

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 35 | Number 1

Article 1

---

September 2006

## Privilege of Being a Christian Artist

James Buswell

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Buswell, James (2006) "Privilege of Being a Christian Artist," *Pro Rege*:  
Vol. 35: No. 1, 1 - 9.  
Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol35/iss1/1](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol35/iss1/1)

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

**Editor's Note:** James Buswell developed this paper, at the request of *Pro Rege* and the faculty of Dordt College, from his presentation at our eighth and final Jubilee Convocation, April 25, 2005.

# The Privilege of Being a Christian Artist

---



by James Buswell

**I**t was somewhere in the middle of my teenage years, while I was living in St. Louis, Missouri, that I was asked to perform at a service in which a distinguished gentleman whom I had long known and revered would be speaking. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to hear him in person. As I listened to him, I was swept up by the power and the rhythm and the energy of his speech.

He was a man who, in his sermons, had a tendency to start very quietly and thoughtfully, as if he were running through his mind just what part of

---

Mr. James Buswell is an internationally renowned violinist and Professor of Violin at New England Conservatory of Music.

his message he wished to share with the people before him. As he continued to speak, his voice would begin almost imperceptibly to rise, and the tempo of his speech would become more animated. He never resorted to histrionics or a melodramatic style of sermonizing, but after twenty minutes the crescendo that had occurred was readily apparent, and it galvanized his audience. I remember the shock of the end of his sermon that day because he ended as though he were in the middle of something and then suddenly sat down. When one thought about it, one realized that his concluding challenge was a most fitting conclusion to all that he had said. One also was left thinking how much more he might have said had his time been unlimited.

After the service was over, I met this man for the first time, and he approached me with a distinct sense of urgency. We sat and spoke briefly, and our conversation touched on several things. But what I can never forget was the moment when he looked quite sternly at me and said, "You know, you have a great responsibility. With your playing of the violin you must make every effort to leave no doubt in the minds of your listeners that God is very much alive, that he cares profoundly about every one of his creatures, and that he is not silent!" I suspect that from those words some of my audience may know who the speaker was: Dr. Francis Schaeffer. That is quite a charge to lay on a teenager, but it has stayed with me and has had a powerful, motivating influence upon my life to this day.

It was some years earlier, while I was still living in Wheaton, Illinois, and just beginning to show unmistakable signs of moving in the direction of artistic pursuit, that my parents had a significant

conversation with a man of ample girth who was the conductor of the Wheaton College Orchestra at that time. This man addressed my parents on the general subject of the burden they had on their hands with a son who manifested musical talent that might lead him into the dangerous and promiscuous world of secular musical performance. In his view, God's talents did need to be developed, but he feared that it would be tough for me to maintain my Christian testimony while focusing so intensely on developing my skills and refining my artistic voice, all the while aspiring to become a respected member of a profession in which idolatry of art or of self was the norm. His words were not meant primarily for my ears, of course. My parents received them with due respect, and my parents and I both looked into my future with some measure of anxiety and trepidation.

These two brief conversations, which are still firmly fixed in my mind half a century later, serve to highlight an unavoidable sense of conflict with which I grew up throughout my formative years. The attempt to be a Christian performing artist can be seen either as a problem or as a privilege. This particular talent, which God has given, can be perceived either as a burden, which brings with it more than the usual amount of selfish temptation, or as a blessing, through which God intends to speak eloquently to the world at large. I am happy to be able to say that the profession into which God has clearly led me has proven to be much more a privilege than a problem.

Because I had certain very specific advantages as a child, I was set out on a path where I would see the privileges and challenges before me in a very positive light while being aware of the dangers with a minimum of fear. It started with my Grandfather Buswell, who was a somewhat intimidating intellectual figure but was also very jolly. By the time I got to know him, he had already been the president of Wheaton College. His credentials in the evangelical Christian world were impeccable, and his theological positions in many areas were eagerly sought out by many of his colleagues. I vividly recall practicing under the same roof where he lived, and often what I practiced was a twentieth-century composition. He would wander into the living room where I was sawing away, sit

down to listen, and start to beat time energetically with his foot. When a pause came in my work, he would get up, pump his fist in the air enthusiastically, and proclaim, "I agree with it; I believe every word of it!" It was not exactly a common response to music listening. Beyond his robust bass voice, which he exercised regularly in oratorio or hymn singing, and a proclivity for picking out tunes on the ukulele, he would not have been thought of as a knowledgeable music lover. Now this same man carried on a rather virulent argument with some of his Reformed colleagues on the subject of the nature of truth. The issue was whether truth in its very essence had to be verbal and propositional, or whether it might be revealed to us in non-propositional ways as well. He came down very firmly on the possibility of, indeed the reality of, non-propositional truth.

