

How Might a Robust Theology of Music Positively Impact the Witness of the Church of Ireland in the 21st century? – Stuart Reid

Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship of music to theology and its impact on the worshipping culture and mission of the Church of Ireland. I examine perceptions and suspicions of music inherited from Plato, Augustine, Calvin and Luther and demonstrate that a more robust approach to musical theology is necessary. Drawing on diverse disciplines such as musicology, theological aesthetics, semiology, semiotics, theodicy, hermeneutics and studies of emotion, I perform qualitative research to determine what would be required of such a theology. This leads to the rejection of the music-as-language metaphor and demonstrates the necessity of emancipating music from linguistic servitude. The ontology of music is ambiguous and cannot be considered apart from the musician-composer and audience and is better identified by the embodied reactions it provokes. Ambiguity, contrary to inherited suspicion, is a positive aspect of music's nature and is ultimately disturbing to post-Enlightenment linear linguistic structures of reason, by suggesting a wider paradigm. Music is remarkable for its communication of discrete emotional meaning and is no more open to manipulation than any other communicative method. Furthermore, a theology of music must allow for theologising *through* music, and I consider what value this has in the age of recording and the modern/postmodern transition. Musicians are often theologians of a post-church society, and the Church of Ireland must find a way of welcoming them, if it is to benefit from their leadership potential. I conclude with recommendations for future research and practical application, and present a fresh musical structure, and a new musical instrument to demonstrate possible avenues for future work.