

Beauty That Saves the World

On Nov. 13, 2010, the 80-voice Chorus of Niagara from Niagara Falls, Ontario, gave a performance of the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*. This would not be particularly noteworthy except that it was done as a surprise performance in the food court of the Seaway Mall. The unsuspecting shoppers did not see it coming. It was just another busy lunch hour in the food court at the mall.

Then a young woman with a cellphone pressed to her ear stood up and began to sing hallelujah. While people were trying to figure out what was going on, the first singer is joined by a man who, moments earlier, had been eating his Arby’s lunch. Then what appears to be a mall custodian joins the chorus. Eventually all 80 voices of the choir are performing a stunning rendition of Handel’s masterpiece.

The shoppers in the food court are stunned. They realize something special has happened. Some capture the performance on their cellphones. Others rise to join in the time-honored tradition of standing for the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Some simply sit with faces full of wonder, while others wipe away tears. All are witnesses to a miracle—the modern banality of a food court has been transformed into a cathedral of astonishing beauty.

A local photography company recorded the surprise performance in the Seaway Mall and posted it online. They hoped it might be viewed by as many as 50,000 people. But within weeks it had been viewed tens of millions of times! Why the interest in this “stunt”? Perhaps the thing that makes the video somewhat amusing is also what makes it deeply moving—its odd incongruence. The juxtaposing of high art and a shopping mall, the surprise of sacred music in a food court, is an incongruence that seems to have a strange effect upon us.

Why? Perhaps as modern people we harbor a deep-seated fear that we are losing all beauty. We have technology, convenience, security and a measure of prosperity, but where is the beauty? Where is the beauty that we know we cannot really live without? With this latent fear lurking in our subconscious, a choir appearing out of nowhere and performing sacred Baroque music in a shopping mall is a beautiful surprise and not unlike the surprise performance the Gospel of Luke reports as occurring at the birth of Christ (see Luke 2:13-14).

This “random act of culture” in Ontario is a wonderful metaphor for how the church should position itself in the world. Instead of angry protesters shaking our fists at a secular culture, we should be joyful singers transforming the secular with the sacred. Instead of alienated separatists sequestered in Christian enclaves, we are to transform malls and food courts into cathedrals by our beautiful song.

If the church of the 21st century will lay down its anger and frustration, and instead joyfully sing the melody of Christ in the malls of meaninglessness, we can perhaps once again astonish a weary world with the beauty of the gospel.

Theologian Yves Congar advocates the idea of the church, not in protest or isolation to the world, but as the saving presence of Christ within the world when he states, “The church is not a special little group, isolated, apart, remaining untouched amidst the changes of the world. The church is the world as believing in Christ, or, what comes to the same thing, it is Christ dwelling in and saving the world by our faith.”

Beautiful! Our task is not to protest the world into a certain moral conformity, but to attract the world to the saving beauty of Christ. We do this best, not by protest or political action, but by enacting a beautiful presence in the world.

The Western church has had a four-century experiment with viewing salvation in a scientific and mechanistic manner, presenting it as a plan, system or formula. It would be much better if we would return to viewing salvation as a song we sing. The book of Revelation (from which George Fredric Handel found the lyrics for his “Hallelujah Chorus”) doesn’t have any plans or formulas, but it has lots of songs.

The task of the church is to creatively and faithfully sing the songs of the Lamb in the midst of a world founded upon the beastly principles of greed, decadence and violence. What is needed is not an ugly protest, but a beautiful song; not a pragmatic system, but a transcendent symphony.

Sin and Satan have stolen from humanity the song we were meant to sing with our Creator. We are bereft of beauty and missing melody. We are left with little more than the inane Muzak of the malls of meaninglessness. It is into this world that the Son of God comes singing his song—a song that first announces itself as beautiful. The Singer invites us to join him in his song. It is an invitation to find salvation—for to join the Song of God in singing his beautiful song is to find the melody that can save our soul. This is the beauty that saves the world.

Adapted from *Beauty Will Save the World* by Brian Zahnd, copyright 2012, published by Charisma House. This book shows how in today’s world of convenience and practicality, salvation is often seen in a scientific and mechanistic manner and presented as a plan, system or formula. By sharing Christ’s teachings, along with stories from Francis of Assisi, and his own life, he helps us stay on the journey to discover the kingdom of God in a fuller, richer—more beautiful—way. To order a copy click on this link:



PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 8/27/2012

This week reflect on the beauty of Christ and His gospel and begin to enact it in the world. Yield to His Spirit when you pray so that His transforming power can change you inside and out. Then carry His presence wherever you go. Let Him lead you to the desperate and lonely and ask Him for the words to speak that would bring life, salvation and beauty to their lives. Continue to pray concerning the upcoming elections and seek His direction on how to vote. Remember Israel and pray for it to fulfill its destiny in God. Luke 2:13-14; Ps. 27:4; Isa. 61:3

To enrich your prayer life and learn how to strategically pray with power by using appropriate scriptures, we recommend the following sources by Apostle John Eckhardt: Prayers that Rout Demons, Prayers that Bring Healing, Prayers that Release Heaven on Earth and Prayers that Break Curses. To order any or all of these [click here](#).