This stance was very heartening to me as I was growing up, spending so much of my time attempting to master a language that was not, strictly speaking, propositional in nature and certainly not essentially verbal. I came to believe quite passionately that music was very much an alternative language, with its own syntax and grammar, definitely propositional, whether programmatic music or not, and fully fit to bring glory to God and to speak His truth with power and eloquence. I found myself bristling at the thought of being an "interpreter" of music. I continue to have the audacity to believe that I articulate a piece of music—I do not interpret it.

My grandfather's point of view caused me to think deeply about the very nature of what I was doing when I performed on the violin in a worship service. Were songs without words as legitimate a form of worship as the playing of a hymn tune through which the congregation might meditate upon the words of the hymn? Or was non-verbal music meant to be just a backdrop to friendly conversation or even to words from the pulpit? How was I worshipping exactly? What was the content of the sounds that came out of this antique piece of wood?

Throughout our secular and religious culture, music has come to be thought of increasingly as a backdrop to other foreground activities, whether those are cinema, an elevator ride, a caller on hold, or a communion service. I find it quite bi-

zarre to be forced to listen to twenty bars of either a Beethoven string quartet or a pop song while someone is pulling up my account on a computer. Music is called upon to serve as a sort of fashionable ambience or to deflect frustration from the indignities of our technological imperatives; as such, it is not seen as any sort of direct and articulate communication. To use music in this way has always seemed to me to be as inappropriate as being asked to listen to two different conversations simultaneously, and I presume that our standards in listening should be at least as high in worship as they would be in the marketplace or in daily life. Even as my convictions in this area came to appear to be ever more eccentric, I felt, even after my grandfather passed on, that I had his vigorous and theological support. Further, it has always seemed to me that Dr. Schaeffer would never have given

---

*My art was rather the language with which I expressed many things dear to me, including supremely my religious faith.*

---

me the charge that he did, if he had not concurred in this matter.

My father went in a very different direction with his life. He went into the social sciences and became an anthropologist. It was through his enthusiasm for the diversity of cultures that I learned a great deal as I was growing up. It became reflexive in our family to relish this diversity rather than to be afraid of it or to fear other people who appear to be different from us or even to have world views radically different from ours. Such fear, I came to realize, is all too common, especially among people of an orthodox religious upbringing. My father's great burden throughout his life was to prepare people to be more sensitive missionaries and to be more effective on the mission-field precisely through an understanding of and an appreciation for the diversity of cultures.

There was another word that echoed in our home a lot as I was growing up, and that was the word "integration." Integration at that time on the campus of Wheaton College in the late 1950s had chiefly to do with the integration of ethnic peoples, and so I came to think of integration as the opposite of segregation. My father wrote a book on the relationship between segregation and the Scripture, and in it he explored the many misinterpretations of Scripture that had nourished the bitter fruits of segregation in many cultures down through the years. He was very much exercised as a professor at the college in assisting the integrating of the Christian community at Wheaton. Perhaps you can understand why I saw that word a little oddly some years later when people would ask me, "How do you *integrate* your Christian faith with the pursuit of your art?" My father had been busy *integrating* different peoples precisely because they were equal members of the human race before God. However, faith and art were not to my mind equals in any way. My faith was something which permeated my entire life, and my art decidedly did not. Faith was the source of my acts of worship; art was not in nearly so exalted a position in my life. My art was rather the language with which I expressed many things dear to me, including supremely my religious faith.

