

Saggi

Bridging Heaven and Earth:
*an investigation in the metaphysics of Martin Luther's
theory of music, in continuous dialogue with Florensky*

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Abstracts

In this paper I set out to explore some aspects of Luther's thought concerning music, as well as to unpack their theological and philosophical implications. To this effect, apart from reading Luther's work itself, I will establish a dialogue between him and the orthodox theologian Pavel Florensky.

Questo testo si propone di esplorare alcuni aspetti della teoria della musica di Martin Lutero e di svilupparne le implicazioni teologiche e filosofiche. A questo fine, oltre che apprezzare il lavoro di Lutero stesso pongo in dialogo Lutero con il teologo ortodosso Pavel Florensky.

El siguiente texto se propone la exploración de algunos aspectos de la teoría musical de Martin Lutero y el desarrollo de sus implicaciones teológicas y filosóficas. Con este propósito, además de enfocarme en el trabajo de Lutero mismo, pongo en diálogo Lutero con el teólogo ortodoxo Pavel Florensky.

Keywords

Luther; Florensky; Theological Aesthetics; Theory of Music; Icons

*Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,
who walk in the light of your presence, Lord (Ps 89:15)*

Introduction

The goal of this paper is that of providing an exposition and interpretation of Martin Luther's theory of music. As much as Luther departed in many ways from the previous theological tradition, his positions concerning the nature of music constitute an exception. As I will discuss below, Luther was the recipient of theories which found their origin as early as in early-medieval and even in pre-Christian philosophy. At the same time, the implementation of his ideas in the liturgical practice of the protestant tradition was in many ways innovative. His vision of worship music as a way of propagating the Scripture eventually led to the use of vernacular in place of Latin in church singing, as well as constituting the foreground for the rich tradition of German music. As a matter of fact, the importance which all the protestant churches give to music today, as well as their typical vitality when it comes to produce new worship music, is arguably a result of "Luther's spirit" as it lives on in his spiritual successors. This, gives us a picture where the late-scholastic framework inherited by Luther became an organic part of his highly original theological thought.

In this paper I set out to explore some aspects of Luther's thought concerning music, as well as to unpack their theological and philosophical implications. To this effect, apart from reading Luther's work itself, I will establish a dialogue between him and the orthodox theologian Pavel Florensky. While not a friend to Protestantism, I believe that Florensky's final work – a study on the nature and role of icons published under the title of *Iconostasis* – provides us with precious insights which can be applied

in order to unfold the deeper nuances of Luther's ideas. As it will appear, I hold that music did play for Luther – and does play now for Reformed Christianity – a role analogous to that played by icons in the Orthodox tradition. In this sense, the reliance of the German theologian on the pre-reformed tradition allows for the establishment of a comparison with the practices of the Orthodox church on the ground of a common heritage. Alongside Florensky, I also make reference to George Steiner's work *Real Presences*, employing it as it were as a mediating element between the two theologians. As it will become clear, the lines of thought which Steiner pursues in this book shall reveal themselves as extremely precious in order to support my analysis of Luther, as well as my attempt of a parallel between him and Florensky.

Often, works concerning Luther's theory of music tend to focus on the ethical importance that this held for him: while I do not intend denying that this is probably the main aspect of his consideration of music, I consciously chose to relegate it to a secondary role. Instead, I opted to focus more on the metaphysical implications of Luther's thought on music, trying as it were to "expand the letter" of his systematic reflection on the subject. Moreover, while I will make reference to Luther's historical sources for his meditation on music, I will keep the discussion substantially theoretic and speculative, rather than historical.

