

Man, Music, and Catholic Culture

Thomas R. Larson
Saint Anselm College

The topic of this paper is the place of music within the Catholic intellectual tradition. The paper discusses the dignity of music, its relationship to man, and its place in education. The paper begins with the pagan classical treatment of music. The classical account of music is bound up with certain claims about human psychology, education, and culture, as well as certain claims about the universe. Allan Bloom's discussion of music in the Greek philosophic tradition is examined as a foil to the Catholic vision discussed in the second part of the paper. The second part presents Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI's understanding of music's place in Catholic culture. Music, along with laws of beauty and order, has its source in God; it contributes to the re-integration of Man and directs him toward union with God in prayer; it has an intimate relationship with the human longing for transcendence; as a universal language, it has a role in evangelization and facilitating inter-cultural dialogue; in its beauty we are enabled to experience the presence of Ultimate Beauty; and in its own and very powerful way, the beauty of the music that has grown out of Christian culture serves as a kind of verification of the Christian faith.

The topic of this paper is the place of music within the Catholic intellectual tradition. It is not a history, nor an analysis of the wide variety of musical compositions that have had a place in liturgical worship. Rather, the paper examines how music has been understood within the Catholic intellectual tradition. While the topic is too massive for any paper to treat comprehensively, I hope to identify some key elements that illustrate the dignity of music, its relationship to man, and its place in education.

The paper is structured as follows: First, I will start with pagan classical treatment of music. I will show how the account of music is bound up with certain claims about human psychology, education, culture, as well as certain claims about the universe. In this first part, I will examine some of Allan Bloom's claims and observations regarding music in the Greek philosophic tradition. Bloom's comments are helpful both because of the importance he sees in the issue of music, and because the vision of music that he presents offers a rival to the Catholic vision I will develop in the second part of the paper. In the second part, I will present Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI's understanding of music's place in the Catholic culture. The thesis of this paper is that the Catholic intellectual tradition, because of its understanding of God, creation, and man, is able to recognize in music an even greater dignity than did the Classical tradition.

Part I—The Classical Assessment of Music

We begin, then, with the Greek philosophical tradition. Both Plato and Aristotle discuss music as part of education – more specifically, moral education. “We’ll never be musical,” Socrates notes, “before we recognize the forms of moderation, courage, liberality, magnificence

and all their kin.”¹ It must be stressed again and again that for the classical philosophers, moral education concerns the education of the passions: *feelings* and *emotions*. As Aristotle puts it:

[M]oral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.²

Early education, for the classical philosophers, aimed at engendering in students proper feelings and emotional responses to stimuli that make up the world around us. As Allan Bloom puts it: “Civilization, or, to say the same thing, education, is the taming or domestication of the soul’s raw passions—not suppressing them, which would deprive the soul of its energy—but forming and informing them as art”; its goal is the “harmonizing” of “the enthusiastic part of the soul with what develops later, the rational part.”³

Looking more closely, however, we see that music education is especially concerned with one passion in particular – *thumos*, known also as “spiritedness” or “irascibility.” In the *Republic*, music is proposed as a remedy for the problem of the guardians. The problem can be briefly summarized as follows: Glaucon objected to the first city for its lack of relishes—he desired more than stability and the satisfaction of necessities; he wanted a “luxurious city.” Simply put, Glaucon wanted *more*. Socrates foresees that the demand for “more” would be source of conflict between the city and its neighbors; hence, a new class was needed for the city, a warrior class capable of fighting the city’s battles. But these warriors or “guardians” themselves pose a problem. The primary tendency of *thumos* seems to be toward the “savage.” The requirements of the guardians seem to demand that they possess contradictory temperamental qualities. What will keep the spirited, violent, war-loving guardians from being savage even to the citizens they are meant to serve? It is here, as an answer to the problem of the guardians, that Plato presents his teaching on music. Music, as part of education, is to be carefully employed to form the guardians—to make them courageous and indomitable in battle, yet gentle and loyal to the citizens they serve.