During these same formative years, my mother was attempting to instill in me godly standards of excellence. From my mother's background she saw work as the very soul of Christian existence, and she felt that all worthy labor should be looked upon as "working for the Lord." She impressed upon me many times that my pursuit of music was something that was blessed by God and could always be used by Him for His purposes so long as my heart was devoted to Him. At the same time she made it amply clear that at some later time I would be responsible to make a very careful decision about exactly how I would use the musical talent with which I had been blessed, and that that decision would have to be based strictly upon God's will for my life. She also indicated that such a revelation would most likely be made directly to me and would not necessarily be nearly as clear to those around me, including my own parents. My parents never indicated to me that I had to be a

musician, nor did they ever advise me against a career in music. My mother simply saw the talent that God had given me, and she bent her considerable efforts to teach me how to work to develop that talent. She did this manifestly because she had an unshakeable belief that being the very best one can be, at whatever one chooses to do in life, is absolutely essential to the sincerity and efficacy of one's Christian witness.

At the same time that these high standards of excellence were being maintained in our home, that same person who was my taskmaster and my sternest critic always had just one thing to say to me anytime that I walked out on to a stage to perform: "Go out there and enjoy yourself!" At certain times we would muse about the fact that if one does not enjoy what one does on that stage thoroughly, no one in the audience will be able to either.

Finally, I was blessed with many great teachers who shared with me their values, musical and extra-musical. Some of those were devout Christian people, and others professed no religious faith of any kind. Almost all of them shared with me two over-riding goals. One was always to be obedient to the will of the composer. You may not know that today a lot of teachers do not emphasize that goal at all in their studios. In fact, the manifest instructions of the composer on the score are considered to be of relatively little interest to many. I came to realize that my own fascination with trying to get inside the mind of the composer, to obtain access to the best possible manuscripts of his original ideas, so that I could follow those very closely, was in fact driven by a very real sense of moral obligation. It dawned on me somewhat later in life that this drive actually did not come exclusively from my teachers. It went back all the way to that Grandfather of mine who stood in pulpits all over the world with his Hebrew Old Testament and his Greek New Testament in his hands, reading directly his own translation as he went along because he never trusted fully anyone else's translation. He particularly loved to stop from time to time as he was reading the Scripture to point out to the congregation certain particularly tricky passages over which scholars had vigorously debated the meanings for centuries. I have to laugh at my-

self now as I approach the age of sixty and realize that I never trust any edition of music either!

These same teachers always emphasized to me the importance of physical mastery over my instrument and the ease with which I was expected to play it. The instrument, they proclaimed, must never be a barrier between my own or the composer's musical ideas and the audience. Therefore, one's goals for technical command of the violin were also noble. Needless to say, it was impressed upon me countless times that the development of the requisite physical skill would require endless hours of hard labor in the practice room —labor which is often tedious, hardly spiritually uplifting, and decidedly anti-social.

As I left the protected environment of Wheaton and moved on to such places as Harvard, I thought a lot about different professions and their relative "holiness." I came to be somewhat surprised by what that orchestral conductor had said to my parents when I was a child. It started to appear to me as if being an artist might in fact be a bit easier for a Christian than being a businessman, a lawyer, or maybe even a doctor. It also struck me as odd that in the Christian sub-culture from which I had come, those three professions were considered to be honorable, but if one were an artist, one might be the black sheep of the family. As one can see, I never felt like a black sheep because of the support that I had around me within my own family, but still there were those little intimations that art was a slightly dangerous thing. As I considered this phenomenon, I came to feel that the *dangerous* part of art for many people was very likely in its being perceived as a selfish act. We go into a practice room all by ourselves, and we spend a shocking amount of time manipulating this toy called a violin. The idea that one would spend this much time in so solitary and trivial a pursuit smacked, to many of my Christian friends, as evidence of selfish indulgence, which could only be motivated by a vainglorious desire for a certain kind of fame, or at least public approval. Still, I knew that spending such a large number of hours in the practice room was the only way that I could develop my talent to the fullest and consecrate that talent to the service of God. It was the only way that I could play with any real accuracy and so speak clearly the mes-

sage that I believed confidently I had been given to speak.

There was also the concern about vanity. It was perceived that when one is an artist, one is a part of that “celebrity” world and lifestyle. The word itself is humbly relative: if there are a few people in the world who happen to know about what one does, there is always still an overwhelming majority of people whose lives never will intersect in any way with one’s precious art. My own “career” has never come close to taking on such global proportions that fame has been in any substantial way a problem for me. But I am still amused when Christian people seem so fond of introducing me to their friends as a “world-class artist,” as if such a class system in any way corresponds to God’s reality.