My paper shall be structured as follows: first, I shall describe what was Martin Luther's conception of music, discussing what he thought of its ontological status and how he categorized it with respect to other disciplines and sciences. To this effect, I shall also briefly cover the sources which contributed to shaping Luther's thought¹. Second, I will explore Luther's understand-

¹ As it will appear, on this point in particular – although it is true of my paper in general – I am highly indebted to the paper by J. Andreas LOEWE, *Musica*

ing of music as something able to bridge heaven with earth, and his opinion that musical composition is capable of conjoining the harmony of the heavenly assemblies with that produced on earth by the choruses of human voices. As mentioned above, in parallel with my discussion of Luther I shall make reference to works other than his – with giving particular emphasis to Florensky’s – in order to underline the metaphysical and theological reach of his ideas.

1. Luther on music: his sources

As mentioned in the introduction, Martin Luther’s account of music represents an anomaly with respect to his broader thought. While breaking with tradition on multiple matters of doctrine, he retained what we could basically described as a late-medieval conception of music². As a result, Luther con-

est Optimum?: *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, in *Music and Letters*, 94 (2013) 4, 573–605.

² In fact, as Neill Stipp notices, when it came to music Luther was generally speaking a conservative. As opposed to other prominent figures of the development of music of the Renaissance, he wanted to retain many of the features of medieval music, including Gregorian chant. N. STIPP, *The Music Philosophies of Martin Luther and John Calvin*, in *The American Organist* 41 (2007) 1, 68-72, 70. Another way in which Luther we remained true to tradition was in his consideration of music as a science within the terms laid down by medieval thought – in this sense, as J. Andreas Loewe notices, «by Luther’s time music had long been an established part of the Quadrivium – arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy – four sciences that were studied alongside the Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric»: LOEWE, *Musica est Optimum?: Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 575. For the role played by musical education in the quadrivium, see A. HEILMANN, *Boethius’ Musiktheorie und das Quadrivium Eine Einführung in den neuplatonischen Hintergrund von »De institutione musica«*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage, Goettingen 2007, 68-104, and K. G. FELLNERER, *Die Musica in den Artes Liberales*, in J. KOCH et al., *Artes Liberales: Von der Antiken Bildung zur Wissenschaft des Mittelalters*, Brill, Leiden 1976, 33-49.

tinued to draw on at least some of the elements of Scholastic philosophy, as well as on some of its pre-Christian sources. Crucially, we find recorded in the *Table Talk* how Luther made reference to music as one of the «prime matters»³. Doing so, Luther reiterated a view held by many before him – including the like of Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard⁴ – and which finds its first formulation with Boethius⁵. According to the Roman thinker, prime matter was characterized by being simply present in nature and never shaped or formed by human action. In his *Preface to the Symphoniae Iucundae* – an introduction which Luther wrote for a collection of motets compiled by former cantor of St Thomas’s Leipzig and composer Georg Rhau – we find Luther expressing himself in terms consonant with Boethius’ positions: «if you examine the thing itself, you will find that music was impressed or created with every single creature one and all. For nothing is without sound, or sounding number, so that the very air [...] in motion sounds and can be heard and even touched»⁶. Something we can notice, is how this passage shows that Luther’s concept of music was deeply ontological, in the sense that to him music held a universal and objective signifi-

³ As Loewe notices, the fact that Luther description of music as prime matter happens in the *Table Talk* might suggest a casual or imprecise use of the term. Still, Loewe argues that Luther refers to music this way in multiple and other occasions, something which suggests that he employed this term intentionally, referring his hearers to a philosophical school still very prevalent in his times. LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 577.

⁴ HEILMANN, *Boethius’ Musiktheorie und Das Quadrivium*, 306.

⁵ In turn, Boethius himself was following in the trail of Nicomachus of Gerasa and Aristotle. For the Aristotelian understanding of prime matter, see C. J. F. WILLIAMS, *Aristotle’s De Generatione et Corruptione*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2002, xv, and in particular the discussion *Prime Matter in De Generatione et Corruptione*, in the *Appendix*, 211-19; for its Boethian adaptation, see HEILMANN, *Boethius’ Musiktheorie und das Quadrivium*, 305-7.

