

Authentic Worship & Faithful Music Making

"Presenter: Dr. Harold Best, Former Dean of Wheaton Conservatory of Music and Author of Music Through the Eyes of Faith. Harold addresses a diverse audience of professional musicians at the American Choral Directors Association.

Location: Music & Worship Interest Session, ACDA National Convention, Chicago, Illinois, February 27, 1999

Introduction

This assignment differs from others I have had on similar subjects, in that today I shall be speaking — I assume — both to Jewish and Christian people of faith, and within these two vast, connected practices, to Conservative and Reform Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians; then in further subdivision, to conservatives, liberals, charismatics, traditionalists, contemporists, populists, classicists, practical eclectics — some say blenders — liturgical and free worshipers; and on the side of mammon, to those who are paid, paid less, paid less than they think they should be, or paid nothing.

I am assuming that we are spiritual and musical relatives of each other, even in the face of the profound difference that we commonly acknowledge: the centrality of Christ for the Christians, the continued longing into the future by the Jews for Messiah; and other differences that Christians have with each other — significant but far less profound; and last but not least, the debates that, perhaps as never before, swirl around all of us: the relation of style to worship, worship to witness, cultural relevance to scriptural integrity, quality to usefulness, and sociologized theology to theologized sociology. The assignment has not been easy but it has been immensely rewarding, and I hope I do not fail you or the Lord.

I have been driven to search out what I truly believe about this topic, what I believe to be irreducible, and how I might relate to each of you without relativizing either your passions and faith, or mine, and above all, without playing ecclesiastically cute and correct games with Scripture. I have been freshened to discover a place of meeting regarding authentic worship and faithful music making that I believe is as foundational for those who await the Messiah as for those who know that they have found Him; a foundational place for those whose meeting ground is anything from praise and worship bands to choirs, organs, and hymnals. We are the worse when we forget that just as Jesus is, for Christians, the Yes and the Amen to everything found in the Law and the Prophets, there is still the primordial force of Law and Prophets that constitutes the dayspring for the Yes and Amen. Thus, there is no emptiness or prettified ecumenism in speaking to Jew and Christian alike of like things to which each must go with hungry heart and unflinching passion. To this Judeo-Christian audience, I speak gladly of Judeo-Christian magnificences. We are drawn together in profound ways, even as we may profoundly disagree, for beneath these harmonies and disharmonies, there is a grandly eloquent deep

structure that urges us into further thought about worship and music. This meeting place, this deep structure, goes something like this.

There is one God, who is the one Lord, the one Redeemer, the one Spirit, the one Creator of heaven and earth. In his unimaginable holiness and majesty, He is Love itself, Love incarnate, and Love unto an infinity of more love. He has not kept the good news about Himself to Himself, but has graciously chosen to reveal it to our race, clearly, unequivocally, and mercifully. This self-revealing Word contains all that we shall ever need in this temporal frame for faith, for salvation, and for instruction in righteousness, for worship, humble service, and personal loveliness.

This God, this Lord, is the uncreated Creator, the unimagined Imaginer, not just back then, but now and always, for right now, everything inheres and coheres by the word of His power. Everything that He creates, He calls good, and in His goodness He has gone so far as to create an entire race of beings in His image. We are thus created creators and imagined imaginers and have been bequeathed a magnificent sovereignty and stewardship over the many things that God Himself has made. And from these we have been gifted to imagine and give shape to a dazzlement of arts, craft, and idea. Even so, we can not out-imagine or out-work the One who is at once our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Rest.

Nonetheless, in a horrible moment, our race heard a lie about Him, chose to believe it, and fell away from the glories that it was intended to enjoy. There is thus something profoundly wrong with us. We have all fallen short of the glory of God and are helpless to fix this wrong, our futile attempts notwithstanding. But just as God is the Author and Finisher of all of His work, He has become the Author and Finisher of our salvation, taking upon Himself the burden of atoning for that for which we cannot atone, if we but trust Him to do so. Isaiah 53 makes this just as clear as the Epistle to the Romans does. Both Testaments swear to this unassailable fact: God is our salvation. Our participation in this great salvation, both Testaments likewise aver, is by faith from which lovingly shaped work and continuing worship issue.