“Idolatry” of the art itself was proposed to me as a danger within the artistic profession. “Don’t worship the art. Don’t worship music,” I was warned. But how does one worship a language? No one I know worships the language that he or she speaks. The language is only a conveyor of the ideas and emotions that I am trying to communicate to someone else. How can words themselves, much less music, be worshipped?

There were some well-meaning people who warned me about the sensuality of artistic expression. This I can well understand. For me, however, the sensual aspects of music were a liberating experience. I had grown up in a society where the intellectual considerably over-balanced the sensual, both experientially and in moral priority. It was my experience that a healthy balance of the two in one’s day-to-day life enriched one’s spiritual life. It seems to me that we live in a popular culture that loves to set an individual’s emotional faculties against her intellectual resources, thereby creating at the very least a highly artificial dichotomy, if not a harmful conflict, in the whole person, who has been made in the image of God. I have found that music does a great deal to heal this artificial divide, not only in the artist himself but in the members of the audience as well.

There was always the concern about the problem of obeying the Sabbath laws. That is an on-going problem and to this day somewhat of a thorn in my side. The concept of a Sabbath has eroded greatly in modern culture. I am asked to perform

some services on the Sabbath in association with my life as a teacher even more frequently than in my role as a performing artist. But a funny thing has happened. A lot of my students suffer periodically from various forms of tendonitis and other injuries related to long hours of physical labor. I have found that preaching Sabbath principles is the best cure. Most of my students have no concept of what it means to stop one day a week and rest from the daily grind. If they learn to do that, most of them stop hurting, and the other six days of work prove to be more fruitful. It sounds to me like a pretty accurate application of the Sabbath principle as taught in the Scriptures.

But gradually I did discover the loneliness of the narrow road. It is still a narrow road, and there is

---

*Still, I knew that spending such a large number of hours in the practice room was the only way that I could develop my talent to the fullest and consecrate that talent to the service of God.*

---

no use in pretending that it is not. That perception started as a young teacher as I chose the students whom I wanted to teach. I chose them differently than many of my colleagues did. Indeed, I saw the concept of talent differently. To many of my pedagogical colleagues, talent is largely a physical and co-ordinational thing, topped off by a sizable dose of *bravura* or *chutzpah*. But to me, talent needs to be measured just as often in terms of intelligence, gentleness, grace, sensitivity, passion, and even compassion. A colleague once flatly declared to me, “You can never find out anything about a person’s intelligence in a fifteen-minute audition.” To be sure, fifteen minutes is a very limited amount of time in which to find out much about another

human being, and now we often have even less time than that. But many of the human qualities mentioned above do show through very quickly, whereas the reasons behind certain physical handicaps are not always readily apparent.

As a young teacher I actually had the audacity to write an article on the subject of talent, in which I proposed that talent for musical expression is actually a very large and diverse thing. Essentially all aspects of talent to my mind have been given by God, including even the capacity for work. But then some of these gifts have been nourished richly whereas others may have been severely stunted by the middle of the teen-age years.

I realized with chagrin that my own developing priorities as a teacher were upside down in comparison with those of many of my colleagues. They saw a student first in terms of physical abilities and chose to dwell primarily upon the technical training of that person, in the clear belief that technical instruction was more crucial, or at least more teachable. The student was urged to focus primarily upon questions such as these: "How do your fingers and arms work? What will promote accuracy of a physical sort? Are you producing the right kind of sound out of your machine?"

I found that I was not starting there with the majority of my students. Instead, I chose to start with their spirit and their mind. Do they understand the spirit which this music is meant to convey? Do they want urgently to speak; is there a real pressure inside their spirit to say something? Are they enjoying the challenge of grasping the architecture of the piece of music before them and of trying to understand just why the composer chose to write this note as opposed to that one? All too many of my students seem predisposed to come to a piece of art that they are to re-create in a sort of abject and hopeless humility. To them it is like the mysterious goddess who came forth full-blown from the head of Zeus—a work which they are meant just to try to execute but of which even the most modest degree of comprehension is beyond their wildest dreams.

As a result of these priorities, so-called technical training came to assume a latter point in priority in my studio, even though it is clearly of the greatest importance to be broached once the engines

of the spirit and of the mind have been more fully fired up. Unfortunately, that approach brought me into rather direct conflict, not only with some of my peers but even more critically with many prospective students. I came to have the habit of asking many students auditioning for my studio some leading questions. I would ask, "Please tell me what you most urgently seek to learn in this studio? What do you perceive your principal weaknesses to be?"