⁶ M. LUTHER, *Preface to the Symphoniae Iucundae*, appendix to LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 598.

cance well beyond its sensual qualities and manifestations⁷. As we will see below, Luther gave great importance to composed music, which as such he considered artificial. Still, even if such music was created by human beings, this was possible only insofar as music itself exists as a fact beyond them – in fact, as creation itself is embedded in music, music is more original to creation than humanity itself, as it was literally around since the time before us. Very influential on Luther for the shaping of his ontological understanding of music was also a book known as the *Speculum Musicae*, a work once attributed to Johannes de Muris, but now linked to a scholar simply known as Jacobus. In this book – and again, in line with the tradition commencing with Boethius –, it is postulated that «music had been at the heart of creation from the time before “the first substances were separated”»⁸. Accordingly, we see the influence of the *Speculum* on Luther when for example he expresses the opinion that music is one of the «transcendental matters», once more individuating music as something that was called into being at the very beginning of everything⁹. Another factor which emerges in the *Preface* is the thought of Matthäus Herbenus, a theorist who also employed the framework laid down in the *Speculum*. Although it is probable that Luther did not have any direct acquaintance of Herbenus’s work, arguably he came indirectly in contact with his ideas – Loewe hypothesizes that this could have happened either through his circle of friends or through the exchange with some of his theological interlocutors¹⁰ – and in fact shows to share his positions, especially as regards Herbenus’s conception

⁷ J. E. TARRY, *Music in the Educational Philosophy of Martin Luther*, in *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 21 (1973) 4, 355-365, here 356.

⁸ LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 582.

⁹ LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 582.

¹⁰ LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 581.

of music as an instrument to communicate God's Word, and his strong sense of music's ability to control the human emotions¹¹. Moreover, on this following Herbenus too, Luther thought of discourse and speech in terms of divine gifts¹². Accordingly, he puts the human voice as a source of sound and music which stands above the music produced by animals – which was in turn superior to that of the wind and the air – coming to the point of claiming that «beside the human voice all things are almost unmusical, so great are the excellent Creator's superabundant and incomprehensible munificence and wisdom in this one matter»¹³.

Distinguishing the music of the natural world or *musica naturalis* from composed music or *musica artificialis*, Luther receives the influence of Adam von Fulda's and Nicolaus Wollick's, also adopting a tripartite categorization of natural music as a result. In this respect, this includes *musica mundane* – the sounds of the natural world – *musica humana* – the music that humans and animals make when they laugh, cry, or speak – and *musica caelestis* – or the music of heaven¹⁴. Let us now focus on this third category. As Loewe notices, while the notion of *musica caelestis* is rather loosely defined by Luther, it nonetheless played a crucial role in his understanding of music and the development of the Reformed liturgical tradition. As he puts it «The capacity to combine Scripture with music (*sermo et vox*), to draw on heavenly music and heavenly words, was what ultimately distinguished

¹¹ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 581.

¹² This, according to Joe E. Tarry, was for Luther true of music in general. Being a gift of God, this amounted to the fact that music was beyond the powers of man to do more than cultivate his skills in its use. TARRY, *Music in the Educational Philosophy of Martin Luther*, 356.

¹³ LUTHER, *Preface to the Symphoniae Iucundae*, 600.

¹⁴ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 582-3.

human beings from animals¹⁵ [...] it was this insight that had led Luther to employ music as an effective practical instrument to further his reforms and that in turn led to the establishment of a distinctive Lutheran choral tradition, in which musicians and theologians collaborated in creating musical art works in order to allow their communities to share in singing and preaching the good news»¹⁶. Similarly to how the Scholastic analogical sense of Scripture was able to unlock the secrets of the spiritual truth, Luther considered the music of heaven able to allow humans to admire a glimpse of God's majesty and harmony¹⁷. While he refers the music of heaven to the image of the angelic hosts singing God's glory – as portrayed, for instance, in Luke 2:15 and in Hebrews 12:22 – this kind of music also includes the occasions when the *musica caelestis* resounds on earth. This, happens whenever human beings sing the praises of God, thereby aligning their voices with the heavenly ones, and allowing the sound of the angelic harmony to be heard on earth¹⁸. As I will elaborate at length in the next section, by composing music and thereby generating *musica artificialis*, human beings shape and conjoin the *musica humana* and the *musica caelestis* – this being another view which Luther shared with Herbenus –, thus creating a melody and allowing us mortals to have a share in the worship of heaven¹⁹. In this condition, human beings become God's co-workers, insofar as they become able, according to their own scale and abilities, of imitating the original act of cre-