Surrounded and nourished by these enormities, we are authentically to worship and faithfully to make music. For all of us, authenticity and faithfulness are of the essence. There are no two ways about it, and in this agitated, stirred up, divisive, less-than-creative present-day pottage we call sacred music, we must rediscover something that has very little to do with music. But once discovered, music — good music, bad music, music of diversity — finds its place, falls under judgement, and makes its way into the halls of praise. A thousand tongues, to paraphrase the Wesleys, who never dreamed of the world of music that we know—a thousand tongues will never be enough.

As to all of our music, we cannot afford to forget that the whole of all musical undertaking in temple, church, and basilica, is based on a three-in-one commandment, one sentence long, from the Psalms: "Sing (play) to the Lord a new song." We can also not afford to forget that it is the commandment, God's commandment, that is of prime importance. We must understand that when God commands, He means what He says, and

that it is the commandment that makes music important and not the reverse. When we attempt to empower God's commands with something even as wonderful as music we have stepped over a forbidden line, for there is such a thing as musicolatry. We must recognize that as wonderful as music is, and as much as we lovingly strive for excellence in its practices, there are no such ephemera as a theological Mozart effect, or expose-yourself-to-the-masterpieces talk, or what-will-music-do-for-me talk. When music becomes of prime importance and God's work is conditioned upon, or made subject to it, we have already paid the entrance fee into the darkened complexities of religion posing as godliness, of Truth conditioned by beauty, and music taking on the qualities of sacrament, if not Transubstantiation.

So, we have this command; really, a three-in-one command: 1) Sing (play). There is no debate, no option. 2) Be sure this song goes in this direction first: to the Lord, and only then, to each other. We are thus to overhear each other singing to God. 3) Make a new song. Don't fake newness with borrowedness, but let those from whom you might be tempted to borrow be so dislodged that they will borrow from you. Also, sing old songs newly, as if for the first time, thus avoiding what Christ called vain repetition. Singing new songs and singing old ones newly are inevitably a part of faithful music making. Each is bereft without the other.

We are talking more about worship today than possibly ever before in Church history, certainly more than the Scriptures do. We need to remember that when we make worship too much the subject, we risk destroying the very thing for which it is intended. The subject can never be worship until the subject is first of all the Lord. To the extent that attention is overly drawn to worship, to the extent that it becomes the primary object of our work, the overriding protocol, within which the Lord and His work are subjects, we can only assume that we have begun to worship worship, or at least, to worship about worship, therefore to worship about God. Visit the typical seminar or conference and you will discover that the attention is on tools for worship (whatever they are), on worship enhancement, ideas, options, and worship leading, in effect, as a spin-off of management technique. And as to the ideas about worship teams, let me say that, theologically speaking, the only worship team that is worthy of the name is the congregation, the people of God who, as a corporate body raise their voices in response to a command, not in acoustical competition with (or surrender to) a select group of miked-in folks. I repeat, the attention is, first and last, to be on the Lord, so much so that worship ceases to be the primary subject, the focus, the action in itself. But when we keep ourselves steadied upon the Lord, worship gains its rightful place as the full articulation, but not the substance, of this steadiness. Left to itself, worship is a dangerous thing, for it needs an object, a preposition. For it is not how or when or with what degree of quality, variety, and imagination that we worship. It is whom we worship. It is a passion about God that finds its voice. It is the "of-God" worship that begins the separation of authentic worship from inauthentic worship. We may not be idolaters in the sense that we have consciously trampled God underfoot and replaced His entirety with our chosen and crafted interpretation of entirety. But we can, in very subtle ways, include our harvest of idols within the Judeo-Christian fundament. If we make too much of worship without making too much of God; if our attention is on how to make people worship, we have lost from

the start, even though we may have developed a dazzling musical, liturgical and methodological arsenal that would make the typical worship-techniques gurus grin like a donkey eating thistles.

