

Integration of Faith and Learning in Music

by

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I began my Christian journey at age twelve when Corrie Tin Boom visited my public grade school and gave her testimony of love and God's limitless grace. Shortly after her visit, the movie *The Hiding Place* opened in Anderson, Indiana. I remember thinking that if a person whose life had been so surrounded by hate, violence, and death could still manage to believe in the love and grace of God and that he had a plan for her life, then I could believe in this same God. Even more compelling was that this same God had a plan for my life and I could live a life for Him and with His help I could overcome the obstacles that would befall my own life. I had been raised in a Christian home and had two loving parents who loved God and each other. I had seen Christian love modeled from birth as my parents lived out their faith. It is from this meager beginning that my walk began and continues to this day.

My professional background is filled with teachers who were passionate about their music making. Most of my music teachers were Christians who taught musical topics through sacred music repertoire. To be sure, I had a healthy dose of secular music in both band and choir, but my most memorable experiences are from works with a sacred message. I am sure that my faith was integrated with my art during these rehearsals and performances. Not only because the text was sacred, but because of the inner connection that I made between the music, the text, and my heart. Works like Handel's *Messiah* and Dubois' *Seven Last Words* were annual events for my high school choir. In my memory, my high school years were a time where I grew closer to God through my church, school, and family.

William Hasker defines faith-learning integration in the following manner:

Faith-learning integration may be briefly described as a scholarly project whose goal is to ascertain and to develop integral relationships which exist between the Christian faith and human knowledge, particularly as expressed in the various academic disciplines. (231)

Hasker further explains that faith-learning integration 1) is not the cultivation of personal Christian living on the part of the faculty member, 2) does not mean using academic disciplines as a source of illustrations for spiritual truths, and 3) is not a public relations program designed to convince constituents of the Christian character of an institution (230-231). Because I am a follower of Christ, His teachings should permeate all of my life, including my decisions with regard to my teaching. Arthur Holmes would say that I am a Christian teacher and not just a teacher who happens to be a Christian (45). Because I am a Christian teacher it should affect the way I teach and also the way I interact with my peers and my students. Yet just because I am a Christian does not mean that I am automatically integrating my faith in what I teach. I must plan and be purposeful about integrating my faith into my teaching. I must endeavor to seize upon the moments in my teaching where further explanation and exploration into my faith is warranted. Holmes describes faith-learning somewhat like Hasker:

A Christian college does not exist to combine good education with a protective atmosphere, for Christians believe that the source of evil is ultimately within the heart, not without. The Christian college does not exist only to offer biblical and theological studies, for these are available in other kinds of institutions, and could be offered through adjunct programs at state universities without the tremendous expense of offerings in the arts and sciences. The distinctive of the Christian college is not that it cultivates piety and religious commitment, for this could be done by church-sponsored residence houses on secular campuses.

Rather the Christian college is distinctive in that the Christian faith can touch the entire range of life and learning to which a liberal education exposes students.

(45)

A brief survey of the ten students in my University Life class yields an interesting look at what they perceive about their reasons for coming to Huntington University. When asked about their reasons, most responded with the very things that Hasker and Holmes said were not the only things we should be about. The current students were very attracted to the protective atmosphere and the Christian character of our university. They wanted to be sheltered from evil and not have to engage in the daily battle of peer pressure placed on their moral convictions that would be put to the test at many other institutions of higher learning. Study of the Bible also ranked high on their list of important reasons for choosing Huntington. Holmes notes: "Many attend Christian colleges for reasons that are so secondary, if not altogether inadequate, that they will end up frustrated unless they can find other meaning to their education, a meaning that is large enough to carry the weight of all that college involves" (3). While I agree with Hasker's and Holmes' definitions of faith-learning integration, I do believe that most students will come initially for the same reasons stated by the students in my University Life class. However, it is our job once they arrive to help our students come to a deeper understanding of what faith learning can be about. Since I am in agreement with Hasker and Holmes, the goal of the rest of my paper will be to relate and develop the integral relationship between Christian faith and human knowledge as it relates to the field of music.