¹⁵ «Man alone apart from the rest was given the gift of words combined with song, so that he should know that he ought to praise God, that is with loud preaching and words combined with sweet melody»: LUTHER, *Preface to the Symphoniae Iucundae*, 602.

¹⁶ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 591.

¹⁷ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 588.

¹⁸ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 593.

¹⁹ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 591.

ation²⁰. In this sense, while God creates endowing the universe with its prime matters, we create in a secondary way insofar as we produce aesthetic compositions reproducing the harmony and glory of the celestial music.

Let us now diverge for a moment from Luther's own writing, and look to a few other sources which, I hope, will allow me to better illuminate what is involved in his conception of music. In his *Real Presences*, George Steiner claims that «there is aesthetic creation because there is *creation*, and analogously that there is formal construction because we have been made form»²¹. Paraphrasing this sentence according to the present context, it follows that we are able of composing music insofar as there is *composition*. Hence, we are able of doing so insofar as we are preceded by an original act of musical composition. Moreover, by composing music we repeat something true of ourselves and of the essence of creation itself. Always according to Steiner, this is an experience that exceeds that of music: in general, when caught in the act of aesthetic composition, he argues that we always come up against an irreducible otherness. In his words, this otherness is «almost materially, like an ever-renewed vestige of the original, never wholly accessible moment of creation. It is, in the idiom and image of current cosmology, the “background radiation” which tells of the coming into being of our world»²². Accordingly, «intimations of a radical “non-humanity” within music's powers [...] intimations of a source and destination somehow outside the range of man, have always pressed upon

²⁰ G. STEINER, *Real Presences*, Faber and Faber, London 1989, 201. «The writing of poems, the making of music, the carving of stone or wood by mortal men and women is not only grounded in available circumstances: it is a *fiat*, a creative motion, always after the first», 202.

²¹ STEINER, *Real Presences*, 201.

²² STEINER, *Real Presences*, 210.

composer and performer»²³. We can employ George Steiner's metaphor of background radiation in order to describe Luther's idea of music as an original and all-pervasive feature of creation. In this sense, every human musical composition draws from a context of non-human music which is the background radiation from which any further sound emerges, and of which any other sound is an articulation.

Another possible parallel is with Pavel Florensky's study of icons in his *Iconostasis*. There, Florensky considers the employment of gold as a colour in icons as «the golden colour of superqualitative existence first *surrounds* the areas that will become the figures, manifesting them as possibilities to be transfigured so that the abstract non-existents become possibilities»²⁴. Then, on one hand golden areas in icon acts as the “fields of emergence” of the figures; at the same time, on the other hand gold does not simply provides the figures with a framework, but also somehow constitutes the very essence of the figure. We can see this as Florensky compares the role of gold in the icons to that of light within the whole of creation. In this sense, he writes that everything which exists, appear and it is possible to experience is essentially light²⁵ – that is, gold – : from a theological point of view, light is nothing but the visual experience of the voice and Word of God²⁶. Hence, the visual experience of the Word of God as light is the prerequisite and the essence of any other visual experience, and particularly that of the Word of God as primarily embodied in Jesus Christ and secondarily in the saints - all of this translates in the realm of icons in the use of gold and its relationship to the artistic representations of the Word's em-

²³ STEINER, *Real Presences*, 217.

²⁴ P. FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, St Vladimir's Press, New York 2000, 138.

²⁵ FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, 154-5.

