

Intimations of Heaven

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 April 2015

Preacher: Edward Norman

[0 : 00] Well, it's a great privilege, always, and a great honour to speak at these events, and I feel often under-equipped to do so.

But, I do bring a passion for music to the subject, so I hope that will carry me through. More than that, we pray and hope our Lord will be in our midst.

Because I think the topic is helpful, and the topic is important. But I did promise myself, I also promised the Lord that I would not be negative this time.

As I have so often been. So, what I wrote was, the scandal of the church situation in music. Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry. The rich panoply of various styles which prevail in the church.

No, I thought better not do that. But there is a hidden point, perhaps not so hidden, which is that when a student enrolls in an undergraduate course in music, I think it's still true, although I wouldn't be surprised if some political correctness has crept in.

[1 : 12] They have to buy a foundational book, a history of Western music. Now, if they're going to specialize in ethnic music, that will come on top of that platform.

But they buy these books, there are several of them, very distinguished. What you're really reading is the history of the Western church, up until about, roughly, 1750.

So, the church, the Latin church, primarily, though not solely, generated and patronized the arts.

And the language of music, coming out of plainchant and coming out of the early medieval polyphony forms, started to move through the Renaissance into the secular field.

But with the death of, and this, I'm sure, was not contrived, with the death of Handel and Bach, J.S. Bach, that's 1750, 1759.

The music, quite suddenly and abruptly, moves out of the church and the cathedral into the concert hall and the opera house and the recital room.

[2 : 22] And in the 19th century, you start to see huge developments in music in terms of orchestral, orchestration, techniques, form, expansion of form, and an expansion of dramatic expression.

Meanwhile, alas, in the church, the music has stayed where it was around 1750, with a lot of imitators of Handel, and not so much Bach, but Handel, certainly, and a kind of stultification.

And it stays that way, really, in the English-speaking world until the late 19th century, when under people like Hubert Parry and C.B. Stanford, the church music starts to revive.

France went through a similar downswing, but at a secular level. You had the churches and cathedrals sometimes turned into palaces of entertainment. Church music fell away, but there were symphonic and secular, if you will, musical developments, which brought that music along.

It came a bit slower in the English-speaking world, but there were hymns, yes, of course. But in terms of significant blocks of influence and enterprise moving the whole discipline along, the church kind of lost it after the death of Bach and Handel.

[3 : 50] It's beginning to recover it in some very wonderful ways. And, of course, all through these timelines there are exceptions to the rule, but it's just a very broad thing. The Western mode of music, it seems to me, speaking around long enough, offers such a rich panoply of expression, expressive tools which are unrivaled.

You have timbre, well, first of all, form, length, can be any length, or can be very short. It's not dictated by commercial radio, as most pop music has been historically.

You've got to get the adverts in, so you don't want songs that are too long. They must fit on to a 10-inch 78 disc. It's not bound by that.

The orchestration is rich. You have strings, winds, percussion, brass. You have numerous exotic additions to that. This is, in some way, part of the uniqueness of what we loosely call classical

music.

You have a huge range of dynamics, from almost inaudible, as you'll hear in the course of the music, to triple forte, which you will also hear in a minute.

[5 : 09] And I could go on. You see the point. It's a palette, an artist's palette, of immense richness. And it owes a huge amount of that variety and richness to its Christian heritage and rootedness.

But many things happen subsequently, sometimes, though within the secular realm, with an eye to the church, or through the personal faith of the composer.

Say, a Mendelssohn. That's just one example. What I wanted to show was the attributes of our Lord God, insofar, in a limited way, they can be reflected or have been reflected in certain kinds of music. And one of those aspects, of course, is our Lord's power, his holiness, perhaps more than any other aspect. His intolerance for evil, the fact that evil cannot go away and think it will not be accountable. It will be. So, when Thomas Tallis, 16th century composer, who lived, of course, in time for the Reformation, took his skills and submitted them, if you will, to the impulses of the day, which were that, let me just quote from Matthew Donovan, the, excuse me, just look, I've lost the spot.