The goals of any Christ-centered music program should be (1) exaltation: involving thanksgiving, praise, and worship; (2) edification: involving teaching, encouraging, and discipleship; and (3) evangelism: involving out-reach to a lost world. The Christian liberal arts institution must strive to help all its students, regardless of major, to achieve these goals. It can

accomplish this by giving students the best education possible, an education that is both well rounded and filled with life experiences only a liberal arts education can offer. Music provides an excellent means by which students may receive the best training possible while exploring the history of their faith from a musical perspective.

The Bible holds many examples of the importance of music in the lives of God's people. The first recorded song in the Bible, Moses' song to God after the parting of the Red Sea ("Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD : 'I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.'" Ex. 15: 1, NIV), shows the importance of music in exalting God during times of victory over their enemies. Joshua and his army were commanded by God to use music and shouting to destroy the walls of Jericho: "When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed" (Josh. 6: 20). David used music to calm an angry king: "Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him" (I Sam. 16: 23). The Psalms are written as songs of worship and are the basis of numerous art songs and choral masterpieces. For example, Psalm 84:1 provided the inspiration for one of the most beautiful movements of Brahms' *Requiem*: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD." This same chapter also provided the inspiration for a contemporary worship song based on verse 10, which says, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere." In the New Testament, songs celebrated pivotal moments of faith for Zechariah as he prophesied the mission of his newborn son John to prepare the way for the Most High (Lk. 1: 68-79) and Mary's song as she rejoiced in humility with Elizabeth over the angel's news that she had been chosen to carry the Son of the Most High. (Lk. 1: 46-55). Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns to God while locked in chains in prison, only to witness the power of God to save them (Acts 16: 25). In Matthew

26:30, at the conclusion of their last meal together, Jesus and His disciples raised their voices in song, singing a traditional Jewish hymn based on Psalm 118:24, which says, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Finally, the most powerful example of the importance music in our relationship with God Almighty comes from Zechariah 3:17, which states: “The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” We worship a God Who uses music to rejoice over us! Such powerful Biblical examples serve to remind us that music is woven into the fabric of our very existence. As we grow in our faith, we learn from the rich heritage of music begun in the days of Moses that continues through the great works of contemporary composers and performers of today. All music that seeks to glorify God through exaltation, edification, and reaching the lost draws us closer to fellowship with Him.

As a professor of music, I have the opportunity to share this rich heritage of music from a Biblical perspective and help my students to see the connection between music, as a gift from God, and their own personal journeys of faith. The integration of faith is a natural by-product of teaching music, a fact that was apparent even to Plato:

Education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary. And further, because omissions and the failure of beauty in things badly made or grown would be most quickly perceived by one who was properly educated in music, and so, feeling distaste rightly, he would praise beautiful things and take delight in them and receive them into his soul to foster its growth and become himself beautiful and good. The ugly he would rightly disapprove of and hate while still young and yet unable to apprehend the reason, but when

reason came the man thus nurtured would be the first to give her welcome, for by this affinity he would know her. (qtd. in Mark 6).

Plato knew that music had the power to touch the inmost soul and that education in music could contribute to the student's aesthetic choices for the rest of their lives, i.e., it could impart knowledge about things of beauty and also heighten their aesthetic experiences. Holmes agrees in principle when he asserts that "all beauty is from God no matter where it is found, the artistic creativity of people is God's good gift" (48).

Martin Luther, the founder of the Reformation during the sixteenth century, also held music in high esteem:

Satan is a great enemy to music. It is a good antidote against temptation and evil thoughts. The devil does not stay long where it is practiced.

Music is the best cordial to a person in sadness, it soothes, quickens, and refreshes his heart.

Music is a semi-disciplinarian and school-master, it makes men more gentle and tender-hearted, more modest and discreet.