²⁶ FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, 146.

bodiment. Accordingly, in Steiner's vocabulary we might say that light is the "background radiation" of visible creation, and gold is its repetition in the context of icons. Accordingly, by analogy it follows that the all-pervasive music in creation is the prerequisite and essence of any human music and experience of the heavenly harmony, while it also generally constitutes the means necessary to make an aural experience of the Word of God.

Having broadly discussed Luther's positions regarding the nature of music I shall turn to consider the effects and role which he attributed to music.

2. Luther on music: the bridge between heaven and earth

Given what discussed so far, it does not come as a surprise how Luther had an extremely high view of music and of what this could accomplish – where this was true in particular with reference to the sphere of worship and of church services²⁷. In this sense, he was of the opinion that by praising God in music, the latter acted as a bridge allowing for the possibility of relishing God's absolute and perfect wisdom, by seeing its reflection in his work of music itself. Accordingly – always in the *Preface to the Symphoniae Iucundae* – Luther presented music as some-

²⁷ As Loewe notices, Luther's «profound love of music as an art form ... inspired successive generations of artists to use their craft in the service of God and Luther's Reformation. He encouraged composers to use their skill not merely to create "sermons in sound", but to enable others to obtain a glimpse of the beauty of God' kingdom: "by embellishing and ornamenting their tunes in wonderful ways and sounds, and so to lead others (as it were) into a heavenly dance». J. A. LOEWE, *Why do Lutherans Sing? Lutherans, Music, and the Gospel in the First Century of the Reformation*, in *Church History*, 82 (2013), 69-89, here 72.

thing able to connect the whole of creation with its creator²⁸. In Loewe's words, the *Preface* «follows an arc that takes as its origin the very beginning of creation and descends from God to those who have been given a voice, in order to return to heaven through composed music: Luther explained that the praises sung by his readers had the potential to take the singers straight back to heaven, and the ultimate origin and goal of music»²⁹. Hence, by becoming consciously musical – that is, by actively composing and producing artificial music as opposed to just sounding – we come to reflectively express and formulate one of the basic aspects of creation³⁰. As mentioned above, in this way composed music comes to amplify and shape natural music and thereby conjoins *musica humana* and *musica caelestis*. Then, by composing and performing music we turn creation – as it were, in the aspect of its musicality – back to God. In this sense, we can imagine music being like a flow, originating from God – or, to be more precise in the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son who is also God's Word and therefore sound – which finds in us a conscious articulation, and then returns back to its origins. As mentioned above, Luther envisaged the heavenly assembly as a choir of many different voices whose multiplicity

²⁸ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 581-2.

²⁹ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 583.

³⁰ Regarding this point, it can be useful to recall George Steiner's comment that «the authentic experience of understanding, when we are spoken to by another human being or by a poem, is one of responding responsibility. We are answerable to the text, to the work of art, to the musical offering, in a very specific sense, at once moral, spiritual and psychological». This, triggers what Steiner calls a responsible response, an «answering answerability [which makes] the process of understanding a moral act»: STEINER, *Real Presences*, 8, 90. Accordingly, insofar as he considered music as central to theology, Luther put composers and poets under the same obligation as theologians of employing their work to propagate the news of God's mercy and grace. LOEWE, *Why do Lutherans Sing?*, 71.

come to be composed into one melodious and harmonic tune. This harmony of heterogeneous elements is mirrored on earth whenever polyphonic music composed by human beings in order to glorify God – that is, music inspired by God’s Word – is performed: this, aligns the performers with heaven, transporting them «to the court of heaven»³¹.