Many would say quite candidly, "Well, I have a pretty clear idea about music, and everyone tells me that I am musically very gifted. But I really need a lot more technique and the ability to play much more accurately."

I found that in many cases I had to admit that I disagreed with them in their own self-estimation, and that it was useful to articulate this disagreement quite clearly up front. I would say to them, "When I hear you play, I have the distinct impression that you do not have clearly in your head a vibrant image of exactly what it is that you want to come out of your violin. If the image in your inner ear were much more precise in terms of pitch, in terms of shape of phrase, in terms of rhythm, and a few more quite basic considerations, you could teach your hands and your instrument to obey your musical will much more fully, and you would sound a good deal better, even without additional technical savvy. The knowledge which you require is first of all conceptual. When that is much stronger, the technical expertise is relatively easy to acquire." Often the prospective students would leave my studio doubting that they had approached the right teacher, and I, in turn, would be doubting how easy those persons would be to teach. In fact, I have lost more than a few potentially good students that way.

I found that this whole concept of *image* had to be redefined in my own mind and defined clearly when I spoke with others in the profession. Some colleagues thought of *image* always in terms of *self-image*, with which one sells oneself to the audience. I did not think that this was very important as an artistic goal or particularly edifying for the audience. What was much more important to me was the *image* which an artist has in his mind before executing the work at hand, in which are clearly

embodied the sounds and the content of what it is he wishes to say through the music. I found that I wanted to preserve or foster or even reawaken in my students a childlike curiosity. Many of the students whom I teach have come from an intensely disciplined environment that is often highly competitive in nature. They have been forced to try to master their instrument as well as possible, but

---

*It occurred to me that  
“accuracy”. . . at the very  
least includes the manifest  
written instructions of the  
composer and embraces the  
accurate telling of the story  
of the music.*

---

in the process their naturally endowed birthright of curiosity has been to some extent beaten out of them. They are not really curious about anything anymore but just want to be told how to push the right buttons. I find that to be a tragedy.

When I was first teaching in Korea, giving only private lessons (as master classes are widely thought to be a waste of time) but seeing most of the students three or four times, I asked several of the students what they found to be most surprising in the things I was attempting to teach them. They agreed that my emphasis on “knowledge,” especially historical, was a big surprise. To their minds, learning to play the violin was largely a matter of skill development, which many of their teachers were quite good at fostering. I was the Western expert being brought in to talk about “style,” which they perceived as a sort of sauce or flavoring, which would make the music taste good to critical ears. And, of course, I was expected to bring with me the latest updates in technical savvy.

I found that because of the personal nature of our God, the personal nature of artistic expression had to be exalted and made clear. I also found that the common understanding in our culture of

the word, “accuracy” needed to be greatly amplified. Many teachers of musical performance tend to think of the success of their students in very simple terms. The student must learn to be consistently “accurate,” which essentially means hitting all of the right notes “in tune”; they must know how to produce a warm and sensuous sound high in cholesterol; and they must know enough about the music to give the general impression of being “musical.” Early on in my teaching life, I was more than a little intimidated by this word, “accuracy.” Many of my students did not play with the cleanliness of intonation that I would have liked, and it seemed clear that I did not spend enough time pounding away at this aspect in lessons. I seemed to be wasting a lot of time trying to help my students understand the language of music and enabling them to get to the heart of the meaning of a musical phrase. I was encouraging rhythmic rigor, developing a larger palette of color, building a cohesive message—all areas of concern that most musicians would agree are of significant value but that most musicians find little time to address adequately in their teaching studios. It occurred to me that “accuracy” is a much larger concept, which at the very least includes the manifest written instructions of the composer and embraces the accurate telling of the story of the music. I certainly did not use my Christian faith as an excuse for the eccentricity of my teaching; but in retrospect, I can see that the values and priorities of my teaching were to a large degree shaped by my faith. And my approach was, and still is, a lonely road at times.

I found consistently the need to meditate upon the things in my own faith that, for me, were clearly extensions that would support me in the act of being a musician. However, they were not part of an integrational process: my faith was and is the very foundation of my being. As such, it supports my language, which is music.

