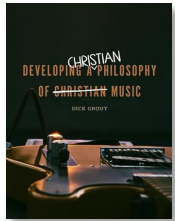


[Review] *Developing a Christian Philosophy of Music*, by Dick Grout



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Grout, Dick. *Developing a Christian Philosophy of Music*. Independently published, 2022. 197pp. ISBN 9798858454526.

In 2023, Professor Dick Grout published his long-worked-on manuscript, *Developing a Christian Philosophy of Music*. Grout originally wrote this as a resource for classes he and others were teaching in upstate New York, and he published it to make it more accessible. In this book, he covers a wide range of topics relevant to Christian music, from copyright law to the debate regarding the use of older or newer songs in corporate worship, and even the question, “What makes Christian music ‘Christian’—the lyrics, the composer, the performer, or something else?” This book provides a new look at topics that might be familiar to those working in worship, music, culture, and their various intersections.

Having been involved in related conversations for the past few decades, I was pleasantly surprised by some new insights into these discussions. One point I found particularly interesting occurs in Grout’s chapter about “Old and New.” He considers whether entirely new songs, time-tested older ones, or a mix should be used. In response, Grout returns to the Koine Greek of the New Testament:

In English, the word “new” can mean “brand new, never ever used before,” or it could mean “new to you, although it may have been used by someone else.” It can also mean “renewed, reconditioned, new.” In Koine Greek, in which much of the Bible was written, two words are used for our one word, “new.” They are *neos* and *kainos*.

The Greek word *neos* means new, as in brand new. It means new in respect to time, recent, or young. If this word were used in reference to a song, it would mean that the song was just recently written.

The Greek word *kainos* means new in the sense that something is renewed or reconditioned, not something absolutely brand new. It can mean new as to form or quality. It refers to the concept of renewing or making fresh. If this word were used in reference to a song, it would refer to the newness of the quality or the nature of the song, that it embodied newness or was made new and fresh again. (30)

Grout points out that in the book of Revelation’s command to “sing a new song,” the writer did not use *neos*—a newly composed song—but *kainos*, a song which is renewed, reconditioned, or fresh. Other points also refer to *neos* songs, but these specify refreshed songs. Therefore, since both are mentioned in scripture, we can make the case from scripture for using both new and classic songs—but always “full of the life of God” rather than out of dry repetition and habit.

Unlike similar books, which may raise questions and then answer them, this book presents important questions and then gives both sides of the argument, encouraging readers to pray and think and come to conclusions based on scripture, their relationship with God, and wisdom from their contexts. Readers are encouraged to intentionally form their own philosophy of music and pray about how that has changed in the past or may change in the future. An example of this principle is Grout's discussion of copyright law. Should Christian songwriters copyright their songs and expect payment for their work, or should they bless the body of Christ by making more resources freely available? Grout explains USA copyright law and then suggests points both for and against the copyrighting of music by Christian composers. He leans toward the validity of copyright, affirming that the laborers deserve their wages, but he presents both sides of the argument. He asks the reader to think and pray, coming to their own conclusions while asking God for insight and wisdom.

Grout also presents a taxonomy of Christian musical worship songs, with two images for the reader to consider: a river and a cross. Through both images, he illustrates these categories:

- 1) Prophetic Music: Revelation, which comes from God (via direct revelation, scripture, etc.)
- 2) Worship Music: Our response to what has come from the throne of God
- 3) Edification Music: Songs of how the revelation from God affects us personally
- 4) Evangelism Music: How we respond to others about the revelation from God

Grout expounds on these categories, using the two images as ways to remember each category. His picture of the cross especially helps me in this. Consider the Catholic sign of the cross as a blessing given by a priest. The priest gives the blessing with his hands moving down, up, right, and left. Rotate this invisible cross ninety degrees. Now the first category, that which comes from the throne of God, comes down. Then our response to God, based on this, goes up. The third category, regarding how this affects us, comes in and points to us, and the fourth category, about sharing this with others, goes out.

Such thoughts and insights abound in this book, prompting us not only to listen to the author for the answer but also to pray about our responses to ideas given and questions posed. This will be useful even for the seasoned worship leader, worship pastor, ethnodoxologist, or arts consultant. As ethnodoxologists, let us not become complacent in our knowledge but press on further, wrestling with the tough questions and reexamining our responses from the past about why we believe what we believe.