Crucially, it must be remarked that, beside his understanding of music as an essential feature of creation, Luther also argued that as such music bears an imprint of the Creator’s wisdom and power. As we come to be able to produce music in accordance with our vocal and intellectual possibilities, we become vessels and channels of the divine action as through us and in us different instances of music are repeated. Once more, in the terms laid down by George Steiner in his *Real Presences* «music [...] “passes through” [...] the person of its composer as it does through that of the performer with a formal necessity and universality far exceeding any individuation»³². In this sense, the individual signature of the author comes to be as it were accidental, insofar as any music originally comes from God, and in this sense predates any human effort at composition. Crucially, if I am correct in reading Luther through the lenses of Steiner work, this allows him to avoid Florensky’s accusation of being under the Western rationalist illusion according to which it is possible to create something from non-existence. Rather, it remarkably puts Luther on the side of what Florensky labels the ontology of the “East”, which believes that «*ex nihilo nihil* and that something [...] is created only by the Real One, by the Creator»³³.

Wishing to further deepen our understanding of the

³¹ LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 592.

³² STEINER, *Real Presences*, 170.

³³ FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, 138.

spiritual process which Luther is writing about, we can again resort to Florensky, and in particular to his description of the act through which an icon is created. In this regard, he writes that «in creating a work of art, the psyche or soul of the artist ascends from the earthly realm into the heavenly; there free of all images, the soul is fed in contemplation by the essences of the highest realm, knowing the permanent *noumena* of things; then, satiated with this knowing, it descends again to the earthly realm. And precisely at the boundary between the two worlds [that is, the visible and the invisible], the soul's spiritual knowledge assumes the shapes of symbolic imagery: and it is these images that make permanent the work of art»³⁴. I believe that, except for the obvious differences of vocabulary caused by the fact that Florensky is writing about figurative art, he and Luther are describing the process involving the human artist and his creator. In Luther, the harmony that we find in polyphonic music can be described as symbolic of the harmony one finds in heaven: a glimpse of the divine fullness able to order the sounds of the different human voices and instruments, and to turn them into an organic and meaningful whole. Just as the iconographer ascends to the eternal essences and draw from this act of contemplation the inspiration for his work, the composer enters with his soul the heavenly court, tasting the harmony of the heavenly choruses he ought to repeat in earthly music.

Concerning the contemplation of the saintly visages in the icons, Florensky writes that «we are beholding a countenance, then, whenever we have before us a face that has fully realized within itself its likeness to God: and we then rightly say, Here is the image of God, meaning: here is depicted the prototype of Him. When we contemplate this holy countenance, we thus behold the divine prototype; for those among us who have trans-

³⁴ FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, 44.

figured their faces into countenances proclaim – without a word and solely by their appearance to us – the mysteries of the invisible world»³⁵. In other words, the countenance of a saint as depicted in an icon portrays in a human face the repetition of the Son's capacity of holding together in a whole all that has been created. Again in Florensky's words, the saints' faces are «the visible witnesses of the invisible world, those living symbols of the co-inherence of this world and the other»³⁶: in this way, by showing a likeness to Christ and therefore to God as in the incarnated Son, the countenance shows how the visible and the invisible come together in harmony. Music does the same through a different sensual medium: the invisible and the visible do come together sonically in the Son, insofar as he is God's Word (John 1:1) and therefore the divine sound and music. As artificial music articulate the natural music which is essential to creation, it is arguable that both created music of all sorts and heavenly music do draw on the divine music expressed by the Son, which is a sound even more original than that of the angels. In the original divine utterance all other voices and music, have they their origin in the visible or the invisible, do come together in harmony inasmuch as he orchestrates and hold together the whole of creation. This, I believe, can be read in the Apostle Paul when he claims that the Son is «the image of the invisible God» in whom «all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible [...] all things have been created through him and for him [...] and in him all things hold together [...] for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things» (Col. 1:15-20). However, insofar as in the present time this harmony is fully and immediately instantiated in the heavenly assembly but

³⁵ FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, 52.

³⁶ FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, 60.

not in the earthly realm – a result of sin – the contemplation of the invisible’s flowing and finding a source of harmony into the Divine Word provides the artist with the pattern of what he has to replicate. Music then, aurally replicate what the Saint’s image does in a visible way. Accordingly, heavenly inspired polyphonic music also does manifest the divine prototype, in the sense that it manifests the Son’s wisdom and power replicating on earth his direction of the angelic hosts³⁷.