Before we go further, let us take note of a few points. First, Glaucon’s dissatisfaction for the first city and his desire for a luxurious city is easy to interpret as an expression of intemperate appetites, in which case the spirited guardian (or the spirited part of the soul) would be called in to deal with the conflicts that arise from the grasping appetites. I, however, don’t find this easy interpretation, which would present us with a rather degraded view of *thumos* (painting it as a sort of bully power that fights to secure sensual goods for the appetites), to harmonize well with Plato’s broader vision of the soul. It is more likely, I contend, that Plato would have us see in Glaucon’s dissatisfaction an expression of a deeper desire, a desire that Glaucon perhaps does

¹ *The Republic of Plato*, translated with notes and an interpretive essay by Allan Bloom (Basic Books, 1968), 402c.

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. W. D. Ross), II.3, 1104b10-14.

³ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 71.

not fully understand. Glaucon gives voice to the human desire, not merely to live, but to live well. To live well requires “going beyond”—beyond mere necessity and the needs of the body. But to what then? Could not Glaucon’s dissatisfaction with the “city of sows” be better understood as a desire for transcendence? If so, both *thumos* and the music that educates it take on an important and elevated meaning.

Thumos deserves a careful consideration, especially as it is the passion that occasions the need for “musical formation.” Let me therefore say a few things about this very complex passion. *Thumos* has several faces—some rather negative, others rather attractive. On the one hand, *thumos* is the passion of anger, of competition, of war and fighting; on the other, it expresses itself in loyalty, a love and protection of one’s own. “My country, right or wrong”—that’s *thumos* talking.

Thumos is paradoxical: on the one hand it resists being ruled or bossed, and so finds expression in the passion for defiance and freedom; but it is also the passion expressed in willing and loyal obedience. Whereas the appetites for pleasure incline towards the soft, the easy, the pleasant and convenient, *thumos* is nourished by the hard, the difficult, the demanding. It is the passion of discipline and self-control; it is also the passion that seeks to dominate others. Its virtue is courage, which preserves *thumos*’s paradoxical nature. As Chesterton observes: “Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.”⁴

Finally, if we have to find a place in Plato’s tripartite soul for *eros* and the enthusiastic religious passions, it seems to me that place would have to be in *thumos*.⁵

Returning, then, to Plato’s account, the spirited part of the soul requires a formation. Now, moral education has, we can see, an inward and an outward concern. By the “outward concern” I have in mind that task, mentioned above, of training *thumos* to respond appropriately to the world around it. As Lewis puts it, the goal of education is to “train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate, whether anyone is making them or not, and in the

⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), “The Paradoxes of Christianity,” 99.

⁵ Cf. Diotima’s description of the exceedingly paradoxical nature of *Eros* and its similarities to *thumos*: “In the first place he is always poor, and anything but tender and fair, as the many imagine him; and he is *rough* and squalid, and has no shoes, nor a house to dwell in; on the bare earth exposed he lies under the open heaven, in-the streets, or at the doors of houses, taking his rest; and like his mother he is always in distress. Like his father too, whom he also partly resembles, he is always plotting against the fair and good; he is *bold*, enterprising, *strong*, a *mighty hunter*, always weaving some intrigue or other, keen in the pursuit of wisdom, fertile in resources; a philosopher at all times, terrible as an enchanter, sorcerer, sophist. He is by nature neither mortal nor immortal, but alive and flourishing at one moment when he is in plenty, and dead at another moment, and again alive by reason of his father’s nature. But that which is always flowing in is always flowing out, and so he is never in want and never in wealth; and, further, he is in a mean between ignorance and knowledge. The truth of the matter is this: No god is a philosopher, or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any man who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after Wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied with himself: he has no desire for that of which he feels no want.” Plato, *Symposium*, 203 D-204 A, trans. Benjamin Jowett, emphasis added.

making of which the very nature of man consists.”⁶ Socrates claims that a good musical formation “tunes” a man, so to speak, so things that are truly good (as judged by reason, cause him sensual delight, whereas bad things (again, as judged by reason) cause him pain, disgust, or some other appropriate negative emotional or visceral response:

Furthermore, it is sovereign because the man properly reared on rhythm and harmony would have the sharpest sense for what’s been left out and what isn’t a fine product of craft or what isn’t a fine product of nature. And, due to his having the right kind of dislikes, he would praise the fine things; and, taking pleasure in them and receiving them into his soul, he would be reared on them and become a gentleman. He would blame and hate the ugly in the right way while he’s still young, before he’s able to grasp reasonable speech.⁷