What am I saying? That worship, in its diversity and variegated fullness, is unimportant? That we need to forget worship and sanctimoniously get on with the things of God and the practice of our musical craft? Not at all. Rather, I'm saying that the things of God and the practice of our craft can go in one of two directions, but not both at the same time. We can worship authentically and we can make music faithfully, or the reverse. It is well to consider that authentic and faithful participate in each other and could just as easily apply to today's topic in reverse order: faithful worship and authentic music making, for in the biblical sense, faithfulness is authenticity and authenticity is impossible without faithfulness. What then is authentic worship?

Authentic Worship

While, interestingly enough, there are no definitions of worship in the Bible, there are innumerable ones in just as many books and tracts, many of them sheer poetry. Useful and rich as they are, and with due respect, virtually all of are limited, to put it bluntly, to what goes on in church. This misses, or at most pays lip service, to a fundamental law of worship, which is the beginning of the secret to the difference between authentic and inauthentic worship. It is this: Worship is not a special event or any sequence of them. Worship is fundamental to humankind itself, so much so, that we must assume that it goes on all the time, all around us, inside of us, and, in a paradoxical way, in spite of us. So before we talk about the specificities of worship, we must first of all understand that there is no one in this world who is not, at this moment, at worship in one way or another: consciously or unconsciously, formally or informally, passively or passionately. For in a most comprehensive way, we are always giving our lives over to something or someone that we consider to be worth the most. Worship does not just apply to specific religious activities and to the deeply religious people who have strong feelings about a nameable god (Judeo-Christian or otherwise), and how that god is to be occasionally encountered, pleased, placated, served, and worshiped. In a way that goes beyond nameable liturgical activities, it applies to our deepest expressions — many of them left unseen or unsaid — of our worldview.

Furthermore, this law of worship cannot be fully understood without taking two realities into account. The first is that God originally created us to worship Him continuously. The second is about how the darkness of our departure from God cut into the splendor of this original truth. We were created to live worshipfully — not just worshiping at certain times, but continually — to be in adoring submission, serving the One whom we cannot help but adore and being adored by the One to whom we cannot help but submit. The depth and extent of this relationship is based on the uniqueness of God creating us in His image and in the indescribable intimacy that this singular act of creation made possible.

I wish there were but one indivisible word that would at once include both living and worshiping as synergies of each other, because that's what God always intended. This is

certainly what any number of Old Testament passages imply and this is certainly how Jesus lived — thirty three years a living sacrifice — no moment spent not worshipping. We were created as naturally to honor, to adore, to submit to, to depend on, to fellowship with our Maker as we were to breathe in and out; not once in seven days, but continuously; not in self-conscious God-consciousness, but in the all-encompassing wealth and quiet of the eternal moment: breath after breath; in speechless quiet, in ecstasy, in words, in deed, in art and craft, work and Sabbath, in supplication, in praise, in laughter, in sleep and in waking, in the simple things and the imponderable things, at table, and in thanksgiving. It is in this fullness of life that God intended worship to be simple, normal, all-encompassing, ongoing, and above all, simple. When I think of this kind of worship, I think of these words from Psalm 131: "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child within me."

Worship and Our Estrangement

But as we know, this fullness was profoundly wrenched from us. As suggested earlier, something is wrong that needs righting, otherwise worship would not necessitate repentance, confession, and forgiveness. This interruption, for which God's saving works are the only answer, contains an imponderable irony: Somehow in the mystery and chaos of our fall, the urge to worship was kept alive and active. We can thus be dead to God but kept alive as worshipers. We simply exchange gods, but persist in our bowing down before them, and it is God alone who can take this ponderous contradiction, sort it out, and, through His own grace and renewing, turn us back again to the continuous, therefore authentic, worship of Himself.

