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The Magnificat: musicians as biblical interpreters

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Why, then, publish a book which says so little? Especially for musicians, it is important to know how little we have to deal with. And Foley provides a needed corrective to the speculations of those like Suzanne Haik-Ventoura, who claims to have unpacked the entire story of music in the OT, and has even produced compact discs of the Psalms of David, sung and performed as she believes they were some 2500 years ago. For this reason alone, Foley's work is important.

For a short monograph, the writing is quite pedantic and heavy-handed. And the print is very small! The book can be obtained through the Alcuin Club, the Pastoral Press in Washington, or the Anglican Book Centre in Toronto.

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The Magnificat: Musicians as Biblical Interpreters

Samuel Terrien

New York: Paulist Press, 1995

xxii + 89 pp. \$14.95

In recent years some good books have been written which disclose theological insight into musical classics. Among these are J. Pelikan's "Bach Among the Theologians" and Paul Minear's discussion of the Requiem, "Death Set to Music". The present book, by Samuel Terrien, professor emeritus of Hebrew at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and a confessed non-musician, is part of this tradition.

Terrien states his purpose this way: "The book seeks to present, not for musicologists, but for enlightened worshipers, an illumination of the poem in light of recent scholarship, together with the interpretation of the text through selected musical excerpts from the greatest compositions of the Magnificat during the past six centuries" (xv).

At the outset Terrien distances himself from current Liberation Theology and Feminist interpretations of the text. He also rejects Marian authorship of the poem, linking it rather with the Old Testament Psalms, and even suggesting that the original may have been in Hebrew. He spends time identifying Old Testament referents in Mary's song to support this. However, he perhaps gives too much emphasis to these Old Testament connections, especially since all we have ever had is the Greek version of the song!

Terrien claims that his book is for the layperson, even though we suspect that many laypersons would find his etymology of the Magnificat excessively thorough and over-scholarly. He even provides a new translation of the poem, rendered from his own "highly probable reconstruction of the Hebrew

original". An interesting exercise, to translate the Greek back into Hebrew, and then re-translate it into English!

In contrast, his musical analysis is quite "lite". He provides reflections on the alternating moods of the various strophes, designed, he says, to "...get us into listening to Magnificats". He discusses composers ranging all the way from the early Renaissance to the present: de Quattris, Byrd, Telemann, Vivaldi, Monteverdi, A. Gabrieli, J. S. Bach, C. P. E. Bach, Charpentier, Hovahaness, Tippett, and Penderecki.

His textual analysis is detailed, but his musical analysis is thin. He sketches musical themes on a wide canvas (or should we say score), rather than providing any musicological detail. And missing entirely is any treatment of the liturgical role of the Magnificat in Evening Prayer (Vespers), the other Offices, or the Lectionary.

In sum, this is an introduction to the music of the Magnificat for the biblically literate rather than an introduction to the text for the musically literate. Terrien provides a fine overture for the musical novice. But an in-depth study of the theology of the Magnificat in music still remains to be written.

He provides a bibliography of "available recordings of the Magnificat" which includes 37 titles—hardly a comprehensive, all-inclusive listing of recordings or composers! In addition, there is a selected bibliography of writings on the Magnificat in music. There is one serious printing flaw: three paragraphs of text on page 22 are repeated on page 23.

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Sources of Confirmation: From the Fathers Through the Reformers

Paul Turner

Collegetown, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1994

92 pp. \$14.00

This is a book of "readings" on the topic of confirmation, chosen and edited by Turner, a Roman priest, who made his entry into this field with the publication of his doctoral thesis, "The Meaning and Practise of Confirmation" (Peter Lang, 1987). The purpose of the present book is "to offer readers a collection of texts from which they may follow the course of confirmation from its patristic origins through the Reformation" (9). Most of the texts chosen come from the period of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Turner's context for writing is the Roman sacrament of confirmation: but the book will be of interest to anyone concerned about the status of confirmation today.