The inward concern is to bring the diverse powers of the soul—the reason, the appetites and *thumos*—into a harmonious, healthy unity. Explaining why “the rearing in music is” as he puts it “most sovereign,” Socrates says that by it, “rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them; and they make a man graceful if he is correctly reared, if not, the opposite.”⁸ Allan Bloom captures well the psychological integration Plato has in mind:

A man whose noblest activities are accompanied by a music that expresses them while providing pleasure extending from the lowest bodily to the highest spiritual, is whole, and there is no tension in him between the pleasant and the good. By contrast a man whose business life is prosaic and unmusical and whose leisure is made up of coarse, intense entertainments is divided, and each side of his existence is undermined by the other.⁹

In his own work on education, *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis takes up and advances this vision of moral formation, giving special consideration to *thumos*—which he calls “the chest”—noting that it has a vital role in actually bringing about and maintaining this internal harmony:

As the king governs by his executive, so Reason must rule the mere appetites by means of the ‘spirited element.’ The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest—Magnanimity—Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may be

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001), 21.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 3.401e-402a.

⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 3.401d-e

⁹ Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, 72.

said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite he is mere animal.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that Allan Bloom, while recognizing that man is whole only when the enthusiastic part of the soul is harmonized with the rational part, betrays his despair when he concedes that such a goal “is perhaps impossible to attain.” He goes so far as to suggest that music—what he calls “the soul’s primitive speech”—is “*alogon*, without articulate speech or reason.” He goes further: “It is not only not reasonable, it is hostile to reason. Even when articulate speech is added, it is utterly subordinate to and determined by the music and the passions it expresses”; music always involves a balance between passion and reason, but Bloom asserts that “even in its highest and most developed forms, . . . the balance is always tipped, if ever so slightly, toward the passionate.”¹¹

Bloom seems to imply, to me at least, that in man reason and passion are *essentially* at odds, and that music’s attempt to harmonize these two parts of man’s being is both unachievable and (worse) doomed to subordinate reason to the passions. Here, I think Bloom departs somewhat from Plato, who seems to entertain a more hopeful vision: “And when reasonable speech comes, the man who’s reared in this way would take most delight in it, recognizing it on account of its being akin?”¹² Plato does not believe music to be hostile to reason. Rather he believes and hopes that by proper musical formation, the emotions and passions can be raised up and brought into harmony with reason.

Musical education, then, aims at putting us in tune with ourselves, and in tune with reality. Educators must “track down” and surround the young with beautiful things” so that the young, dwelling as it were in a healthy place,” will develop a connatural sense of truth and goodness. Being tuned to the universe itself, and possessing an interior psychological harmony, the young “will be benefited by everything” and will, even without their full awareness, be brought into friendship and harmony with “beautiful *logos*”!¹³

Part II—Music’s Place in Christian Culture

Now it may seem that my paper has drifted from the themes of this conference – Catholicism, Beauty and the Arts. But in what follows I hope to develop these themes of music, *thumos*, transcendence, integration and education along specifically Catholic lines. I hope to show that the classical ideas are enriched and deepened within in Catholic thought and culture and that music especially, within in the catholic vision of things, attains a dignity that is hard to surpass. Here my guide will be Joseph Ratzinger/ Pope Benedict XVI. Benedict is not only a great lover of music, but has also reflected long and hard on the place and meaning of music in

¹⁰ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 24-25.

¹¹ Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind*, 71-72.

¹² *Republic*, 3.401d-402a

¹³ *Republic*, 3.401 c-d

the Christian worldview. Let me say that, while I can and will only give a brief account of some of what he has to say on these themes, it is for me an honor and a pleasure to do even this.

In an address given in 2008 in Paris to “Ministers from the World of Culture,”¹⁴ Pope Benedict made the case that the culture of Benedictine monasticism served, and can continue to serve, as the vital source of what we know as western European culture. The distinctively Christian view of God, Man and creation served as a ground out of which a magnificent culture developed. The key elements of this Christian view are as follows.

