." (Turner, p. 12)

As a member of Christ's Presbyterian Church, I believe that "the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever". (Westminster Catechism - Psalm

86, Romans 11:36, Corinthians 10:31, Revelations 4:11, Psalm 16:5-11, Isaiah 12:2, Philippians 4:4 & Revelation 21:3-4) Among the many ways we can glorify God is to honor Him by discerning what talents He has given to us and by utilizing those talents in the work He provides. (I Corinthians 2:12, 7:17, 12:4-6) I believe that music is one of the ways we can voice [the larger] creation's praise."

(Begbie, p. 212)

I passionately believe that music, that all of the arts have an impact on our lives that affect us in addition to and through the worship of God. "Beauty that glorifies God needs no excuse for being, and as we are made to enjoy beauty, beautiful art can nourish our souls." (Ryken, p. 47) "Christian art is redemptive...Art is always an interpretation of reality, and the Christian artist should interpret reality in its total aspect, including the hope that has come into the world through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Ryken p. 41) Christians know that Jesus wins and grace for all of us who walk with the Lord abounds. And no matter how difficult this life is, or how twisted God's fallen creation has become, a new heaven and a new earth is ensured. "The best art doesn't tell people what to believe but enables them, for a short while, to see things differently, and the Christian can enable people to momentarily glimpse the world through eyes that have been touched by Christ." (Turner, p. 115-116) Art (music) can "...throw light on man's sufferings and his joy, his needs and potentialities, and to outline a happier destiny in store for him. Hence, they can

elevate human life, which they express under many forms according to various times and places.” (Turner, p. 33) Even more amazing is the possibility that music (all of the arts) might offer a foretaste of the arts in the future, even in the new heaven and new earth. (Begbie p. 264, 267)

And so, God gives us talents. He has decided our best path. And He is the God of steadfastness and encouragement. (Romans 15:5) And this is important, as it takes great effort to develop the talents given into a skill that approaches heavenly excellence. And therein lies a trap, a bottomless pit for the Christian artist. Stravinsky understood: “I take no pride in my artistic talents; they are God-given and I see absolutely no reason to become puffed up over something that one has received.” (Ryken, p. 49). Acknowledge the gift is from God. Have no pride in accomplishment. God hates our pride; (Proverbs 8:13) for in that pride we would elevate ourselves to God-status denying His gifts to us.

Admitting that our gift is from God releases us to do that which God wants us to do. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14b)

So why do so many of my students tremble? Why have I trembled? I understand the limitless love of Christ. (Romans 8:38-39) Jesus has told us that “I am with you, even to the ends of the earth. (Matthew 28:20) We know in Psalm 16 that we belong to God. We can also see countless examples in the

Scriptures that God does encourage, that heaven's strength is aligned with those who do His will. Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Peter and countless others have proved God's faithfulness through the ages. For Christian artist have the everlasting God sustaining them and it is He who offers us more than the slavery of fear. "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

(Romans 8:15-16) Yes, the task of preparing a performance as an offering to the Lord is enormous. However, "any anxiety we have about the sheer enormity of the task facing any Christian in the world of music should be met with the recollection that in Christ the chains of the world's evil have already been snapped. (Begbie, p. 276)

Skillful practice leads to mastery which allows a grateful emotional/spiritual foundation in the performer displacing the natural fallen human emotional/spiritual slavery of fear. Metaphorically, we are striving to "win a race", to lift our artistic expression to a level approaching heaven. "Effective practice ultimately is a way of thinking while you are collected." (Dr. Andrew M. Sauerwein) This leads to more than productive practice, but to worship, for the calling of the Christian artist demands more than artistic excellence:

"...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed

by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:1b-2) If God is working in us to transform our mind, then in our practice, all we have to do is cooperate. God is active, not passive. My art is tied to how I live. With His help, "if we are living righteously and God's laws are constantly before us, then the imaginations of our heart will reflect that." (Turner, p. 124)

With a clean heart and skillful practice in the presence of God "...there is fullness of joy." (Psalm 16:11b) Practice is not task, obligation, duty, but ultimately is joy, as "joy is the air the Christian breathes as he or she pursues a vocation." First as we know "...we are recipients of the invitation...to step back into that role intended for us to voice creation's praise to the resounding glory of the Creator, and to witness wonders beyond imagining in our lives and the lives of others." Second, "...joy...comes from knowing the end is assured." "...the mandate for any action in the created world (including music) is essentially evangelical... God has a future for the world He made and that He has a place for his people as part of that future. Any action for good we undertake in the world of music is underwritten by Christ." (Begbie, p. 276) Bonhoeffer says, "We do them [the arts] just because of the joy of doing them." (Begbie, p. 158) Christians vested with artistic talent and called to the arts can be joyful knowing that they are fulfilling God's purpose for their lives in their vocation.

“...There can be no living with Christ without dying with Him.” Romans 6:8

Frustration, perseverance, endurance, and patience in the midst of opposition are all part of our vocation to share in Christ’s sufferings. (Romans 8:17). This is part of what it means to be conformed to the image and likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18) to live in a world not fully healed. (Begbie, p. 262) In my daily walk as an artist, so much competes for my attention, for the time the Lord has given me. Still, I know that He wants me to be an artist. Again this year I have established an ambitious schedule of performances. I do this because it was what I was made to do, through it I glorify my Creator, because of it, others’ lives are enriched, and my students see the daily testimony lived for the Glory of God.

Current Sachs performing schedule for 2012-2013

October 13, Chamber Concert, Belhaven University with Mr. Kenneth Graves, clarinetist and Ms. Shellie Brown, violinist.

October 20, Orchestra Pianist, Thalia Mara Hall with Mississippi Symphony Orchestra.

October 30, Chamber Concert, Belhaven University, the Belhaven Piano Trio including Mr. Song Xie, violinist and Mr. Bennett Randman, cellist.

February 2, Orchestra Soloist, Belhaven University, piano soloist with the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, Concerto in C Minor, K. 491 by W. A. Mozart

February 16, Orchestra Pianist, with the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra

March 19, Duo/Duet/Solo Piano Recital, Belhaven University, with Mrs. Carolyn Sachs

Sources:

Begbie, Jeremy; *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music (Engaging Culture)*; paperback, pp. 416; Baker Academic, December 1, 2007; ISBN-10: 0801026954, ISBN-13: 978-0801026959; Focus - Our creativity (music, music language) is a reflection of a creative God and His creation. Music as a language is capable of independently touching the spirit of man.

Committee on Bible Translation (Editor); *The Holy Bible: New International Version Containing the Old Testament and the New Testament*; hardcover; New York International Bible Society, 1980; ASIN: B00273HLEG.

Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts (Paperback)

~ Jeremy Begbie (Editor)

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Baker Academic (January 1, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801022444

ISBN-13: 978-0801022449

Art for God's Sake: A Call to Recover the Arts (Paperback)

~ Philip Graham Ryken (Author)

Paperback: 64 pages

Publisher: P & R Publishing (May 2, 2006)

Language: English

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ISBN-13: 978-1596380073

Respectfully submitted,

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