

THE SYMPHONY OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

In seeing the Greek word from which we get our English ‘symphony’ in various parts of the New Testament, it occurred to me to explore the connection between this word and the Body of Christ, insomuch as we interact and harmonize as an orchestra, with God as the composer and Jesus Christ the conductor. This article is therefore not intended to be overly doctrinal, but rather an examination of a concept, a metaphor by which we might see the concert and concord of the Body through a new perspective.

THE MEANING OF SYMPHONY

Our English ‘symphony’ comes from συμφωνία (sumphōnía), which is Greek word meaning a “sounding together” or “agreement or concord of sound”. Similarly, σύμφωνος (sumphónos), carries the connotation of "harmonious". There are various similar Greek words with shades of meaning that are all based in this concept of harmony, of agreement, of concord, and of sounding together. It appears in the scriptures at various points, notably when Christ spoke of His disciples ‘agreeing’ concerning anything on earth:

¹⁹ “Again I say to you that if two of you agree (συμφωνησωσιν - sumphōnēsōsin) on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 18:19)

Other examples of the use of this group of words include the lack of harmony between the holy and profane:

¹⁵ And what accord (συμφωνησις - sumphōnēsis) has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:15)

...and a description of music itself, in the story of the Prodigal Son:

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music (συμφωνιας – sumphōnias) and dancing....” (Luke 15:25)

These various renderings and connected words give us a broader, multi-faceted picture of ‘symphony’, one which is very useful as a symbol for the agreement and shared life of the body of Christ. For truly the life of the body is not made up of isolated individuals, but rather it functions as one organism, with each member playing it’s part. This, however, is a divine mystery – not being based on physical, visible, temporal institutions of man, which by their very nature must fade and pass away, but rather the communion of all those who are filled with the Life of God by the Spirit, which communion takes place in the heavenlies, in the hidden spiritual realm in which our foundation, anchor, origin, and connection resides.

Similarly, an orchestra is not made up of individuals playing whatever their own heart desires, but functions as a singular demonstration and manifestation of a composition. The music itself

might be likened to the Spirit. Without the music, you could gather various people and place instruments in their hands, and they might indeed have every appearance of an orchestra, but only by their shared manifestation of the invisible symphony do they truly bear the stamp of an orchestra.

THE ORCHESTRA OF THE BODY

Playing ones part in the orchestra is an act of faith. If you see your part irrespective of the other instruments, it may not make sense. You might only come in to the symphony in certain places, and at other points have no obvious part to play at all. But in keeping your eyes upon the conductor, you trust to his skill in bringing the parts together to make a harmonious whole, a sweet melody that delights the listeners. In the same way, as individual parts of the body of Christ, there are times where it is unclear what our part is, and it may seem as if we are not involved in the various movements. But in keeping our eyes upon Jesus Christ, we can trust the Head to knit all of the parts together in the union of His Spirit, that we might manifest the will of God as One.

...the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. (Colossians 2: 19)

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul describes the diverse gifts and callings of the body of Christ. This passage is easy to translate into the concept of an orchestra, as it shows the Spirit of God placing each saint in the body – or musician in the orchestra – as He sees fit:

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same^[b] Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

To pursue our musical concept still further, one could say that *“to one is given a violin, to another a cello, to another a clarinet, to yet another a trumpet. Yet all these instruments sound together, playing the same melody written by the composer, guided by the hand of the conductor”*. And as an orchestra brings glory to the composer and the conductor in its harmonious rendition of the symphony, so the body is called to bring glory to God through the obedience of Jesus Christ, each of us playing our part faithfully, not trying to rewrite the tune for our own glory. In this we also trust in God to make us fitted and refined for that part which He has designated for us. If we are a violinist, He will teach us the instrument and the part which

must be played, together with the timing of when to play it. It is a moment by moment, note by note walk of obedience and trust.

THE MUSIC WE PLAY

It is my belief that when the divine orchestra is fully trained and assembled, with eyes fixed upon the conductor and the sheet music of the Spirit in front of us, that the world will then hear the symphony of God. Through the glorified body of Christ, and His fully perfected and adopted sons, they will hear a symphony of infinite love, encompassing all of the divine kindness, wisdom, and benevolent judgment. Through the harmonious display of Christ in His body, the completed temple will be seen, and the risen Lord will be fully revealed in all His elect, to the praise of His glory:

¹¹ In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

The symphony that God has written is not meant to return to Him void. He is calling and refining His people together – teaching, leading, guiding, training, disciplining and chastising us, not that we may ultimately play His symphony to an empty hall, but to a bustling, eager throng, that come to hear the true Gospel of the everlasting kindness, which the vast multitudes of despairing creatures have so longed to hear, though they may not know it.

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Romans 8:18-21)

We are not called by God that we might idly strum a harp on a fluffy white cloud somewhere, enjoying a selfish paradise, but that we might partake in this great symphony, this revelation of the corporate Jesus Christ that finally looses the bonds from creation completely and irrevocably. This calling is high, majestic, and incomparably mysterious, and it thrills and excites us when we truly contemplate it!

CONCLUSION

It can sometimes be so difficult to grasp why our lives unfold in the manner they do. Even with the light of Christ dawning and rising within us, we so often feel as though we are “looking through a glass darkly”. Our lives in Christ are often solitary and full of tribulation - but dear Saint, in such times consider the grand purpose of God, and the unfathomable glory and honor of the upward call of Christ. For truly He dwells in you in all richness. This article is written so that

your faith may be encouraged by the wonderful scale and sweep of God's assembly, and the part He has called every one of us to play in His great plan of the ages, which will extend to all corners of His creation, and which we shall fulfill by His grace. Amen!