

Prefaces

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I write this as we approach 2017, the year dedicated to marking the 500th anniversary of the European Reformations. Amidst the massive literature that will doubtless pour forth during those twelve months – in addition to colloquia, conferences and lectures – it will be fascinating to see how much scholarly energy will be given to music, perhaps the most elusive and beguiling of all the arts. Understandably, huge attention has been paid to the battles over visual art that raged so fiercely in the sixteenth century. The re-evaluation of the role of images and our sense of sight during this period has proved to be fertile ground for scholarship. But historians and theologians have been inclined to spend rather less energy considering the ways in which music – in practice and theory – became a heated focus of interest and debate, bound up as it was with the seismic philosophical, scientific and political shifts of the time. In fact, this was an age when music's immense affective and persuasive powers were developed as never before, and this in turn generated entirely new and pressing questions about its proper use. Those who tried to curb and control its place in worship did not, as is often thought, have a low view of music. Just the opposite. They were acutely aware of its potency – indeed, its *theological* potency.

When I first started investigating the place of music in the reform movements of the sixteenth century, I searched in vain for an informed introduction to the field, and one that was sensitive to the complex theological issues at stake. Chiara Bertoglio has provided just this. And despite its substantial length and depth, she still insists that it is only “a stepping-stone for further studies”. Yet if it is an introduction, it is one with at least three highly unusual features. To begin with, it is written by an astonishingly able pianist and performer. This gives the text a practice-rooted authenticity, and makes Bertoglio especially alert to the tensions between musical practice and theory which run through her chosen era. Second, although a devout Roman Catholic, Bertoglio's instincts are ecumenical through and through. She is quite properly keen to show that music written within a particular theological or church tradition has the capacity to speak far beyond the boundaries of that tradition. More interested in continuities than discontinuities, she adopts an approach to historical study that refuses to allow *conflict* to be the leading conceptual category. Although fully aware that music can be a highly divisive force, she rightly points out that “it has often been the only means of unity, traversing boundaries and building bridges made of melodies, words and people who crossed the religious divides and weaved an in-

visible communion”. The relevance of this in our own day could hardly be exaggerated. Third, she devotes a whole chapter to women’s voices, something which should need no special pleading, but which brings a perspective that has often been woefully under-represented in studies of this sort.

Any reader of this book cannot fail to be immeasurably enriched and pressed to re-think in quite radical ways why music matters, why it is vital that we see it flourish today – and perhaps most especially in the Church. As Bertoglio notes, this is “not the study of a dead object, which can be dissected at leisure and whose relevance for the life of contemporary people is cultural at best. It is instead a field which even today is full of resonances, some of which are among the most important and cherished in the lives of millions of believers”. Quite so.

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