I have always loved music. He that is skilled in this art is possessed of good qualities, and can be employed in anything. Music must of necessity be retained in the schools. A school-master must be able to sing, otherwise I will hear nothing of him.

Music is a delightful, noble gift of God, and nearly related to theology. I would not give what little skill I possess in music for something great. The young are to be continually exercised in this art, it makes good and skillful people of them.

With those that despise music, as all fanatics are wont to do, I am not pleased, for music is a gift bestowed by God and not by man. So it also banishes Satan, and renders men joyful, it causes men to forget all wrath, uncharity, pride, and other vices. Next to theology, I esteem and honor music. And we see how David and all the saints clothed their pious thoughts in verses, rhymes, and songs, because in times of peace music rules. (qtd. in Mark 31-32).

So what is it about music that gives it such power over our thoughts and actions? Music can be an outpouring of our soul in thanksgiving, praise, and adoration of our Lord. It is a natural response to God's grace in our lives. The Bible is filled with instances where mankind was moved to use music to communicate with our Maker. Whether we call out to Him in times of need or we extol His deliverance from disaster, music can help us commune with our Lord. The power of music and understanding how it has been used can be found in the study of music history.

Holmes again:

History is strategic in this regard when it is studied not just as a factual chronicle of rulers and wars and dates, but more as cultural and intellectual history. In that perspective it reveals the significance of ideas and values out of which people (reflective and valuing agents, that is) have acted. It becomes a history of governing ideals, and it included the creative and redemptive influence of Christianity in the shaping of our culture. (53)

We must study our musical past in order to understand how music has shaped our current culture. When we study how the children of Israel responded to God, we can begin to understand our own response to God in our contemporary society.

The study of music history is an integral part of my daily instruction. I teach music history in all of my classes. Concert Choir, Choral Literature, Choral Arranging, Choral Methods, Middle School Methods and Choral Conducting all rely heavily on music history as a foundation for instruction. For instance, this semester in Concert Choir we are presenting a Choral Masterworks Concert. The repertoire for this performance is Schubert's *Mass in G*, Brahms' "How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place" from *German Requiem*, Handel's "Sing Unto God" from *Judas Maccabaeus*, Beethoven's "Hallelujah" from his *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, and Mozart's *Ave verum corpus*. Most non-musicians realize that we must learn the notes and sing the syllables at the prescribed time. We probably must decide when to get louder and when to sing softly. But it does not end there! In the process of rehearsing this repertoire we will also explore the lives of each composer and will delve into the texts and discuss the historical importance of each piece. We will examine and translate the text of the Latin Mass and discuss how Brahms' *Requiem* was a by-product of Martin Luther's reformation more than two hundred years after his Ninety-Five Theses were posted on the door at Wittenberg in 1517.

Holmes observes:

Be it the history of science or of philosophy or of art or whatever, we have available historical samples of faith in creative contact with learning. They give us precedents on which to build, a tradition in which we too stand. They underscore the fact that God is at work in the history of the arts and sciences, as well as in the church and the nations, and this history continues today in our own efforts at a constructive relation of faith and learning. (54)

In rehearsal we will discuss healthy vocal technique and ways to balance and blend our choral sound. Of highest importance to me is our musical expression. It is musical expression that connects the singer to the message. Without musical expression our offering will be a

clanging gong, devoid of thought or meaning. My goal at each rehearsal is to encourage the students to think about the message, to make their music an offering to God each time we meet. Sometimes it is very easy for the students to get caught up in thinking only about vocal technique or just singing the right syllable at the right time. When they perform in this manner they will not be drawn into the message of the music. I must be the catalyst that draws the singers' attention to matters of faith while they are negotiating the other demands of musical performance. It is far more than a performance, even during rehearsals; it is dedicating our gifts and talents as a praise offering to our God. Not because we want to attain a flawless performance, but because we want to offer God our very best. And only when we feel that we have honestly laid our best effort at the feet of our Master will we be satisfied.

