

THOUGHTS ON MUSIC AND WORSHIP

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In considering the future of music in the Church worship service, a brief inquiry into the scriptures is necessary if musical objectives are to be rooted firmly in the rich soil of doctrinal truth. Too often in the past, the use of music in church worship has been based upon the shifting sands of personal prejudice or the diverse opinions and philosophies of men rather than upon a sure scriptural foundation.

From the beginning God ordained worship as the way back into His presence, instructing Adam and Eve to "repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore" (Moses 5:8). This is an eternal commandment which has been reiterated as the greatest of all commandments down through the ages, yet it is the least understood. The scriptures are replete with examples of individuals and groups who have regained Christ's presence through calling upon His name, receiving the Spirit, hearing His voice, conversing face to face with Him, and in some instances even regaining the presence of the Father as well while still in mortality.

Although it is an individual responsibility, worship is also a family and a corporate or assembly commandment. As "all have not faith," we are commanded to meet together to call upon the name of the Lord, and to teach one another in an established house of prayer upon His holy day. He has promised to be in our midst, ready to draw near to us if we draw near to Him (D & C 88:62-78, 118). From this we can conclude that the objective of a sacrament meeting (worship service) is to "realize" His presence, to effect a communion (or spiritual experience) between the worshipers and God. It follows that everything said and done in this worship service should help each member of the congregation to obtain a personal religious experience. This is the criterion of judgment, the ideal toward which we should strive. It is necessary for us to make this preparation if we are to be ready to come into the presence of the Lord.

Music, primarily hymn singing, supplemented by choirs and instruments, has always been associated with worship, even in the Council in Heaven, not as an ornament or entertainment, but as a functional, essential means of calling upon or communicating with God. It has also been ordained of Him for the purpose of teaching His gospel to His children.

Music has an exciting destiny in heralding the Second Coming of the Savior. The "redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion," "with songs of everlasting joy," with "acclamations of praise singing Hosanna to God and the Lamb." In that glorious day not just a few chosen singers, but all the righteous who remain to meet Him shall "lift up their voice[s]" to sing a new song.¹ Since music in

worship is ordained of God, it is necessary for us to tune not only our hearts, but also our voices and instruments in preparation to meet Him. Understood and functionally utilized, music can be a most potent instrument to help prepare the Saints for this marvelous event.

The first responsibility of the Latter-day Saint church musician, then, is to understand that the term "worship" means communing with God, attaining a closer personal relationship through the aid of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally this has not been understood by the leadership or by musicians of the Church. Too often hymns have been selected randomly at the last minute and with little or no consideration of their relationship either to the service or to other hymns in the service. Likewise, prelude and postlude music and musical numbers too often have been selected for their entertainment, educational or aesthetic value alone rather than for the contribution they can make as an aid to or as an act of worship.

Latter-day Saint church music is yet in its infancy, historically speaking. There are now many proficient singers, instrumentalists, composers and musicologists in the Church, but very few of these have specialized training in church music. There is a great need for educational programs that would make such training available. This is not as difficult a task as it may seem. There are many good books on the general subject of church music. Also, a number of Latter-day Saint candidates for advanced degrees in religion, history, and music have unearthed a rich store of primary research materials. These theses and dissertations are readily available for the preparation of textbooks which deal specifically with Latter-day Saint worship and music.

The Church school system is well established and functioning with many schools, seminaries and institutes in various countries of the world, serving in 1976 nearly a half a million students. From this vast number there are many potential church musicians. BYU and other Church colleges have faculty and facilities for training church musicians. What is needed now are a curriculum specific to church music and expansion of the teaching staff to take advantage of the increasing number of young musicians who have not only musical ability but a desire to serve the Church.

In addition to courses now available at BYU, suggested specific courses could include Latter-day Saint Worship, from a doctrinal and practical point of view; Hymnology, based on traditional Christian as well as indigenous Mormon sources; Service Playing, a course for organists emphasizing techniques of hymn and choir accompaniment, preludes and postludes, with information on sources of high-quality, but not necessarily difficult service music; and Choir Directing, a course including vocal and rehearsal techniques and sources of good choral literature of easy to difficult dimension.

With the organization of the new Church Music Department, many badly needed improvements are being made in church music, including a new hymnbook, and, hopefully, hymnbooks not only for the center stakes of Zion, but for all cultures in the world-wide Church, in their own idioms. Much good is coming from the efforts of the best qualified musicians of the Church, but we need many more music specialists. If we are to adequately prepare the Saints to sing a new song to the Lord, we must have a dynamic training program.

In a talk to the faculty of BYU in 1967, President Spencer W. Kimball gave us a glimpse of the goal: "For long years I have had a vision of the BYU greatly increasing its already strong position of excellence till the eyes of all the world are upon us.

President John Taylor so prophesied, as he emphasized his words with this directive:

You mark my words, and write them down and see if they do not come to pass. You will see the day that Zion will be far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters.

God expects Zion to become the praise and glory of the whole earth, so that kings hearing of her fame will come and gaze upon her glory. . . .²

The challenge for the contemporary Church to strive for this ideal was given by Richard L. Evans in the following statements, made in 1961 and 1966, respectively.

We must have the courage to look at all programs in the light of present needs, . . . even if it means reappraisal, and perhaps, if the First Presidency so suggests, a redistribution, a redefinition, and an abridgement in unessential areas, a better use of time, of effort, and energy. . . .

I am thinking of a phrase: flexibility and firmness. These the Church must have: the flexibility of change, to meet conditions as they come, with firmness of principles and of instruction and of gospel précepts and commandments, never tampering with the solid foundations, but ever keeping flexible in meeting current conditions and being discriminating as between what is superstructure and what is bedrock foundation, and always being prepared to make the necessary adjustments between the two. . . .³

Preparation and knowledge with faithfulness, are infinitely better than just faithfulness alone. . . . I would challenge young men and women to succeed. I see no virtue in mediocrity. The Lord God gave man the earth and told him to subdue it, and he isn't likely to subdue it with a dull instrument. I would say to this generation, old and young: In faithfulness and righteousness, prepare and improve yourselves for service.⁴

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we musicians should be willing to consecrate our time, talents and even our financial means for the most important activity of man—worship. We must help the Saints to develop a vital personal relationship with the Savior through the skillful and relevant employment of that most glorious and potent gift.

¹2 Ne. 8:11, Isa. 52:7-10, Mosiah 15:28-31, D. & C. 84:98-102; D. & C. 101:17-19; D. & C. 109:79.

²"Education for Eternity," Brigham Young University, September 12, 1967.

³One Hundred Thirty-first Semi-Annual Conference Report (October, 1961), pp. 82-85.

⁴"Build Life for Service," *The Improvement Era* (December, 1966), p. 1120.