It starts with the first words of the book of John: “In the beginning was the word. . . .” Music is another form of words, and when we play our instrument, we are telling stories. And we tell stories that minister to people. That evident fact continues to be a great source of comfort to me. I realized that the cornerstone of my art is, in fact, not intonational accuracy but rather rhythm, and that

rhythm is spoken of often in the Scriptures. There is a time for everything, including every note that I play. That timing is not mechanical in nature, any more than the moment at which an apple falls from a tree is mechanically determined. No one, least of all God himself, stands before the apple tree and intones, “One, two, three, four.... Now!”

I found that the God whom I worship is a god who believes in excellence and whose creation is rich in detail. He is not superficial, nor does He wish to be generally expressive. He loves to be highly specific. I found also that He is a god who enjoys the beauty of symbolism. It was not a bottom-line mentality that Jehovah sought to nurture in His people. He created a world in which many things cannot be expressed or even noticed if one looks only to the so-called bottom line.

I came to understand what the word, “passion” means. Passion is not something to be feared as an excess of some kind of sensual fixation. Passion is something that our Lord experienced most powerfully, and we are just meant to be imitators of that to some small degree. With the passion comes compassion, and compassion is what chamber music is all about. I cannot play one note without being aware of what my fellow artists are playing, and I have to communicate with that person every word that comes out of my instrument and be sensitive to the words being uttered by every other instrument, reacting to them in a meaningful way. My desire to be true to the original intentions and ideas of the composer is an extension of my need to be a faithful “creature,” following the original impulses of the creator.

The imagination with which the creator has endowed me is by no means a burden. Rather it is a command of that creator to use our imaginations in all sanctified power. It is my belief that the imagination that is developed through musical discipline can be sanctified and liberated from moment to moment through the Holy Spirit.

I found that studying the fullest implications of the doctrine of eternal security as espoused in the Calvinist tradition gave me a great disdain for small preoccupations with security, both in my art and in my daily life. My students often have been taught to choose fingerings that will be safe so that they will not make a mistake. I teach them to take

risks in order to be able to say something boldly that is extemporaneous and immediate and real. Those small risks can be a part of our human life precisely because we enjoy a larger sense of security and confidence in eternity.

I found that the transparency of soul, which is talked about both in the Scriptures and in the writings of some of the great Christian expositors, implies to us as artists that we are to be emotionally open people, candid in an almost embarrassing way. Not everyone is meant to be a performer. Performers are truly exhibitionists in a way that is sometimes painful because of its openness. But then, we want the music to speak through us directly. It is not we but the story of the music that is on exhibition through our art. In some very real sense, we, the artists, must disappear, and it must be God who speaks through us and through the stories that we are telling with such passion and such love. This is why the fullest expression of emotion is not really embarrassing—because it is not actually about us. Rather it is about the music, about the composer, and about the Creator.

Finally, I have come to the conclusion in my teaching, especially in the past few years, that one of the most difficult concepts to explain to students who do not have the privilege of seeing life from a distinctly Christian perspective is the concept of grace. Quite a lot of music either implies or says clearly that it is to be played in a manner that the Italians call *grazioso*. When we are not directly in narrative mode, we are usually dancing. Those two modes of expression are by no means mutually exclusive, especially in the music of J. S. Bach. All too often when I am listening to a student performance of a piece marked explicitly *grazioso*, there is nothing in the playing that remotely resembles grace. I try to get away from the Italian and propose the nearest English equivalent, which is, “graceful.” But even this relatively common word is not exactly part of the common speech of most young adults today. They would not very likely compliment a friend on “graceful” behavior, speech, or action. They would express approval with words like “cool” or “awesome,” little realizing that centuries ago “awe” would be reserved more likely for God himself or for the wonders of nature. I suspect that for some today, the aspira-

tion to be “graceful” would seem vaguely effeminate or even elitist. What about the desire to be “gracious?” This concept goes a bit farther, as it is not just a physical thing but is more internalized and has moral overtones. It is a posture that may be based upon gratitude and a habitual attitude of thanksgiving.

But the more I try to explain how *grazioso* music needs to be played, the more I realize that Christians

can possess a unique and explosive understanding of the whole concept of grace. Through our Lord we see in living terms just how grace is something that absolutely must be received before it can be passed on. It is not something that can be produced, it is not a process in the modern sense of that term, and it cannot be purchased at any price. It is a gift that can only be received and then must be passed on.