3. Luther on music: ethics and supernatural grace

The effect created by the alignment of the earthly choruses with the heavenly ones impact those involved in the performance in ways which transcend the purely aesthetic sphere. A strong believer in the ethical power of music, Luther characterized it as a discipline, able to make humans more patient and gentler. This, together with what we have discussed before, made him place music only second to theology in the order of sciences, and to God’s word itself in the order of what it is to be celebrated³⁸. As Luther puts it «experience bears witness to music’s being the fine thing that, after God’s word, deserves and ought to be celebrated, which rules and governs the human passions [...] by which men themselves are governed as if by

³⁷ Luther found in the psalmists a prime example of how music plays this bridging function between heaven and earth. In them, we do not only find the notion that music is of the universe’s essence – as for instance in Ps. 19:1: «heavens declare the glory of God» - but we also appreciate how through music the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to the Psalmists, who in turn used these gifts to compose the psalms «to enable others to share in singing the eternal song that lies at the heart of all creation, thereby concluding the arc that links the Creator to humankind, and humankind to its maker»: LOEWE, *Martin Luther’s Theory of Music*, 582-3.

³⁸ STIPP, *The Music Philosophies of Martin Luther and John Calvin*, 68-9.

their masters and quite often carried away»³⁹. By inhabiting the courts of heaven and pronouncing praises to God, music can make humans good and at peace with themselves by providing them with a view of eternity⁴⁰. Subsequently, Luther considered music as a force able to promote goodness and to overcome evil, able to help the believers to develop a permanent habit of avoiding evil and sinful behaviour⁴¹. In these regards, he compared music to religion, as they both share the power of dispelling sadness and melancholia – this, in line with the previous discussion, shows how he believed that music and religion had a common source in God⁴².

According to Loewe, this makes music for Luther similar to the Scholastic supernatural habit of grace, insofar as «music also was a free gift created by God. Like the habit of grace, music was in itself grace-filled. Like the habit of grace, music had a profound effect on the human soul, encouraging and enabling other habits of goodness and grace». Nonetheless, Loewe registers a difference, insofar as music is not, according to Luther, an agent of justification – something which can be accomplished only by the uncreated grace of the Holy Spirit –, but still contributed to the formation of the believer's character in a way analogous to the late-scholastic supernatural habit of grace⁴³.

4. Conclusion

Through my short survey of Luther's conception of music, I hope to have showed what is the range of this theory's met-

³⁹ LUTHER, *Preface to the Symphoniae Iucundae*, 600.

⁴⁰ TARRY, *Music in the Educational Philosophy of Martin Luther*, 359.

⁴¹ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 594.

⁴² TARRY, *Music in the Educational Philosophy of Martin Luther*, 359.

⁴³ LOEWE, *Martin Luther's Theory of Music*, 597.

aphysical imports. Located at the nexus between late-medieval scholastic and reformation theology, Luther's views on music manage to be a fairly traditional engagement with the subject, which at the same time is put at the service of the protestant spiritual revolution. This, shows how without subtracting anything to his originality and theological genius, a too facile and total opposition between Luther and preceding theological and philosophical tradition has to be avoided.

Crucially, the comparison I have drawn between Luther and Florensky shows how in different ways their theologies attribute to art a connecting role between heaven and earth. As much as an examination with their broader thought would easily shows their wide areas of disagreement, they share a kindred mindset as regards the symbolic role of art – that is, about art's capacity of embodying heaven in earthly means. While Florensky gives his preference to visual icons and the portraits of the saints for which Eastern Orthodoxy is widely known, Luther is equally passionate about music and its theological and pedagogical potentialities. In this sense, although this would be the subject of a much longer work, this enquiry into Luther shows the potential of understanding protestant theology as fundamentally framed around music as both as an artistic as well as spiritual medium. In this sense, music would stand to the reformed tradition what icons are to the orthodoxy.