

Plato, on Music

“Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, gaiety and life to everything.

It is the essence of order, and leads to all that is good, just and beautiful, of which it is the invisible, but dazzling, passionate and eternal form.”

CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP AND MUSIC EDUCATION

Vida Chenoweth, Ph.D.

"Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the universe and wings to the mind." - Plato

A scholar pursues learning, learning that never ceases. Can we establish that knowledge is a good and desirable thing for a Christian? God was pleased with Solomon who chose wisdom and knowledge when God promised to grant him any request. In the book of Proverbs we read that it is not good to be without knowledge; in the same book (4:5) we are told to get wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and knowledge are not identical. Knowledge is gained through experience or association; wisdom is discernment. The Christian scholar recognizes that wisdom is from God.

A scholar's first task is to humble himself to learning; for without humility there is no learning.

The music scholar seeks to learn the art of playing and of how music is composed. When we speak of Christian music we generally are making reference to a Christian text set to music or to instrumental music which infers such or is a personal means of praise. To a Christian artist, his music is a means of prayer as he recognizes the Author of his talent. This music has a serious content, is devout and void of egocentricity.

In the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul encourages the people of Ephesus to sing or recite psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." There is little we can take with us to Eternity, but the Apostle John was given a vision of the people singing and making music at the throne of God (Rev. 5:14,15). Music is an eternal gift that should be returned to the Giver as an offering.

But all schools are not open to an acknowledgement of God! Yet, the students will observe the teacher who may be their only example of a Christian. From him or her, they will receive some of the Christian attributes of patience, respect, and kindness. These attributes often couple with teaching great music and fostering the talent of a student. It is not uncommon for the music teacher to be a guiding influence for the life of a student. Music is powerful.

The experiences of a musician should be stimulated by history which has inspired musical forms, practices and theories of music. All of these contribute to an understanding of the practice of music. Not only history, but the influence of other disciplines help to shape musical ideas and methods. The impact of painters and writers is often the stimulus of musical practices. Even fields such as linguistics, mathematics and physics help to illumine one's musical perspectives and imagination.

The responsible church musician contributes to the unity and high purpose of the church and, with the Spirit of God, is an agent in corporate worship for attaining that awesome awareness of being in the presence of God, a rare experience, remindful of the account in II Chronicles, chapter 5:

"It came to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying,

'For He is good;

For his mercy endureth forever;'

that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."