

Music with Sacred Text: Vital to Choral Music and to the Choral Art

Choral music educators recognize that choral music may fulfill diverse objectives. At one end of the spectrum is aesthetic education and artistic performance which can insure development of musicality and sensitivity. At the opposite end of the spectrum is pure entertainment. Between these two poles may be found opportunities to enhance knowledge and understanding through a growing awareness and perspective of history and art as reflected in great music. To achieve any selected educational objective, the *quality* of repertoire is of paramount importance.

An assessment of the quality of repertoire which can fulfill the highest objectives of aesthetic education necessitates careful examination of the relationship of text and musical setting. The wealth of choral literature which represents and reflects peoples, cultures and traditions of all lands and compositional styles of all eras includes much music in which the composer has utilized a sacred text. The term "sacred" refers to *all* manner of religious belief and not only to the practices of Judeo-Christian teachings. It is important to recognize the fact that almost all of the significant choral music composed before the 17th century was associated with a sacred text.

To study and perform music in which the musical setting of a text is artistically accomplished is a highly commendable objective. While public school teaching objectives and criteria for repertoire selection should not include religious *indoctrination*, the selection of quality repertoire will invariably include within its broad scope music with a sacred text. To exclude from a public school curriculum all choral music which has religious meaning associated with the text is to severely limit the possibilities of teaching for artistic understanding and responsiveness. Such an exclusion has as its parallel the study of art without any paintings related to the various religions of the world, the study of literature without mention of the Bible, or the study of architecture without reference to the great temples and cathedrals of the world.

Since choral music with a sacred text comprises such a substantial portion of the artistic repertoire representative of the choral medium and the history of music, it should have an important place in music education. Its study and artistic performance have nothing to do with the First Amendment to the Constitution and the doctrine which advocates separation of Church and State.

(This statement, first published in the *Choral Journal* in November, 1983, has been endorsed by the National Board of the American Choral Directors Association.)