But the problem is not just replacing God with crafted gods, but mixing our crafted gods in with our God-talk in a curious kind of spiritualized syncretism. If idolatry is the act of shaping something that we then allow to shape us, we need to look for the ways we persist in depending on things, or acts, or buildings, or people, or music, or art, or any other thing to cause or even facilitate a state of worship, to determine the worth of our worship, or enlarge the extent of God's presence with us. And how often have we heard worship leaders talk about the power of music, of music as a tool, of creating a sequence of events that "lead up" to worship, to empower it, or even culminate it. We must not forget that we can contrive innumerable religious ways to hide these idols and to baptize them into our communion. This is why the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, and most particularly Isaiah, spend so much conceptual thought on idolatry, not just the carving of things from wood, but confusing God's handiwork and our handiwork with God Himself. While I shall return to this again, let me say it here: Depending on music to aid, induce, or enhance worship is idolatry dressed up in psycho-aesthetic finery. It confuses the power of music with the presence of God. In this culture of broken down speech and precisionless morality, where, in the words of George Steiner, music is the new literacy, we can bring ourselves to believe that without music, waves of it, gobs of it, there is no worship. How often have we heard these careless words from our so-called worship leaders: "We'll have some worship (meaning, we'll sing), then we'll pray, read

the Scripture and hear from God's servant."? This is worship-think at its worst, yet we hear it all around us. Put as simply as possible: We do not sing in order to worship, nor do we sing as if this were all worship is. We must of necessity sing because we are at worship, because God is now here, irrespective of our contrivances to get Him here.

Worship and Our Redemption

Now we come to the nub of the matter. If the urge to worship is created in each of us and if all of us are somehow at worship all the time, how do we talk about authentic worship? We cannot assume that if we can just come up with yet another creative definition, add just one more twist to our arsenal of liturgies, think good thoughts about God, push the soul's worship buzzer, repeat a call to worship, turn on the organ, strap on a guitar, fire up a synthesizer, or hire the best worship team, biblical worship will take place.

Instead, we have to return to the very root of the Truth, for this root is the root of authentic worship. It is found in both Testaments and drives the entirety of our relationship with God. Here it is, so familiar that we can lose sight of its profound significance: The righteous one shall live (therefore worship) by her faith. Let's put this another way: Faith is the only thing the righteous man shall live (therefore worship) by. Not worship times, not music, not liturgy, but faith. Whatever we do, it must be by faith. It is in the midst of completely and continuously living by faith that true worship takes place. It is living by faith that distinguishes between the mere activities of worship, and the faithful, that is, the full-of-faith condition, that turns each of them into a pleasant aroma. Living by faith means worshipping by faith, and worshipping by faith encompasses the whole of living by faith. There is simply no other option or condition for a confessing believer.

But we cannot stop here. If, among that resounding triad of faith, hope and love, love is considered the greatest of all, then love raises the whole of faithful living and continuing worship into a gracious, celebrative, unfussed, uncontrived, unmanipulated offering to the Lord. In Galatians 5:6b Paul puts it this way: ". . . the only thing that counts is faith working through (or, made effective by) love." This is the way of the Law and the Prophets and of Christ, whose ways are the ways of continued worship. This had to be what St. Paul further had in mind when he said that we are living epistles (II Corinthians 3:2,3), and it is only this kind of living that allows us to say that the best witness is overheard and overseen worship, and no amount of in-church activity will ever replace this. We must bear in mind that the Scriptures include or allude to every approach to worship there is: organized, spontaneous, public, private, simple, complex, loud, quiet, silent, brief, or extended. It is sheer presumption for us to think that, under the guise of being "contemporary" — whatever that word now means — or creative — how empty this word has become — we can come up with new ways to worship. There simply are none. The Holy Spirit saw to that millennia ago.

But of the many passages that lie at the heart of authentic worship, four in particular stand out. I want to spend a bit more time on the first one, with the idea that the remaining three add further weight. The first is Romans 12:1 where St. Paul literally begs