[6 : 48] Ah! I won't waste time. Can't find it. Doesn't matter. There was an insistence that the texts, if we're going to have choral music, if we're going to have music to listen to in the course of worship, there must be clarity, and there must be emphasis given to the text.

So, the tendency was to come away from detailed, florid music, pre-Reformation music, and go for a more homophonic, as it's called, style, where the words really come through clearly.

Here is Thomas Tallis's Let God Arise and His Enemies Be Scattered. What? It is. Let's not.

It is. CHOIR SINGS The Lord with water flow, Against his Christ may go.

Just a short little piece. The clarity of the words shaped the music. It's interesting to see how other people have moved through an expression of God's wrath.

[8 : 42] A God who will bring judgment. This is how Verdi sees the Dies Irae, the Day of Wrath.

It's a bit slow and they uptake this thing. Come on. It's quite a long way from the 16th century.

The Day of Wrath That Day will dissolve the world in ashes, As David and the Sybil prophesied.

The Day of Wrath That Day will dissolve the world in ashes, As David and the Sybil prophesied.

The Day of Wrath That Day will dissolve the world in ashes, As David and the Sybil prophesied.

So, here, way on into the 19th century, Giuseppe Verdi is able to take advantage of the expanded symphonic orchestra, The huge dynamic range that that offers, With the percussion and the extra brass and the doubling of instruments, Especially in the woodwinds and brass.

[10 : 41] A huge chorus. And I think through this kind of music we get, In our limited perception, Just a glimpse of how our Lord will appear on that day.

It's not enough, but it's a help. Okay, now that's all.

We go a step further to Hector Berlioz. And this is how he sees the trumpet.

A trumpet shall sound. Vast, huge, antiphonal off-stage groupings.

Thank you.

[12 : 15] It gives a new dimension to the oft-heard phrase if you're a music director, the organ's loud. Chuba Mirum.

Chuba Mirum.

Chuba Mirum.

Save Me, O Font of Pity. I'm sorry to cut these, but we have to keep moving. Interesting glimpse through the art form of only a glimpse of judgment.

What's so thrilling about that music is that the composer has decided that this is weighty, that the issues involved are serious, there is no time here for sweet reflection, that there is an alarm element in it all, and there is a wake-up call.

[14 : 33] So, there we are on the matter of wrath. How, then, has the Lord have mercy on us been reflected through time?

There are so many examples that I feel almost negligent in skipping through things like this, but I just have to. This wonderful one, for me, is Bach's B Minor Mass.

Right at the start. Chiriae, lay us on the Greek text.

You can just feel the kind of... So, we have the minor key, G Minor, B Minor, and this kind of massive cry at the beginning, and then Bach writes a fugue.

So, there's this tendency to fall type of phrase, kind of imploring phrase. There's the next entry in the dominant key.

[16:05] And clearly in Bach's mind, many scholars have gone into this, and there's no time here to examine it, the fugue means much to Bach, as it probably did to many of his contemporaries.

The symbolism in music in the Baroque era, Bach died in 1759, is... 1750, wasn't it? 1685, 1750. It's very, very important. Kind of sharing of ideas back and forth, not just one line, but a shared exchange of an idea.

His famous example is the Trinity fugue for the organ, the St. Anne fugue. It's in four parts, but the whole work, the whole fugue is in three segments, it's in three flats, and it's in a triple meter. And that, the interval of a third frequency, the counterpoint, the sixth. That kind of symbolism was the bread and butter of the creative bench, if you will, of these composers, but particularly of Bach.

[17:16] So the instruments state this kind of reflective interchange, four statements of the theme, and then the choir comes in, the tenors first.

This has been conducted by the Tokyo Baroque Ensemble. Suzuki is a conductor, a Christian, and I think amongst other Japanese musicians, having become Christians, in part through studying the music of Bach.

