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Little David Play on that Harp: The Need for Religious Music

A Commentary by Jason Curry



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The "Spirituals in Concert" is undoubtedly one of my favorite, televised concerts. In 1990, two outstanding African-American opera singers, Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman, electrified an audience at Carnegie Hall by singing a number of African-American spirituals. Spirituals such as "Over My Head," "Lord, How Come We Here" and "There is a Balm in Gilead" moved, inspired and reminded a diverse audience in New York and throughout the world about the triumphs and tragedies of African-American life through song. One of my favorite songs was titled "Lil David." The refrain of the song stated:

"Little David play on that harp, Hallelu, Hallelu, little David play in that harp, Hallelu." This short, upbeat and inspiring spiritual was based on the following scripture: "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp and played with his hand: so Saul was

refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him (1 Samuel 16:23)." In short, the power of God moved through the medium of music, and that which was evil left Saul, so that the presence of God could move in him.

I believe that music that is inspired by God (e.g., gospel music, praise music, and hymns) has the power to remove evil, self-defeating, self-absorbing and unproductive thoughts both from our minds and hearts. Not long ago, I was a bit disturbed by the music that was being played on one of the popular radio stations in town. I had my children in the car, and I was looking forward to hearing songs that reflected love, self-determination, community, marriage and/or progress. The vulgar, violent and vitriolic lyrics of the music that I heard were clearly not designed to help demons to flee. In fact, the lyrics may have been written for the sole

purpose of inviting demons to come.

We need more music that mentions the Messiah in the mainstream culture. We need a crescendo of inspiration instead of innumeros of degradation. We need hymns that reflect the psalms or the psalter, not songs that reflect idolatry and adultery. We need a little more heavenly sanctification and a little less self-glorification. We need a little more consecration and a little less fornication, a little more virtue and a little less viciousness, a little more about Jesus' immortality and a little less our human immortality. We need songs that talk of kneeling instead of lyrics that talk about stealing. The power of God is able to move through the music that we hear and sing. Let us continue to promote and embrace music which reminds us of God, so that we may be all that God is calling us to be.