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Wiser Than Despair: The Evolution of Ideas in the Relationship of Music and the Christian Church

Quentin Faulkner

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This book addresses a highly complex and elusive matter: why the Christian Church was able to contribute so generously to music from its earliest days through the 18th century and why it has suffered since that time from a creeping artistic paralysis. Modern attitudes and assumptions often find the values and accomplishments of the Christian worldview enigmatic, even repellant, and church music has come to be one of the primary areas in which the tension between conflicting worldviews continues to be worked out on a daily basis. This thoughtful work investigates the historical interaction of theology, philosophy and music, and will be of interest to church musicians, theologians, music historians and cultural anthropologists. In its concluding chapter this work explores a number of basic questions: In what sense, if any, can the arts (and then the fine arts) be considered profoundly significant for modern society? Is there a meaningful role for artists of genius and total commitment? Do the arts (and then the fine arts) have any profound significance for the Church in the modern world? Of what significance, if any, to the Church in the modern world are the great Christian artistic accomplishments of the past? This exploration is by means of excerpts from historical sources, quotations from modern authors, and commentary on both. It calls upon historical, philosophical, theological, liturgical, anthropological, and musical sources and concepts in an attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of musical developments that have served the Christian church for centuries and that have also provided a rich heritage of art music.

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