There are the altos. There's an organist in Japan who became a Christian through studying the organ music of Bach. So there's some inherent goodness in the music.

And of course, we have to mention, I'm going to mention, Roger Scruton would be very pleased with me, you cannot avoid the issue of beauty. There's beauty here. You could spend all day defining that.

I would commend Roger Scruton's YouTube, I think it's a BBC documentary, on beauty. which he mischievously presents largely in the Tate Modern Gallery.

[18:48] So, talk about being negative. But he, it's a wonderful documentary. We've shied away from that.

Oh, it's subjective. You can't say what's beautiful. Yes, you can. And this is. For me, personally, this could just go on.

I... Bach seems at pains not to draw attention to himself, and in order to do that, crafts his music so intricately, so perfectly.

As so much, is so often the case with the arts, the better it is, the less it draws attention to the executives. So you're free to get a glimpse of heaven.

A good performance helps. There was a romantic tendency to take these things desperately slowly.

[20:00] I think the scholarship behind this has yielded a very sane approach to that lovely music. Now, there's a fascinating composer, didn't I?

Schnittke. I didn't bring the actual disc. I've got it here. I've got the music here. Schnittke, S-C-H-N-I-T-T-K-E, a Russian composer who died in 1998, had a career under the Soviet regime which, like for so many musicians, ended up in great unhappiness.

But, his father was posted diplomatically to Vienna where he suddenly caught this love of music.

Later on, in great ill health, he became a Christian and wrote basic, based on the Russian Orthodox traditions, a set of psalms.

It's called psalms, but they're really poems. And this is Oh Lord, I'm sorry, I've gone and left the text behind.

Anyway, it's essentially saying, you'll hear it, Oh wretched man that I am, will you have mercy on me. This is what his...

[21:29] Here, dissonance is used. I mean, evident dissonance, sustained dissonance.

because this is no laughing matter. Oh, because this is no laughing matter. heavy man never Oh, he got you in prepared hold music on.

CHOIR SINGS It has something of that Russian Orthodox Rachmaninoff style Vespers sound.

Solemn, rich and above all a deep thread of lament. Something which I think we have lost a bit, not just in our music.

Crying for mercy. Very difficult music. Another glimpse of heaven, which is that there's the power and the glory, but there is also our situation before our triune God.

[23:52] It's the intensity, it's the depth, it's the further dimension which these composers, I think, have caught. No easy access into God's presence.

In one sense, of course, it is easy and wonderful, but in another sense, we can't saunter into God's presence. And I think most of these composers have caught that. It is, in fact, a strain of modesty in the work, which should, I think, always feed into or mark true creativity.

This is a very interesting work by John Tavener, a British-based composer who died recently, converted to Russian, sorry, converted to orthodoxy. His choral works are fascinating. Just listen to a bit of this. This is another lament. It's an ode. So he's using chant, Byzantine-style chant. And the choir will come in. I'm just going to let this run for a while.

[25 : 18] What we'll hear is a choir responding with this beautiful phrase, again, imploring mercy. But it has this kind of effect.

And the next time, it's down in pitch. And it comes in. Next time, it's down in pitch a bit further. Huge melismas.

Huge melismas. Huge mel wisdom.

When we thank you for inviting ■■■■, it can only be the best God's name, but the Pete ■■■■ is one of theuve.

Such talent within you, such a degree. He took all my power, and I will exult eternity.

[26 : 49] The thing I love about Orthodox worship is it goes on.

Have mercy on me, O Lord. I will exult eternity.

I will exult eternity. It's a bit like a litany.

The ode is a major performance form, I mean a composition form, poetic form in the Reformed worship tradition.

Orthodox worship tradition. So we have a contrast of the single line, monody, and the choral response of the people, if you like.

[28 : 11] I thought that they could easily join in.