us to present ourselves as living sacrifices. The message is unequivocal: Whatever we do as people of faith, we do in the paradoxical condition of sacrificing ourselves as the only way of remaining alive. This verse further makes it clear that this continued act is, as most translations say, our "spiritual worship:" a life-long, faith-wide condition. This is a continuum; there is no other word for it. To use an oft-quoted phrase from one of Eric Routley's hymns, this continuum is both "duty and delight." And it means nothing other than a return to the kind of continued worship that God originally intended for us. And it can only further mean that there is now but one call to authentic worship that replaces the call that came of our estrangement. It comes when we turn away from the gods of estrangement and turn back to the God of our salvation. Since this call back to true worship comes but once (not every week, as our church bulletins erroneously suggest), we are free to understand that the carpenter, the surgeon, the garbage collector, the engineer, the artist, and the public servant are to continue their worship of God, making faithful offerings of the crafts, the constructs, and sequences of their daily work. It is a wonderful thing to know that the word liturgy was originally a secular term signifying an agreement to perform and complete some kind of ordinary service: tile setting, carpentry, and the like. Being a sacrifice for as long as we are alive constitutes our agreement to be worshipping workers, as the people of God, in all circumstances and places.

Now what about corporate worship? Does being a living sacrifice excuse us from Sunday's rounds? Not at all. Corporate worship is the necessary and sacramental widening of the everyday, all-the-day moment-by-moment walk of faith, of belief and of stewardship. Put as simply as possible, we do not go to synagogue, temple, cathedral, basilica, or church to worship. We go to these good places to continue our worship, but now corporately (that is, as a body, in a doubled communion with the Lord and with each other). We go to these places to give synergized expression to what we should have been doing all week long: praying, singing, listening, offering to the Lord, speaking, being silent, confessing, growing, and being broken. To think of church time as worship time without connecting it to the seven-day-a-week liturgy of being living sacrifices is to miss the entire biblical point of worship and to concoct an artificial parenthesis for an hour or so once a week or so. Corporate worship is irrelevant, however beautiful its protocols may be and however nourishing its sacraments are, unless it participates in the seamless life of continuous worship, and unless it is seen as a symptom of how we live and act all week long.

The second scripture is John 4:23-24, taken from Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers that the Father seeks. God is a spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth." Jesus said this, interestingly enough, in response to the woman's attempt to switch the subject from how she was living to where she worshiped, something we do all the time. She essentially reduced the issue of worship to one of location, place, time, and tradition, which is what a great deal of today's "worship talk" is about. But Jesus would have none of this. In a brief and powerful statement, He subsumed — without doing away with — the entire worship-history of time, place, tradition, and protocol under a new law: that of worship in spirit and in truth. Thus, authentic worship is a peculiar condition of life while location and

circumstance are incidental. We are not be in and out of the Spirit, or in and out of Truth. We are summoned, rather, to a continuum of spirituality and Truth-fullness.

The third scripture, Psalm 29:2, is brief and pungent: "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Once again we are brought face to face with the reality of worship as an ongoing state, simply because holiness itself is a condition to which each of us is permanently called. The beauty of holiness is not an aesthetic beauty — the holiness of beauty, neatly platonic, but sloppily scriptural. Neither is it a pinched-face, perfectionist and forbidding piety, but a state of hilarious loveliness and exemplary goodness. It is a condition brought on—mind you, these are not my words—brought on by cleansing, hungering, thirsting, wrestling, warring against, panting after, and seeking out the things of God. This is the worshipful holiness of the twenty-four hour day, the state of being redeemed, of continuing as a living sacrifice, and being led by the Spirit so as to live completely in the truth.

These three passages can now be summarized with a fourth, again from the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 10:12-15; 20-21. Verses 12-15 state in detail what St. Paul in Romans 12:1 says in principle, and I shall not quote them here. Verses 20-21 add further voice and summation: "You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen."

Let's put all of the preceding together: Authentic worship is to be undertaken as an act of love, driven by faith, architected by hope, and saturated with Truth, whatever the content, context, time, place, style, or circumstance. Our corporate worship is acceptable and effective only to the extent that we are moment-by-moment living sacrifices, doing everything in the Spirit and according to truth, seeking out the beauty of holiness as our only path and our only walk, holding fast to God, who alone is our praise and our worship. If these conditions and actions mark our entire way of living, then they will mark the entirety of our corporate worship. There is simply no exception to this principle. It is simple, uncluttered and within reach of each of us erring, estranged, but hungry and forgiven believers who by faith follow hard after the Lord of Hosts.