First, God is the creator, the source of all matter and all order and harmony. Whatever the laws of beauty and order are, their author is God. The “beauty of music depends on its conformity to the rhythmic and harmonic laws of the universe. The more that human music adapts itself to the musical laws of the universe, the more beautiful it will be.”¹⁵ When man conforms to the true standards of beauty, he does not merely conform to some impersonal “laws” or “Platonic forms”; rather, as Benedict writes, “to sing with the universe means . . . to follow the track of the *Logos* and come closer to him.”¹⁶

Second, Man has his origin and his destiny in God, and is called to a personal relationship with God. The effect of sin is to separate man not only from God, but even from himself. Fallen man is fragmented and in need of integration. Bloom’s apparent belief that the rational and emotional parts of the human being are essentially at odds, is understandable in light of our experience of fallen man; but this is not the truth about man’s essential nature. The Christian view of human wholeness and integration serves as an important and distinctive touchstone for measuring the value and importance of music. Body and soul, spirit and matter, work and prayer, time and eternity—these must somehow be brought into a harmonious relationship in the very life of man. Genuine human wholeness and integration, however, cannot be had in isolation from God. “The music of faith looks for the integration of the human being in the *sursum corda*”¹⁷—that is, in the lifting up of the whole of man’s life to God as a sacrifice of praise. To pray in this way is to join in the song of the choir of angels mentioned in Isaiah and in the Gospel of Luke. Music, in the Christian scheme of things, has its source and highest standards from God, has as its highest purpose the re-integration of man in the loving, self-giving, worship of God.

Now, with these things in mind, consider this passage from Benedict’s address to the ministers from the world of Culture.

¹⁴ MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE WORLD OF CULTURE : ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, Friday, 12 September 2008, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-cultura.html .

¹⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 152-53.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 153-54.

¹⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord* (Crossroads Publishing, 1996), 125.

[I]n communal prayer one is singing in the presence of the entire heavenly court, and is thereby measured according to the very highest standards: that one is praying and singing in such a way as to harmonize with the music of the noble spirits who were considered the originators of the harmony of the cosmos, the music of the spheres.¹⁸

Monastic singing ennobles man by demanding that he conform to heavenly standards of form and beauty. Man must be more than human. Note also that the standard for excellent music is not merely an abstract idea or law; rather, it is personal, it is to harmonize with the music of the noble spirits—the angels—who were believed to be the originators of cosmic harmony.

Pope Benedict argues that the vision of God, music, and man at the heart of Monastic culture led to a search for a music worthy of prayer, worthy of the words of scripture, for music that might harmonize with the music sung by the angelic choirs in the court of God. Such a quest required a very special “ear training”—a training of the ears of the heart. The bold quest is clearly inspired by Christian faith: though such a search was arduous, there was reason to hope that there were such musical laws, the finding of which would bring us into harmony with ourselves, with the cosmos, with the angelic choirs and with God. Inspired by the dignity of artistic music, and the hope that the laws of heavenly harmony and beauty could be discovered, Christian artists set out on a quest to discover and produce music worthy of God and man. The result of this quest, according to Pope Benedict, is nothing less than the glories of Western Music.

This intrinsic requirement of speaking with God and singing of him with words he himself has given, is what gave rise to the great tradition of Western music. It was not a form of private “creativity”, in which the individual leaves a memorial to himself and makes self-representation his essential criterion. Rather it is about vigilantly recognizing with the “ears of the heart” the inner laws of the music of creation, the archetypes of music that the Creator built into his world and into men, and thus discovering music that is worthy of God, and at the same time truly worthy of man, music whose worthiness resounds in purity.¹⁹

Note that not only did this purpose and hope serve as vital animating principles of the “great tradition of Western music”; it also required the development in man of a heart that “listens” and attends to the deeper harmonies and truths of reality. Man’s one interior life acquired a formation making such “listening” and “appreciating” possible. Benedict expressed this conviction several times in comments he offered at concerts put on at the Vatican.

Consider his comments given at a performance of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, a symphony written by Beethoven when he was profoundly deaf!

¹⁸ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, Friday, 12 September 2008.

¹⁹ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, Friday, 12 September 2008.

