

# Creativity as a Communicable Attribute of God

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As a composer of classical music, I have been thinking for some time about the relationship of my creativity compared to the creativity of the Creator God who made me. The question I hope to explore in this article is how does the creativity of man, who was created in the image of God, reflect his Creator's attributes. I can do this best from my perspective as a composer, even though every human being, as we shall see, creates in some fashion.

I would like to begin my consideration with two complementary texts of Scripture.

Genesis 1:27–28: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it..”

Psalms 19:1: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Our understanding of God has been aided by many theologians in past centuries, and probably none more than by St. Thomas Aquinas, the great 13<sup>th</sup>-century theologian and philosopher. It was St. Thomas who most clearly helped to develop our understanding of God through the use of analogy. Briefly stated, his thesis was that if we understood God as “good,” we could not consider God's goodness to be identical to our goodness, for that would bring the infinite and divine character of the Creator down to the level of his creatures. However, if we go to the other extreme and consider that because God transcends us in infinite measure, *his* goodness has nothing to do with *our* goodness, then it is easy to see that we can understand nothing at all about God. God in his Word clearly intends us to understand at least *some things* about him for our eternal benefit, as it speaks of things as *revealed* to us, and those for a particular purpose (Deut. 29:29). St. Thomas proposed, then, that we can understand characteristics of God through *analogy*, i.e., that since we can understand what *goodness* is on the human level, we can understand *something to some extent* about the goodness of God. We must take care to correctly order the analogical process: While it is correct, for instance, to state, “A good father is like God,” we may not reverse the analogy to maintain that “God is like a good father.” A creature may be compared in some way to the Creator, but never the Creator to something he has created. Our level of understanding of the attributes of God is only made possible through our having been created in his image. Such ontological status was not given to any other creature; only human beings are enabled to understand and worship God on a spiritual and moral level. This fact would seem to answer the “why” question about man's receiving this imprint of the divine. God clearly desired worship from not only the spiritual beings (i.e., angels) he created, but also from one divinely appointed species from the physical realm.

All of this is intended only as an introduction to the main points to which I hope to draw the attention of the reader. As I've noted, as bearers of God's image, we possess this quality not only *ontologically* (i.e., as a core part of our being), but *economically* (as it pertains to our work and actions). For instance, we can engage in the action of loving because God first loved (I John 4:19). The love of God is not only intrinsic to his essence as a Trinitarian Being with an inter-Personal love, but it extends through the Incarnation and indwelling of the Holy Spirit to all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Consequently, through our God-given ability to love, we can comprehend *his* love to an extent, but only because our love has a basis and precedent in his.

Likewise, we can create, because God *first* created, and even though our creative ability is of an entirely different order than his, our ability in this regard can point us analogically to this action of God, and our understanding of him as Creator. I would go even further than that, and state that the creativity of man is an essential component of his human nature. Every human being creates *something*. Some create other human beings via having children. Some create designs for new automobiles. Some simply create order by cleaning out their closet. Since one of the primary things I create is music, I am able to speak most lucidly on the topic from my perspective as a composer.

So, exactly how does my creative activity of writing music point me to God? I would propose that there are at least four (and doubtless other) areas in which my composing music does that.

1. It reflects order and logic (in it, I obey God's command to "subdue" the earth)
2. It strives for excellence (it recapitulates God's declaration that his creation was "good")
3. It demonstrates harmony (symbiosis in music pointing me towards the symbiosis with which God permeated his creation)
4. It demonstrates teleology (in its purpose as a microcosm of the love and glory of the Creator).

Each of these components of a composer's music directs the attention of the Christian to a different aspect of God's character. Considering order and logic first, we understand from Scripture that God is a God of order. Not only do we have God's own declaration that he is such (e.g., in John 1:1, the Greek word, *Logos*, means not only "word," but "logic"), and that he has acted in an orderly way (I Cor. 15:23, etc.), but he desires *us* to be orderly (e.g., I Cor. 14:40). God's universe is a logical and orderly place, where everything fits together beautifully. However, it was not always so. Genesis 1:2 suggests God's initial creative act produced a world (described as "without form and void") that required further ordering by God to permit the subsequently formed creatures to survive and thrive. Through God's agency, matter was first created *out of nothing*, but the formless character of that matter was restructured to achieve order of the highest degree. Indeed, the order the Creator put into his universe is continually being discovered by scientists through new and deeper insights.

So, although composers cannot create *ex nihilo*, they *can* mimic God's own reordering of his creation by manipulating the raw materials God put at their disposal—things such as sonic frequencies, spatial and temporal relationships, and timbres—to extract order from the ether. Composers do this through selection, arrangement, and weighting of the musical elements God has created for them to work with. The resulting new work—a composition—therefore points us analogically to a prior action of the Creator. A piece of music thus declares the orderliness and logic of God.