Once we get the faith/love/worship issue straightened out; once we submit to the scriptural principles stated above; once we truly understand that authentic worship can only lead to more and more of itself, then we may have to rethink our Church-going, as it is typically perceived and practiced, because of the ways we have separated it from the biblical concept of worship unto continuing worship, coupled to our mistaken concepts that worship can be gradually awakened with a prelude, officially announced with an introit, continued in a liturgy, culminated in a benediction and shouted into cozy memory during the postlude.

We will also come to realize that what we do in church says less about who our God is and how faithfully we serve him (or them), than what we do the rest of the week. But if we understand worship as a seamless garment, comprising all of faithful living, made

startlingly new by the Lord Himself and brought to full strength by the Spirit, then 11:00 Sunday morning, or whatever "worship time" we choose, will be something splendidly different. We shall no doubt further understand how wrong we are for working so hard at unlocking the "secret" of worship with just one more alternative, one more attraction, one more tune or texture, for those who show up in the sanctuary looking only for the secret. We shall also certainly want to keep the lines of communication between ourselves and the senior pastor as theologically clear as possible. We shall want to understand together how wrong it is to place the burden of proof so heavily on the music and musicians, on the worship style and the worship leader, instead of the Spirit, whose sovereign purpose, after all, can override or undergird any of our devices.

Now, here's the clincher. Here's where cake meets icing, and here's where we have our cake and can eat it, too. Once we understand the underlying principles of authentic worship, then we are free to come back to the plethora, the richness, the beauty, and variegated delight of the works of worship. Now we are completely free; free of them, now free to offer them; free to see them disappear as incense, immediately lost in the overwhelming presence of the Lord himself; now free to study and draw from them, and, I hope, free to thin them out, be more quiet, more at rest, less hurried, worried, and liturgically hyper-active. Only then can we declare ourselves free of the technologically steroided and often manipulative systems which substitute for, or attempt to enhance the power and quietly loving presence of, the Lord. Only then are we free — this will sound strange, I know — free to become small, powerless, and weak again, knowing that the strength and power of the Lord are made perfect in our weakness. Only then are we free to understand that true worship generates and welcomes true diversity, not because diversity is so trendy and with it, but because our worship is so cosmically boundless, so fundamentally simple, and so God-intoxicated that we have no choice but to reach for the thousand tongues, knowing that no single tongue, no single style, no single order of worship, no single anything, can begin to capture the glory and the grace.

And I respectfully insist that this magnificent diversity should be practiced in all corporate worship instead of being divided up into alternative "experiences" for those who want it just one way, for those who are simply too lazy and too self-seeking, too provincial, to enter into the disciplined joy of seeking out God and wrestling in worship, newly, diversely, and strangely. "Not in my style" or "Not in my language" or "It doesn't meet my felt needs" is fallen worship through and through. It blasphemes the name, the might, and the limitless imagination of the Uncreated Creator, and makes light of the mandates of faith that cause the strange to become familiar and familiar once more to become strange. These childish whims and whimpers miss the whole point of the life of faith, that we, along with Abraham, the prophets, the saints, and the great cloud of witnesses, are on a journey, being called out, and like our brother Abraham, not knowing where we are going, but all the while trusting God. Once we get our structures and artifacts out of the way only to regain them in the Light; once we take the burden off the gifts and lay it on to the Giver; once we fully realize that the gift is not responsible for our worship, but the Giver is; once we understand that God alone is both Means and End, Author and Finisher, Alpha and Omega; once these things become gradually clearer; and once we see and remain in the Light, we will find it shining on common ground, the

common ground of godly and authentic worship, a continuum of action upon action, faithfully and knowingly made into offering after offering, straight through this life and on into eternity.

Faithful Music Making

It is in this light that the call to faithful music making comes, laser-like, to us. Faithful music making goes way beyond great music making and the making of great music. Not that these are unimportant. But greatness, excellence, and innovation can never together be considered the *sine qua non*. These are not what's first. These, rather, are the result of what's first. If they were first, we would not be talking about the worship of God through music, but the worship of Music through god: Music with a capital "M" and God, with a little "g." The ideas of beauty as a sacrament, of beauty equaling Truth, are foreign to a Judeo-Christian worldview. But the sacraments, taking on expressions of beauty, homilies that breathe poetry while Truth is spoken, bring a smile, we can be most sure, to the Uncreated Creator, the Unimagined Imaginer and the Author and Finisher of our salvation.