The music itself allows attentive listeners to guess something of what was at the root of this unexpected explosion of joy. The overwhelming sentiment of jubilation transformed into music here is far from trivial or superficial: it is a sentiment won with effort, overcoming the inner emptiness of someone whom deafness had forced into isolation—the empty fifths at the beginning of the first movement and the constant bursting in of a gloomy atmosphere are an expression of it.

Silent loneliness, however, had taught Beethoven a new way of listening which went far beyond the mere ability to hear in his imagination the sound of the notes that he read or wrote. In this context, a mysterious saying of the Prophet Isaiah springs to my mind in which, speaking of a victory of truth and righteousness, he said: “In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see” (cf. 29: 18-24). Mention is thus made of a perceptiveness that those who obtain the grace of external and internal liberation receive from God as a gift.²⁰

Here Beethoven is seen as an historical example of one who, perhaps because of his suffering, developed that capacity of “recognizing with the ‘ears of the heart’ the inner laws of the music of creation, the archetypes of music that the Creator built into his world and into men, and thus discovering music that is worthy of God, and at the same time truly worthy of man.”²¹

Fourth, the Christian tradition has a distinctive take on the connection between music and transcendence. Recall, that earlier in this paper I noted that Glaucon’s dis-satisfaction with what he called the “city of sows” not only initiated the discussion of *thumos* and music, but it also suggested the human longing for transcendence. Pope Benedict explicitly connects music and the human longing for transcendence, and surprisingly seems to touch on Glaucon’s very concerns. Beautiful music, according to Pope Benedict, nourishes and gratifies Man’s desire for transcendence. In comments at the end of one concert Benedict noted the following:

[T]he marvelous sound of the two symphonies made me forget daily life and transported me into the world of music which for Beethoven . . . meant “a revelation higher than any wisdom or philosophy.” Music, in fact, has the capacity for taking one beyond oneself to the Creator of all harmony, inspiring within one resonances which are, as it were, in tune with the beauty and truth of

²⁰ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI—CONCERT IN HONOUR OF THE HOLY FATHER PLAYED BY THE BAYERISCHER RUNDFUNK, THE ORCHESTRA AND CHOIR OF BAVARIAN RADIO, Paul VI Audience Hall Saturday, 27 October 2007, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20071027_concerto-baviera.html.

²¹ MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE WORLD OF CULTURE : ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, Friday, 12 September 2008.

God—with that reality which no human wisdom, no philosophy can ever express.²²

True beauty can cause us to “intuit the harmonies of Heaven,” to give us “a moment of meditation and prayer,”²³ even in the midst of our daily routine. What we intuit may surpass human speech’s power to express!

Unlike Bloom, who thought that music, being hostile to logos, subordinates reason to the passions, Benedict suggests that the truly beautiful gathers up all of man’s soul into spiritual transcendence that not only surpasses human *logos*, but even provides the ultimate satisfaction the *sensual* appetites. Recall Glaucon’s desire for “something more.” Here is Benedict’s response to Glaucon’s demand:

Every sensual pleasure is narrowly delimited and ultimately incapable of intensification because the sense act cannot go beyond a certain measure. Whoever expects redemption from it will be disappointed, ‘frustrated,’ as we would say today. But by being integrated into the spirit the senses receive a new depth and reach into the infinity of the spiritual adventure. Only there do they come completely into their own.²⁴

Man’s sensual appetites are either integrated or separated from his spiritual core. When separated, they can never find genuine satisfaction; they can only direct themselves to limited, temporary delights. When integrated into man’s spiritual life, on the other hand, the senses “reach into the infinity of the spiritual adventure.” Even the body finds its true satisfaction in spiritual transcendence! In this vision of transcendence, we see the whole man—body, soul, matter and spirit—integrated, raised up and satisfied. Music, too—as rational and sensual, as it appeals and satisfies both the rational and sensual nature of man, and as it lead whole man beyond the limits of the temporal, to touch in some way eternal and abiding reality—secures a distinctive dignity and meaning within the Christian worldview.

Christian faith—its teachings about God, Man and the cosmos—and the culture it has inspired thus provide a rich soil in which music can reach its highest power and dignity.

²² ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI delivered at a CONCERT OFFERED BY THE BAMBERGER SYMPHONIKER ORCHESTRA ON THE OCCASION OF THE MILLENNIUM JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BAMBERG, Courtyard of the Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo, Tuesday, 4 September 2007,

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070904_concerto-bamberg.html.

²³ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI AT THE END OF THE CONCERT OFFERED BY CARD. DOMENICO BARTOLUCCICHOIRMASTER EMERITUS OF THE SISTINE CHAPEL -- Courtyard of the Papal Residence, Castel Gandolf, Wednesday, 31 August 2011,

https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110831_concerto-bartolucci.html

²⁴ Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 125

We can say that Western music, from Gregorian chant through the music of the cathedrals and great polyphonic music, through the Renaissance and baroque music, right up to Bruckner and beyond, derives from the inner richness of this synthesis [of spirit, intuition and sensuous sound] and has developed its possibilities abundantly. This magnificence exists only here because it was able to grow solely from the anthropological ground that combined the spiritual and the profane into an ultimate human unity.²⁵

Benedict notes that there is a reciprocal relationship between the Christian faith and the music it inspires. Having noted that Western music's greatness is indebted to its source in Christian faith, Benedict spins things around and notes just what it is that this great music gives back to the faithful. I will mention three ways in which this is true.

First, because it is a "universal language, music has served the church in carrying out its missionary obligation. Pope Benedict commented on this several times. At the conclusion of one concert, given at the Vatican by the China Philharmonic Orchestra and the Shanghai Opera House Chorus and featuring the music of Mozart, he noted how truly beautiful music serves to facilitate the meeting of cultures:

Music, and art in general, can serve as a privileged instrument for encounter and reciprocal knowledge and esteem between different populations and cultures; a means attainable by all for valuing the universal language of art.²⁶

Benedict made a similar point, but with perhaps a greater personal emphasis, in comments he delivered after a concert celebrating his 80th birthday:

I am convinced that music—and here I am thinking in particular of the great Mozart and this evening, of course, of the marvelous music by Gabrieli and the majestic "New World" by Dvorák—really is the universal language of beauty which can bring together all people of good will on earth and get them to lift their gaze on high and open themselves to the Absolute Good and Beauty whose ultimate source is God himself.²⁷

²⁵ Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord*, 124.

²⁶ ADDRESS BY HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE CONCERT GIVEN BY THE CHINA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA AND THE SHANGHAI OPERA HOUSE CHORUS -- Paul VI Audience Hall, Wednesday, 7 May 2008, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080507_concerto.html

²⁷ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI AT A CONCERT FOR THE HOLY FATHER'S 80th BIRTHDAY -- Paul VI Audience Hall, Monday, 16 April 2007, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2007/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070416_concerto.html

Second, besides serving as a powerful tool for evangelization, music has also proven to be powerful aid in people's prayer life. Rather boldly, Benedict argues that in beautiful, artistic music, "[t]he mystery of infinite beauty is there and enables us to experience the presence of God more truly and vividly than many sermons."²⁸

Third, music has a special worth because it inspires hope. Hope, it should be noted, is a virtue of the spirited part of the soul. It is closely related to courage. Its corresponding vices are presumption on the one hand, and despair on the other. Its object is the "arduous good" – the good that is difficult to attain. Benedict says that part of the spiritual value of the art of music, is that it is "uniquely called to instill hope in the human spirit, so scarred and sometimes wounded by the earthly condition. There is a mysterious and deep kinship between music and hope, between song and eternal life."²⁹

Finally, Pope Benedict makes what I find to be an amazingly bold claim about music's relationship to the faith. It is a claim that is surely very personal, but clearly is built on the many intellectual and cultural elements of the Christian tradition mentioned in this paper and so opens to universality. Benedict confesses that for him that the very beauty of Western Music serves as *verification* of the truth of Christian faith!

For me the greatness of this music is the most immediate and most evident verification that history has to offer of the Christian image of human beings and of Christian faith in redemption.³⁰

In comments after a concert that featured the sacred music of Bach, Benedict said that "in hearing this one understands: it is true; such strong faith is true, as well as the beauty that irresistibly expresses the presence of God's truth."³¹ The astounding beauty that arose out of Christian and monastic culture itself testifies in a most persuasive way to the truth of what Christianity says about God and about man.

