The whole world is a theatre for the display of the divine goodness, wisdom, justice, and power, but the Church is the orchestra ... the most conspicuous part of it.

John Calvin

God exalts His Church to preeminence by ways and means unknown to men, in order that His power may be magnified in this weakness.

John Calvin

The church is born of the Word of promise through faith, and is nurtured and preserved by this same Word. This means that the promises of God make the church, not the Church the promise of God; for the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church. In this Word the church, as a creation, has nothing to establish, ordain, or make, but is only to be established, ordained, made.

Martin Luther

Although it may not be in our power to cleanse the Church of God, it is our duty to desire her purity.

John Calvin

He who would have, and is in search of, a church in which no dissension and no difference exist among preachers, no insincerity against the First Table, and no outrage, and wickedness against the Second Table, will never find his church.

Martin Luther

There are two bases for the assertion stated in my title. Music has a psychological power to teach. We can often remember the music, sometimes word for word, and yet forget most of what the pulpit minister—even the very best—has said. This is not to denigrate the quality or role of discursive preaching. It does, however, point up the fact that music has greater power to inculcate.

Music has a scriptural mandate to teach.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Eph. 5:18-20).

In a similar passage Paul says:

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16).

An honest reading of these passages makes it difficult to escape the didactic function which the apostle Paul accorded to singing. What about “psalms?” The addressee would have reasonably understood it to mean “The Psalms,” not rhymed psalmody in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English to tunes composed in Geneva in the sixteenth century. Setting aside the debate over strict psalmody, this much is abundantly clear: The Psalms embrace a very wide range of subject matter, and as such, should be our paradigm in contemporary church music practice.

It appears then that the chief musician bears the same load and responsibility of teaching as the pulpit minister, yet with different means. Therefore, the chief musician must be prepared and examined as thoroughly as the pulpit minister. The
The Chief Musician Is a Pastor-Teacher

particulars will differ in obvious points, and will intersect in
others.

What is the profile of a competent chief musician?  
*The chief musician knows what to teach*, having one finger
on the pulse of the congregation, another on the pulse of
Holy Scriptures, and is a partner with the pulpit minister in
every way. Indeed, his power to inculcate sets the table for
the work of the pulpit minister. Conversely, the cool reason­
ing of the pulpit minister applies what has been inculcated
by the musician. Together they edify the body.

Not only does the chief musician know what to teach, he
is able to furnish music necessary to that wide range of
teaching. The simple fact is, not even the best prefabricated
materials will fit his congregation exactly. In the same way
that God places a specific man in the pulpit to minister to a
congregation with his unique personality, so the musician
must be able to furnish uniquely tailored music.

Big Caveat: This may very well mean that the congrega­
tion sometimes will dislike the music in much the same way
that good preaching should displace us from our comfort
zone from time to time. That is a necessary feature of
growth. The music must embark upon verbal teaching
which may not feel good musically but must, nonetheless,
be spoken to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual
songs. This is truly relevant, truly contextual church music.

*In the same way that a pulpit minister must design mes­sages to meet the needs of a specific congregation, so the chief
musician must be able to compose specific music.* Many
Christians recoil at the thought of a preacher reading a
sermon from A to Z by someone else. And yet, strangely
enough, this is the normal practice in church music. This is
not to assert that music by other musicians and from other
ages has no place. A good sermon embraces the wisdom of
other Christian thinkers but remains the product of a unique
individual whom God uses to minister to a unique congre-
gation. Music composition is to music what homiletics is to
preaching.

The chief musician must not only know what to teach and
be able to compose music to furnish that teaching, *he must be
able to perform or organize performance of that music so
that congregational singing will succeed.* Because of the
command to "speak to one another," congregational sing­
ing remains supreme. Solos give the parishioner extra
opportunities to "check out" or to be distracted (usually by
idiosyncratic performance). A word of caution: If the chief
musician is introducing unfamiliar music which is necessi­tated by the teaching, the time dimensions of corporate
worship will need to accommodate learning. There are
ways to reduce the shock of this such as teaching choirs
first, using soloists to introduce the music to the congrega­
tion, singing the new music casually during a prelude time,
etc. Nevertheless, there does come a time when the congre­
gation must brace itself for learning. And the leadership of
that congregation must be supportive because the congre­
gation, often, will not initially be so.

One final observation: the points above are in descend­ing order of importance. And yet the overwhelming perva­sive practice in the broad visible church is the opposite.
While I cannot claim music as a first cause, it comes as no
surprise that the overall visible Western church is growing
neither in size nor in ethics. What else should we expect
when we so easily squander such power of inculcation on
worldly blandishments and on texts with a narrow range of
teaching? What would our divorce rate in the church be if
twenty times a year we turned to look each other in the eye
singing, "You shall not commit adultery?"
Author
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