

A Russian Eschatology:
Theological Reflections on the Music of Dmitri Shostakovich

Submitted by Anna Megan Davis to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree
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Abstract

Theological reflection on music commonly adopts a metaphysical approach, according to which the proportions of musical harmony are interpreted as ontologies of divine order, mirrored in the created world. Attempts to engage theologically with music's expressivity have been largely rejected on the grounds of a distrust of sensuality, accusations that they endorse a 'religion of aestheticism' and concern that they prioritise human emotion at the expense of the divine. This thesis, however, argues that understanding music as expressive is both essential to a proper appreciation of the art form and of value to the theological task, and aims to defend and substantiate this claim in relation to the music of twentieth-century Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich. Analysing a selection of his works with reference to culture, iconography, interiority and comedy, it seeks both to address the theological criticisms of musical expressivism and to carve out a positive theological engagement with the subject, arguing that the distinctive contribution of Shostakovich's music to theological endeavour lies in relation to a theology of hope, articulated through the possibilities of the creative act.

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Note on Abbreviations

References to the score are made where possible citing the rehearsal figure and the number of bars preceding or following this. For example, [35]¹⁻³ refers to bars 1-3 after rehearsal figure 35.

Note on Translations

Translations of Russian names and places are cited consistently throughout, with the exception of those references occurring within direct quotations, where citations remain true to the translations of the original sources.