In the Christian intellectual and cultural tradition, then, music, along with laws of beauty and order, has its source in God; it contributes to the re-integration of Man and directs him toward union with God in prayer; it has an intimate relationship with the human longing for transcendence; as a universal language it has a role in evangelization, and facilitating inter-cultural dialogue; in its beauty we are enabled to experience the presence of Ultimate Beauty;

²⁸ *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 146

²⁹ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI -- CONCERT OFFERED BY PRESIDENT GIORGIO NAPOLITANO OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC IN HONOUR OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI ON THE OCCASION OF THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF PONTIFICATE , Paul VI Audience Hall, Thursday, 24 April 2008, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080424_concerto-iii-anniv.html.

³⁰ ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI, Thursday, 24 April 2008.

³¹ GENERAL AUDIENCE, Castel Gandolfo, Wednesday, 31 August 2011, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110831.html

and in its own and very powerful way, the beauty of the music that has grown out of Christian culture serves as a kind of verification of the Christian faith! Here, then, are the Christian grounds for the dignity of music and musical art.

Conclusion

A fitting way to conclude this paper is to return to the theme of education and consider Pope Benedict's call for an education of desire. In one of his final Wednesday audiences³², Pope Benedict discussed the human desire for God. He noted that while this natural desire is attested to throughout Christian literature, we often see little evidence of it in our contemporary secular culture. Many people today do not seem to desire God. Why? Benedict's answer is that Man does indeed desire God, but this desire can become disordered, and hence needs to be cultivated and nourished, and so he called for a "pedagogy of desire." In a comment that sounds remarkably similar to passages out of the *Republic*, Benedict says that such a pedagogy would have two aspects.

First we must, as Aristotle would say, cultivate the right kinds of pleasures and pains, or as Benedict puts it, learn "the taste for the authentic joys of life":

Educating individuals from an early age to savor the true joys, in all areas of life—family, friendship, solidarity with those who suffer, self-denial to serve others, love for knowledge, for art, for the beauties of nature—, all this means exercising that inner taste and producing effective antibodies against the trivialization and flattening prevailing today.³³

All people, young and old, should cultivate the ability to experience joy and pleasure in the things that are truly good; we must cultivate in ourselves the "desire for true realities." The spirited part of the soul—the desire for something more, something great, the desire to rule and not be ruled—this will be called upon so that those of us who are ensnared and addicted to those things of the world that are shallow and insipid can fight to reach beyond "mediocrity in which they find themselves entangled." Cultivating the desire for freedom, in this case a freedom from cheap and easy satisfaction, and a freedom for deeper, truer, genuinely satisfying and ennobling joys, will, according to Benedict, allow the desire for God to emerge again.

The second aspect of this pedagogy of desire, which is even more closely related to the theme of *thumos*, is "to never to be satisfied with what has been achieved."³⁴ The truest joys, Benedict claims, lead us "to be more demanding—to desire a higher, more profound good—and

³² Benedict XVI, GENERAL AUDIENCE, *St. Peter's Square*, Wednesday, 7 November 2012, https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20121107.html

³³ Benedict XVI, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Wednesday, 7 November 2012.

³⁴ Benedict XVI, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Wednesday, 7 November 2012.

at the same time, to perceive with increasing clarity that nothing finite can fill our hearts.”³⁵ Here we see that *thumos* is required for the difficult, arduous pursuit of the truest joys; we also see that the truest joys are connected with transcendence, since “nothing finite can fill our hearts.”

The fruit of such an education Benedict summarizes as follows: “Thus we will learn to stretch out, unarmed, towards that good which we cannot construct or procure for ourselves by our own efforts; we will learn to not be discouraged by the difficulty involved or by the obstacles that come from our sin.”³⁶ Further consideration of the similarities and differences between Plato’s and Benedict’s view of music’s role in education, would, I believe, bear even more fruit. Within both the Greek philosophical tradition and the Christian intellectual tradition, music has an important part to play in education, the forming of spiritedness, and the integration of our whole being.

³⁵ Benedict XVI, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Wednesday, 7 November 2012.

³⁶ Benedict XVI, GENERAL AUDIENCE, Wednesday, 7 November 2012.