Come, wretched soul, with thy flesh confess to the maker of all. And from now, thee, I must call thee, and bring tears only share.

I was speaking to a young Christian, recently out of UBC, who has become Orthodox. who is explaining the four-hour services that she's been going through, because it's their Easter.

So the peace is getting lower and lower and lower. The peace is getting lower and lower.

There's no metrical going on. And there's no slap beat. And there's no slap beat. I find that almost static in its impact.

[29 : 31] That is, you think, you become... It's sort of timeless. I don't quite know how to express it. But it's a dimension of the world.

And there's no place in the world. And there's no place in the world. I don't know how to express it. But it's a dimension of worship.

And I think an aspect of heaven. That is, our time-driven existence, including time-driven worship, doesn't allow for readily.

You can't put this on every week in church. But its place in the artistic contribution to life is, I think, very, very rich.

Others... This is another one I'd like us just to spend a moment listening to. Have another approach. This comes from a very sensuous, you might say, harmonic language.

[30 : 33] But knowing that the man was a devoted Christian, affected nonetheless. Maurice de Ruffley's Kyrie, you know, the opening of our communion service.

Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us. This, however, from the Requiem. So there is, let light eternal shine on the deceased.

But you get this very, very rich... This very, very rich palette. It seems to have a great sun a-stheaded smoke at the ■■■■ede also.

It doesn't let me, very rich■■■■■■... It wants a rain and shine on the sides... for the glowing light on the earth.

Maurice de Ruffley, 20th century composer, organist and music director at La Trinité in Paris.

[31 : 54] A very self-critical composer, destroying much of what he wrote. He and his wife toured as wonderful organists.

A very modest couple, the music quite intricate. David Poon has played a toccata of de Ruffley's recent history here.

So there is the Liberame playing chart which has been woven into the whole texture.

So there's a kind of reference to that which is in the creativity. So the effect really is ethereal.

So the effect really is ethereal.

[33 : 11] There's the plane chant again.

A Ut gece ■■ ovat durduresemble. CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS
 CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS style. So we're now into counterpoint and imitation.
 And then over this he imposes the plane chant again in slow motion in the brass, except its organ.
 All that is called.
 All that tells come, God, in . exercise, add a mintyMan ■ that looks like Jesus is This is King's
 College, Cambridge.
 [36 : 09] It's just worth hearing through. It's not too much longer.
 You notice, of course, how we're very much tied to the Latin texts in these pieces.
 That says something. But it's glorious.
 Thank you.
 Thank you. Just a small reference to the plain chant in the organ. It's gorgeous music, if you can get
 it.
 [38 : 12] But it does us good. And you can't get it everywhere. It's impossible. You need that
 quality of performance to make it come alive, as most of these performances have done. So
 Maurice de Ruffe, significant because there's been a whole school of imitators of him.
 I don't mean that in a negative way at all. Influenced by him. Influenced by him. writing anthems and
 writing anthems and settings for the church, which can be tackled on a smaller scale by choirs that
 are not rehearsing twice a day and that kind of thing.
 This is an interesting work by a very interesting composer. Frank Martin, Swiss composer, 20th
 century, died.
 I'm not sure of his dates. I'm ashamed to say. I'm ashamed to say. But, or do I have them? It
 doesn't really matter. It's, I think, towards the end of the last century.
 He wrote a beautiful setting of the Eucharist or the Mass. He was a Protestant, but he wrote it in
 Latin and was so self-effacing, much like Maurice de Ruffe, except he didn't tear up his music.
 [39 : 28] But he felt that the composer just had to back right out, let the music stand there. To what
 extent he achieved that, you'd have to judge.
 But this is his Agnus Dei from his Mass. Interestingly, just performed by the Trinity Western Choir. I
 mean, Latin, Mass.
 Anyway, with their new conductor, Joel Tranquilla. They did a very good job. This is for double
 choir.
 Soprano alto tenor bass, soprano alto tenor bass. It's a unique kind of tonality, tonal palette.
 So this is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world text. But this is the Lamb of God that
 takes away the sin of the Lord.
 [40 : 30] And this is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the Lord. It's a unique kind of
 tonality, tonal palette. CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS
 CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS
 CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS Marches CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR
 SINGS CHOIR SINGS
 A real appeal, a real cry. Not for mercy, but reflecting on mercy. Taketh away the sin of the world.
 Well, yes, for mercy. Hear our prayer. Thank you.
 This truth of the Lamb of God. And there throughout that, there's a pulsing.
 [43 : 40] Oh, oh, oh from the second choir. And this offbeat music over the top. It's settled down
 now. Oh, oh, oh.
 And talking of pulsing, underlying stuff. Do. The walk to the cross.
 And those dissonances, the pain. St. Bach's St. John Passion. And then from the moon.
 and again constant moving there's this forward movement it's not static this points us a little more to
 the glory of God for that is in the text yes the Lord crucified even in the utmost degradation it says in
 the translation you've been glorified so you've got that great cry from the choir Lord our sovereign
 whose fame is glorious in all the world Herr unser Herrscher and those dissonances now we've got
 this kind of group or crowd response so it's in the major key not a minor key yet this throbbing
 underlying foundation gives a solemnity and a menace in fact for what's going to come up in the St.
 John Passion account but also looking beyond that of course
 Handel had another approach to this again using counterpoint this is in the minor key it's very
 sparse it's a strange approach it's a strange approach perhaps to a text you might expect to result
 in very slow reflective sorrowful music there's almost a hint of glory this glorious wounds kind of

