

Sacred Music

I use the word "Sacred" in "Sacred Music" to refer to the Triune God who reveals Himself both in Nature (all of it) and in Christian Scripture (all of it). Sacred music, in contrast to Christian Music [above], is that music which conveys a sense of this God. Sacred Music is music that conveys the Transcendence, the utter Holiness of God, His Altogether Otherness. Sacred Music makes you aware you are in the presence of the overpowering Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. This awareness leaves you in silence, still and motionless. It is neither exciting nor meditative, but powerful and stirs the spirit within, convicting the heart of personal sin and giving the worshipper a sense of frailty and mortality. Sacred Music leads to repentance and confession and submission to God and an openness to receiving the Word of God and motivation for obeying it. These are the signs of Sacred Music. It is music that leads to an Isaiah 6 experience. *1 I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" [The emotional high point in our Anglican Liturgy for me is singing the Sanctus. It is the one place where I raise up my arms] 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"*

The music that has this effect on the worshiper is a combination of solid Biblical Theology (lyrics) conveyed through appropriate sounds or musical settings. Such music would be "Sacred". And what would be Sacred Music? Primarily, the Psalms, which I assure you contain much about Christ, the Gospel and Salvation. Sacred Music also includes those Hymns whose lyrics (usually based on the Psalms) and music meet the same criteria of great Theology and great arrangements, such as Handel's Messiah or Bach's Oratorios and Luther's Chorales. [Note: I agree with Luther that singing is meant to be congregational. Sacred Music requires that churches make the effort to teach and train their members to sing.]

Worship is an event in which God Himself, not simply doctrine about God, is made known. This revelation is verbal and cerebral, but it is also experiential (which is not to say it is subjective). This experience is vertical, not horizontal and it is with God, not solipsistic (confined within oneself). Worship is God-directed, not other- or self-directed. We are not responding to each other or to our inner self. We are confronted by the Living God who is above, beyond and greater than us, as well as with us in the Sanctuary. Worship is responding to Him. We share this experience with others assembled. It is edifying to all. We have a fellowship, but it is not in ourselves, it is in the God whom we are worshipping.