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Rhythms of Desire

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Possibilities and Pathologies: Music, Desire and Worship

(part of “Rhythms of Desire”: J K A Smith and Jeremy Begbie)

“desire” – explored *musically* and *theologically* in the context of corporate worship

music especially appropriate for this conversation:

- it is *commonplace* in Christian worship
- it *forms* us
- it is a *bodily* practice: non-verbal, non-propositional, yet *meaningful*
- *communally embedded*
- in worship, it can be a *habit-forming practice*
- it *can carry an “understanding” of the world*, at an affective, pre-theoretical, pre-cognitive level
- it can generate *concepts*, way of thinking that can illuminate the dynamics of desire in worship

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- How can music enable us to *experience* and *understand more deeply* the dynamics of desire in worship, in particular, the theological shape of desire?

possibilities

- how can music help us experience (and understand) a healthy exercise of desire in worship?

1) music can enact a foretaste of the future we desire, the social, bodily life of the world to come

through....

- (a) musical empathy

(b) the combination of “entrainment” and “semantic indeterminacy”

“the use of the voice is one of the principle continuities between the states of bodily life on either side of the grave.”

Christopher **Page**, *The Christian West and Singing*, 49.

(later)
(c) polyphony

2) music can *enact* and *model* the dynamics of desire

AND YET !!!

warped desire.....

pathologies

- how might music get caught up in (and thus help us understand) the corruptions of desire in worship?

1) when we identify *this or that* music with the music of the new creation

2) when we attempt to make music satisfy our *ultimate* desire

for example:

- when *our desiring* becomes an end in itself

Sehnsucht

C. S. Lewis – “sweet desire”



- for something *this world cannot offer*
- it is a joy heavy with *pathos* and *grief*
- the *more* you try to grasp it the *more elusive* it becomes

why do we enjoy it?

- because we know the fulfilment will always be a let-down!

In music:

Robert Schumann, *Dichterliebe* (1840)

Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* (1859)

reflections