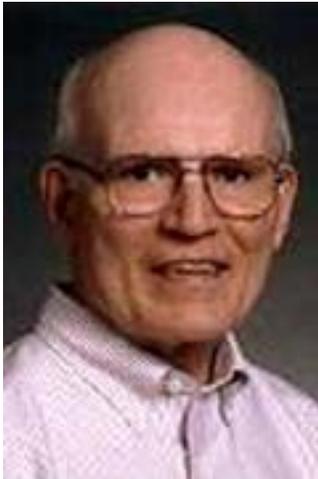


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## *Music for worship: sentiment or sentimentality; restrained or unrestrained; old or new; a search for principles*

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We have been passing through a neo-classic era in music. The musical pendulum has swung to the far right. Romantic music has often been viewed with suspicion especially by the hard-core neo-classicists and some liturgical experts who consider it "sentimental" and unfit for worship.

One cannot imagine music without sentiment. It would be an academic exercise of no artistic value: music by robots for robots. Music devoid of feeling is a naked skeleton without flesh and blood without life.

Now, there are many degrees and kinds of sentiment. So-called "intellectual" music has sentiment. There is a definite kind of feeling one derives from the neatly turned melodies and the occasional teasing of Mozart. There is power in a Bach fugue, and a certain intellectual delight in following the threads that make up this tapestry of sound. And in the Romantic era, sentiment is brought forth with less apology. There is the sonorous yearning of Wagner or the bombast of Berlioz.

There is nothing wrong with sentiment. It is human to have feelings; it is inhuman not to. But when does sentiment become sentimental? When the artist tries to clothe his work with more feeling than it or he really has. This is insincerity - a kind of fakery. Time has a way of showing it up for what it is.

Restrained and unrestrained is another set of terms that needs some thought - especially in the religious field. It seems to me that these are nothing more than sanctimonious substitutes for the terms Classic and Romantic respectively. All too often - for my blood, at least the term unrestrained is used to signify an enemy of the liturgy.

Where did this attitude originate? The noted musicologist, Manfred Bukofzer, seems to have the answer. It came with the advent of the Baroque era. Bukofzer points out that the Renaissance was the last era of stylistic unity. Therefore, it has been "glorified as the paradise lost of music." This unity

expressed itself in a self-reliant attitude on the part of Renaissance composers toward musical style. In the Renaissance, style was taken for granted.

However, with the advent of the Baroque era, this old style was not cast aside, but rather deliberately preserved as a "second language" the *stile antico* of Church music. The Baroque era, then, becomes one of style-consciousness with its *stile antico* and *moderno*, as well as later distinctions between Church, chamber, and theatre music. Bukofzer concludes: "The misleading idea that a certain style is in itself more proper for the Church than any other came forth in the style-conscious Baroque period, and the same idea continues to afflict us today."

Other than this, I have never received an adequate explanation for the idea that our music for worship must be marked with restraint. When did our Lord teach us that the basic principle of our worship of him or of our service to our neighbor is restraint? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment." I find here no words of restraint for worship and life. Why can't the Kyrie, for example, sometimes be an impassioned plea? "Lord, have mercy!" A timely outcry indeed!

I'm not at all convinced that Georgian chant (beautiful as it is) or purposefully restrained (and often extremely dull) music can best and most clearly convey the words of eternal truth to contemporary man.

Drama? I think we need a little! We need a trumpet blast in some of our introits. We need the spice of some dissonance in our *Gloria in Excelsis*. We need to be brought to our feet. The Church of Jesus Christ is getting far too pudgy from sitting so comfortably in padded pews.

J.B. Phillips somewhere has pointed out that it was not times of persecution that ate away the strength of the Church. Those were the times when men had to stand up and be counted. Rather, the dangerous times are when the Church rots from within by becoming established and comfortable in the world. Paul Scherer once said that "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine" would better be "Blessed disturbance, I am his!"

And finally, there is always the argument between the old and new. In the past century, there was revival of the Classic and Gothic styles of architecture. A revival in art may be defined as a romantic association with the remote past.

Regarding this pre-occupation with the past, Otto Spaeth points out that the parishioner of today drives a streamlined car and flies in jet planes. He works in offices and factories where maximum efficiency and good working conditions are the order of design.

*Yet every Sunday he is asked to hurl himself back centuries to say his prayers in the pious gloom of a Gothic or Romanesque past. The clear implication is that God does not exist today; he is made out to be a senile old gentleman dwelling among the antiques of his residence, one whom we visit each week out of sentiment and then forget since he obviously has no relation to the normal part of our lives.*

Perhaps the same charge can be made of the music we use for worship Sunday after Sunday.

It is good that we seek basic principles for the music we use in Church. But the basic argument is not really between the old and the new or the restrained and unrestrained. It is, rather, between the good and the bad - the meaningful and the meaningless. Let's work from there, never forgetting that we can become more involved in worship principles than in worship itself. God is a Spirit who is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. And that, after all, is the crux of the matter.

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