Of the three strategies of faith-integration—compatibilist, transformationist, or reconstructionist—described by William Hasker and based on David L. Wolfe and Ronald R. Nelson's work, I feel that my discipline falls comfortably within the compatibilist strategy.

According to the compatibilist strategy, “the integrity of both faith and discipline are in large measure presupposed. And the scholar's task is one of showing how shared assumptions and concerns can be profitably linked.” As is evident from this, the compatibilist does not recognize any deep, fundamental tension between the assumptions and the procedures of her discipline and the Christian faith. She feels comfortable and ‘at home’ both in her faith and in her scholarship; her aim is to demonstrate and exhibit the unity between them which already exists, at least potentially. (Hasker 233)

Since music has been used as a form of worship throughout mankind's existence, it has a central place in many worship experiences today. Music can draw us closer to our Lord and foster a closer relationship with Him.

In the fall of 2002 the Huntington University Music Department, in conjunction with the Admissions Office, created a departmental brochure to be used as a recruiting tool. In it, we faculty shared our thoughts about what God's calling is for those who perceive God's direction in their lives for a vocation in music.

Scripture is filled with examples of individuals who worked diligently to perfect their musical skills. They achieved positions of leadership and fulfilled God's purpose by becoming accomplished musicians. Young David entered the court of King Saul because he was a skilled harpist. Kenaniah achieved ministry leadership because of his great skill in singing. I Chronicles 25 describes hundreds of vocalists and instrumentalists, "all of them trained and skilled musicians for the Lord." The Hebrew word "maskil," meaning to become wise or skillful by instruction, is found in more than a dozen Psalms referring to music. Music is a high calling. It enriches our lives, cheers our darkest days, stirs our emotions, and stimulates our intellect. Music shapes our culture. Our world needs skillful musicians, men and women who can compose wisely and perform well. ("Huntington College n.p.)

In reviewing this text, I am reminded of Paul's letter to the Romans, where he writes: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" (12: 6a). In turn, Holmes' more recent musings come to mind:

Especially in performance areas and in the disciplined development of skills (although certainly not only there), the attitude of the teacher or student is the initial and perhaps most salient point of contact with the Christian faith. . . . A positive, inquiring attitude and a persistent discipline of time and ability express the value I find in learning because of my theology and my Christian commitment. (Holmes 47)

Getting students to buy into hard work is very difficult at times. Music majors are known for long hours and schedules that do not leave much time for extracurricular activities. All kinds of motivational techniques and encouragement are used to help the students run the races that God has set before them. Holmes reminds us that it is important to help students realize that there is a season for everything and that at this time in their lives God wants them to increase in knowledge and skill.

The first task of integration is at the personal level of attitude and motivation. . . . Somehow or other the student must realize that education is a Christian vocation, one's prime calling from God for these years, that education must be an act of love, of worship, of stewardship, a wholehearted response to God. (Holmes 49)

Students must understand that their education is their vocation for the time being and their devotion to their craft will bring honor and glory to God. Once they are focused on their education as their mandate from God, they realize that what they are learning and how they are learning to learn has a direct impact and benefit on their future quality of life. Hopefully, by the time they graduate, our students will be capable of the higher learning skills of analysis and synthesis and will use these learned skills to problem solve in their future life's journeys.

During the brief years we have to assist them in their search for knowledge and truth, we can also help them see the value of learning how to use their gifts and talents to bring glory and

honor to Christ Jesus. Music has the power to elevate the human experience by drawing us closer to God as our Creator, Redeemer, and Lord; conversely, music can also drive us far from Him through our sinful nature. Holmes cautions that “sin occurs not when we enjoy created things but when we misuse them. The sin, in fact, is in not valuing as we should the resources God has made” (14). Students ultimately still have the power to choose. If they choose the former, then they will experience the joy and blessing that comes from that decision. If they see the value of integrating their faith with their music, then we as their faculty and mentors have succeeded.

Works Cited

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