motif in this the setting with a new virtuosity in the setting and the setting for the god and the strong behind the because he ■■■■■ in the setting

[48 : 19] The dipping, dropping phrase usually has to do with sadder things.

Rise. There's a triumphant note in it. And that goes on into...

A wonderful description of sheep. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Thank you.

[49 : 57] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Then he returns to the solemn aspect.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

it's one of the most deeply moving performances of the messiah i've heard of i'm going to discover that the director john butt as a christian he's interviewed by um ken myers on his uh audio journal um and also happened to be the organ scholar playing for that derufle recording when he was organ scholar at king's college i made a mistake earlier i'm very sorry when i mentioned schnittke it's alfred schnittke i got the name wrong i'm sorry and he was born in 1934 um that's just a reference back i want to leave time for questions but i wanted to uh illustrate light glory light this is um the uh contemporary composer shorty uh liggetting or liggetting how do i pronounce that is that right um and this is light again based on the um requiem text extraordinary depiction of light as it might possibly appear in heaven luke satana his it's spelled l-i-g-e-t-i the composer's name this is in 16 parts so probably each member of the choir has one part only i don't know how big the choir is it's a good idea if you've buried the cat by the time you do this you of course you need you need perfect tuning perfect blend everything but what's wrong with that um why not aim for that um so so so so so so so so so so i'd like to play it all but it's long it's good eight minutes so i'll fade it in just a sec it's coming to unison

[56 : 31] so so so all that complexity and it comes back to one i think it's brilliant um but it's very difficult to do and you're not going to hear it every week um i'd like to end before we have questions with uh person i personally feel comes out with such convincing vision and skill and humility in the this whole issue of glimpses or intimations of heaven and it's bark and it could be anyone but for me personally bark captures it and i'll end with that this is about the spirit so comes santo spiritu with the holy spirit aspect of the glory of the glory who who is and in as he is where

Drums, trumpets, rhythm, then counterpoint again.

This is a yes, the communal, the fellowship aspect. Says you, says they. Someone else is going to join in a minute.

It's not just a solo. It's an ensemble, a community.

Amen. That's affirmative.

[59 : 28] That's a great amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The dance, such a strong component of Baroque music, underlying this celebration. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[60 : 22] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

The End The End