



My Seven Strategies: Using Music to Reach Progressive Christians

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Peace Church, April 2016

Music's Power

- As a preacher, I have often felt myself working against the theological notions people learned from old hymns
 - "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb"
 - "Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild"
- Hymns have a leverage that is difficult for preaching to match

Strategy #1: Teach Better Hymns

- I preach about God's forgiving love ...
- ... but I also invite people to sing about it (e.g. The Inn of God's Forgiveness)
- As they sing, they encounter the idea of God's forgiving love in a more intimate way...
- ...rolling out of their own mouths!

Strategy #2: Repurpose "Secular" Music

- Reimagining secular love songs as sacred
- Example: "You Light Up My Life"
- Joe Brooks, words and music
- Big hit for Debby Boone, 1977
- The "Sister Act" effect: I Will Follow Him, My Guy, Ain't No Mountain High Enough, Stop!
In the Name of Love

But What About the Classics?

- I've discussed:
 - Some hymns whose explicit theology I don't like
 - Some whose theology I do like (because I wrote them myself!)
- What about great music with whose explicit theology you disagree?

Example: Dies Irae

- Words by Thomas of Celano, c. 1250 (?) – tr. by William Irons, 1848
- Medieval plainchant melody, often borrowed: Rachmaninov, Berlioz, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, etc.
- Used in Catholic liturgy over the centuries: 1st Advent, funeral and requiem masses, All Souls' Day

Singing When You Don't Agree

- Sympathetic singing: to explore the theology of a fellow child of God
- Narrative singing: to tell a spiritual story (that isn't your own)
- Compassionate singing: to serve the spiritual needs of others
- All good, but watch the leverage!

Strategy #3: Bracket Problematic Classics

- "I think Thomas of Celano was earnestly seeking reconciliation with God here..."
- "Today we're singing Irma's favorite hymn. If you have a favorite hymn you'd like us to sing, please let me know."
- "This is the story of a man I met, a homeless Vietnam veteran who told me..."