Faithful music making is faith in God while for the sheer love of Him, we bring on our song. Faithful music making is faith in God, not in music. Faithful music making is not just what works or just what is good. It is working at goodness because faith demands it and knowing that what works is not to be equated to His working through it. It is not the seeking out of quality as if this, in isolated splendor, could impress God. The splattered trumpet playing, sent straight on to Jesus, in Duval's *The Apostle*, is not that much worse than the B Minor Mass, sent straight on to Yahweh, once we bring each up close to the infinite depths of the glory and majesty of God. For whatever we do when we make music, we just lisp. But lisp we must. And when this lisp is lisped by faith and in complete adoration, the Lord himself enters into the tune and transforms it. What may be flat, sharp, or cacophonous to us, is sweetness to the One to whom it is offered, to the One whose eternal work is to transform.

Faithful music making is fidelity to a call to make music for the glory of God, irrespective of talent, budget, resources, fame, or anonymity. Faithful music making is meekness and humility, not hype, swagger, and gussied up balderdash, for it is the meek who inherit and the humble who discover that God's strength is made perfect in their weakness. In these days of church growth by style change; in these times of prolonged, professionalized, and self-indulgent worship of worship, the near narcissism of big-time Gospel, the strut, the hype and swagger of consumerist Christianity, mega-this and media-that; what is it that finally counts: the size and scope of these things or the faith that proceeds with integrity, quietness, and authority? Only in recognition of these spiritual obesities and in repentance of them; only in a growing humility; only then, let the music come. Let it come in its corrected and rightful newness. Let it come in waves of excelling and bursts of newness and hilarity. Let it come, not to alert God to presence Himself with us. No! Let it come because He is now here, eternities before we can ever bring tune to our instruments or pitch to our song. Let it come because we authentically

worship and cannot wait to lift our tunes authentically and faithfully to the One who is Author and Finisher, Sin-bearer and Redeemer, Servant and Lord.

I finish by asking this question based on a story from the Old Testament: What can we learn from Jericho? The story of the defeat that contrary city cannot be fully understood without reference to the music that was made as the people marched around its walls. The story is so familiar that it need not be repeated here, except to say that music making was among the things that God told Joshua and his people to do, and the walls did not fall down until the trumpets were blown.

There are two ways to interpret the musical part of this story. One is biblical and the other is not, and I'm afraid that the latter dominates the former in present day ecclesiastical circles. The unbiblical interpretation goes this way: People blew their trumpets and brought the walls down. Simple, isn't it? It was the music that did it, by golly. It was the music that brought the culmination about and caused the crash. Isn't this what many of us say, or at least hint at, about music in worship: Bring it on so that great things will be done. Bring it on so that people will worship. Bring it on so that God will be brought on, for without it, God will be hobbled and hamstrung.

The biblical interpretation goes this way: As people blew their trumpets to God in obedience to Him, He knocked the walls down. For it is God and God alone who does the work that He wants done as we make our music, not because we make our music. Our task and our privilege is follow His commands and to bring our work and our music to Him first. Then He can do whatever He pleases and we can take no credit for what He has done. If He works mightily when music is made, let's be sure that we don't credit the music and then build on that presupposition, for if we do, we are bound to expect music to repeat the glory, when it is God's business alone never to repeat the glory, but bring an even greater glory, music or no music.

So, let the music come! Let the thousand tongues break forth! Come! Come, let us worship authentically and make music faithfully, for then we ourselves will not only sing a new song, but in a doubled cosmic anthem, we shall hear the Lord Himself break into melody, for these are the words of Zephaniah the prophet: "Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! . . . The King of Israel is in your midst; . . . he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival." **AMEN!**

Note: Church musicians are free to make copies of this article. We are grateful to Dr. Best for his generosity in this matter.