

Jeremy S. Begbie. *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007. 412 pages, \$22.99

Although not a magnum opus, this book is a magnum pretty-close. It contains extensive discussion, a 30-page bibliography, and 50 pages of endnotes from diverse fields. It is an expansive exercise in locating and then examining the role of music in the created order. This work, to be clear, is not about lyrics but about music, the melody, the *sound* of music. The book is one more entry in a substantive series put out by Baker Academic, the Engaging Culture series. Others in the series which have been previously reviewed include *Reel Spirituality* (Robert Johnston), *Visual Faith* (William Dyrness, also series editor), and *A Matrix of Meanings* (Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor). As with others in the series, this books take some work, yet it does not require the reader to be highly proficient in either theology or music theory. A greater acquaintance with either will only increase the level of engagement with the author's claims and concerns.

One might wonder why music should even be an important topic of theological study. On the one hand, the theology of the lyrics might seem to be more easily discerned, more direct, and therefore more important. On the other hand, what could be theological about melodies? Aren't they theologically neutral? Melodies certainly can convey emotion, but theology? What insight could they contain about the nature of God? The author replies to this, "Theology's first calling...is to help build up the people of God, to shape the Christian community for the sake of its worship and mission to the world." And certainly music is an important part of worship, either by its inclusion or by its conscious exclusion. In the Introduction the author claims that "no apology is made here for the fact that this book will require hard thought." He makes good on the claim. It requires hard thought because the territory covered is sizable and the ideas complex. But it is well-reasoned; the effort is paid off.

The book is divided into three sections: Music in Action, Encounters, Music in Christian Ecology. Each section is further divided into several chapters. The first section defines music as an action: music making and music hearing, both of which are "socially and culturally embedded." Music making is "*the intentional production of temporally organized patterns of pitched sounds*" (40). Music hearing then is "*the perception of temporally organized patterns of pitched sounds as 'music'*" (40). Begbie then works his way through various biblical understandings of the revelatory role of music. Both positive and negative attitudes toward music are present, hence the variations of the place of music in worship, especially related to the use of instruments.

In the second section, the author explores the Great Tradition, beginning with Pythagorus' analysis of music as revelatory of the creator's design for creation. This was a highly rational understanding in which "the harmony of the universe can be expressed in mathematical ratios or proportions apprehended by the mind, and musical sounds can mediate these ratios" (79). This section continues with an examination of the place of music in the views of Marten Luther, John Calvin and Huldrych Zwingli. This is followed by a chapter on Bach, which is in turn followed by a chapter on three musical theologians: Schleiermacher, Barth, and Bonhoeffer. This is then balanced by a discussion of two theological musicians: Olivier Messiaen and James MacMillan.

Section three, "Music in Christian Ecology," is not about making music greener but about the created order, on the one hand, creating "a network of basic biblical beliefs

or faith commitments that together shape and pattern our perceptions of the world” and then locating music within that framework (185-6). Begbie poses three questions: What kind of Creator creates? What kind of cosmos does the Creator create and relate to? What kind of calling do we have in this cosmos? (187)

Those with passing interests in both music and theology will likely enjoy this book. I certainly learned a thing or two about music theory, about why the majority of western popular music employs the 1, 4, and 5 chords of a key, for example. I also appreciated the wide-ranging survey of how various theologians, ancient and modern, have accounted for music in the created order. The author notes that he had intended to have a closing chapter that might “help us develop responsible habits of judgment about music as we engage it in everyday life.” Indeed, I had hoped for such a chapter. Its absence does not make for a weak book. It does, however, create a desire for this next and important phase of Begbie’s work.

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