Secondly, we see that when God created, he did not do so whimsically, but created towards the purpose of the *good*. When he had done so, he declared each portion of his creation *good*, and man, the pinnacle of his creation, *very good*. I do not believe that his declaration *made* these things good; rather, my conviction is that he declared them *good* because they *were actually and intrinsically good*. God was simply stating the truth of the matter. Not only was his creation good, but I believe that God made it as good as he possibly could, not only because his nature as an altogether good Being demanded it, but also because the heavens might otherwise only *suggest* the glory of God, rather than *declare* it. Consequently, when a composer strives for excellence in his music, he does so because God has given him this gift to imitate him in this respect. The more I strive to follow Christ in his holy character, the better my music will be. Why? One example is that sometimes my sin makes me too lazy to keep working on a piece I know has flaws in order to perfect it. If I remain complacent in my laziness, I will not honor Christ through that, and my music will suffer. My seeking to glorify God in all that I do *should* cause me to cast off laziness, and create a work that will glorify him all the more. If I do this, I must remain cognizant that no matter how good I (or others) might consider my piece to be, it will be but a pale shadow of God's good creation. Still, it will point to God as a good Creator, and so my striving for excellence in my music will therefore declare the goodness of God in his handiwork.

When I speak of harmony as a third way in which our creations point us to God, I'm not speaking of a series of chords or the relationship of notes to each other. Rather, I'm speaking of the symbiosis in a piece of music among its component parts. It is interesting to note that when God created music, he did so in a manner that made certain pitch relationships mathematically "more consonant" than others. For instance, the interval of the perfect octave can be expressed mathematically (as a ratio of the frequency of its pitches) as 2:1, whereas less consonant intervals form more complex mathematical relationships (the perfect fifth is based on the relationship of 3:2, and so on). When we see the elements of a piece of music—things such as melody, chord structure, form (including both repetition and contrast), texture, dynamic volume, and phrasing—all brought together by the composer into a work that evidences symbiosis, we consider such a piece of music to be far greater than the sum of its parts. Symbiosis is the working together of things for mutual benefit. As an example of this, try to hear mentally the beautiful second theme from Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique Symphony*, and then to imagine it only as the tune shorn of the underlying chords. It loses about 90% of its glorious beauty. The same happens if we conjure up in our minds the chord sequence without the tune. Even with both of those components

present, if we strip away only the passionate dynamic swells in volume, the piece loses a good deal of its impact. Such harmony of its components points us to God's symbiosis in his creation. We see mutually beneficial interconnectedness in a million different ways in creation, but more importantly and personally, we see God's sovereignty over his universe in relation to the lives of his people: "For God works all things together for the good of those who love him, and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). This is the ultimate symbiosis in the created order, but the harmony or symbiosis in a composition can nevertheless point the listener to the infinitely more complex harmony created for his benefit by God.

Finally, music points to God through its teleology. God created his universe for a purpose, and that was as an expression of his glory and love. I do not mean to suggest that God considered himself deficient in either glory or love, but only that having created something outside of himself would allow him to interact in the loving way that he desired to do. A Christian composer's music is likewise purposeful, and its purpose is to thereby love and glorify God. For Christians, that's obvious, because as we obey God, *everything we do*, and not just the act of composing, is for the purpose of glorifying God: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Even when we sin, (in a sense, and despite our evil heart attitude), we glorify God, because when we are convicted of sin, and repent of it, we are looking to the One who died that we might be freed from its curse and its dominion. Every time we abase ourselves through repentance of sin, we exalt our Creator and Savior.

What may not be so obvious, however, is that whatever *anyone does* is to the ultimate glory of God. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss were both adamant atheists, and undoubtedly were writing music intentionally for their own glory. Yet, God declares that he will not share his glory with another (Isa. 42:8), so the music of these men, despite the attitude of their hearts, nevertheless glorifies God. In fact, God ordained that these two men should live in order to write music that would glorify him. So then, what is the difference (in respect to their music) between Strauss and a composer who seeks to honor and glorify God? Surely it is that the latter rejoices when God is glorified through his music, whereas the pagan has no true conception of what it means to deflect glory away from himself. Such a man doesn't allow himself even to admit the fact, much less welcome it. Yet Scripture teaches that the stiffest knee and the most curse-infused tongue of the most hardened atheist will one day bow before the Son of God at the great Day of Judgment and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11) before being cast aside into perdition, an act in itself that will magnify and glorify God in his attributes of justice and holiness. Contrasting that, the compliant knees and willing tongues of believers will joyfully confess Jesus as Lord, and in so doing, magnify his mercy, love and forbearance toward them. Their works will likewise reflect their Creator, meaning that the music that I and other like-minded composers write, like the rest of creation, joyfully declares the glory of God.