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## Reading Igor Stravinsky's Poetics of Music in Christian Higher Education

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### Recommended Citation

MacInnis, J., & Peters, M. (2022). Reading Igor Stravinsky's Poetics of Music in Christian Higher Education. *International Journal of Christianity and Education*, 26 (2), 177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20569971221087689>

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### Abstract

This article presents the composer Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) as an historical educator in the context of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures on Poetry at Harvard University (1939–1940), published as *The Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*. As music professors at North American institutions of Christian Higher Education, the authors each read Stravinsky's *Poetics* with students in music classes. We describe here our different pedagogical methods and how we employ Stravinsky's *Poetics* to form students with Christian approaches to culture-making.

### Keywords

Stravinsky, poetics, music, culture, Christian education

### Disciplines

Christianity

### Comments

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# Reading Igor Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music in Christian Higher Education*

International Journal of Christianity &  
Education

2022, Vol. 26(2) 177–190

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DOI: 10.1177/20569971221087689

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## Abstract

This article presents the composer Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) as an historical educator in the context of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures on Poetry at Harvard University (1939–1940), published as *The Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*. As music professors at North American institutions of Christian Higher Education, the authors each read Stravinsky's *Poetics* with students in music classes. We describe here our different pedagogical methods and how we employ Stravinsky's *Poetics* to form students with Christian approaches to culture-making.

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## Introduction

During the academic year of 1939–1940, Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) delivered the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures on Poetry at Harvard University, which were presented in French, published in that language as *La Poétique musicale*, in 1942, and then published in English translation as *The Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, in 1947. The six lectures of *Poetics* were not composed by Stravinsky himself, strictly speaking, rather he employed ghost writers to flesh out 1500 words or so of his own shorthand notes. In the

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first lecture, Stravinsky shared that his goal was to disclose a series of “musical confessions,” his “dogmatic confidences,” a justification of his ideas and personal views about music. While his goal in the lectures was neither an explicit nor comprehensive theological perspective on music, Stravinsky’s text manifests some references to Christian faith as he explicates a composer’s perspective on what it means to be a creator of culture.

This article explores how we, music professors at two North American institutions of Christian higher education, each employ Stravinsky’s *Poetics* to help students engage with Christian approaches to culture-making. Our goal is not to consider Stravinsky’s own Christian faith, which is a complex subject (see Copeland, 1982; Cross, 2015; Taruskin, 1996; Walsh, 1999; Walsh, 2006). We aim, rather, to explore how Christian commitments shape our pedagogical approaches to the text. We affirm that education is not merely about ideas and information transfer; education is about formation. Therefore, our work engaging Stravinsky with students at distinct institutions is similar in that we both strive to form those students with commitments to culture-making, as people invested and active in the world of music.

## Why Stravinsky?

While Stravinsky would not be considered an historical educator as such, the particular context of the *Poetics* allows for significant connections with this themed issue. First, the six sections of the text were originally presented as academic lectures at Harvard, the first time a musician held the Norton Chair of Poetry. Stravinsky was thus placed in the role of an educator, in this context. Second, our focus in this article is a pedagogical one, considering the ways that we apply Christian perspectives on pedagogy in the present while reading with students a text from the past.

Stravinsky’s *Poetics of Music* serves for each of us as a valuable source for engaging Christian perspectives on human creativity and shaping culture, in several contexts. We begin with a brief perspective on why we think this source serves our students well in this regard, in addition to the many good books on these topics being written today, for example, Crouch (2008), Edgar (2017), and Fujimura (2021).

We are primarily drawn to this text because of Stravinsky’s own work as a culture maker. Stravinsky is not remembered as an academic lecturer (the role he was filling in his *Poetics of Music*), but, rather, he is recalled as a composer and performer. This means that we can consider with students, in a full way, Stravinsky’s career and creations along with his ideas about music and culture. In approaching the *Poetics* in Christian perspective, we form and foster within our students their own sense of calling to shape the musical cultures in which they participate.

Second, we are drawn to this text because of Stravinsky’s avowed Christian faith. Stravinsky was a member of the Russian Orthodox Church for most of his life and, in significant ways, his faith informed his compositional practices (Copeland, 1982). Acknowledging this stated (though sometimes disputed) commitment, allows us to talk with students about Stravinsky’s musical compositions, the content of the *Poetics of Music*, and to consider both from the perspective of Stravinsky’s faith and Christian worldview.

Finally, reading Stravinsky forms and confirms within our students an understanding that there are multiple perspectives on human culture that can be meaningfully Christian, while, perhaps, not always being in agreement with each other. Because Stravinsky's experience of Christianity (rooted in the Russian Orthodox Church of the early 20th century) was distinctively different from our students' experiences of Christianity (often, though not exclusively, in North American Protestant churches today), engaging students around the *Poetics of Music* helps us affirm the rich diversity of Christian perspectives that are possible.

In the following, Mark Peters (hereafter "the first author") shares how he teaches one lecture of Stravinsky's *Poetics*. Then, considering *Poetics* more broadly, as an entire work, John MacInnis (hereafter "the second author") describes how he teaches each lecture over several class periods.

### **Music making as human practice: The *Poetics of Music* in dialog with other texts**

The first author focuses class engagement of the *Poetics* upon Lecture 3, "The Composition of Music," with a goal of forming students' perspectives on music making as a deeply human practice. He approaches the third Lecture of Stravinsky's *Poetics* as a dialog partner with other texts. This allows for meaningful engagement with some of Stravinsky's key ideas and invites students to consider perspectives on shaping culture from one of the most prominent composers of the early 20th century, while also considering Stravinsky as one of multiple dialog partners on a theme.

One context in which such an approach is employed is in Music Research and Bibliography, a class included in the graduate music program at Concordia University Chicago. While this course focuses on finding, evaluating, and documenting scholarly sources, it also includes two additional key themes: 1) the nature of history and how it is recorded and studied, including the role that artworks have in telling history and 2) a Christian vocation of scholarship. Stravinsky's "The Composition of Music" serves as one of the texts through which students consider these two additional themes in relation to each other.

This engagement with Stravinsky comes at about the mid-point of this 4-week intensive course and after students have already been processing questions around the study of history and Christian scholarship through reading, writing, and class discussion of various texts, including Robert Tracy McKenzie's *A Little Book for New Historians* (McKenzie, 2019) and Richard J. Mouw's *Called to the Life of the Mind* (Mouw, 2014). Since this is a music course, we consider our human calling as culture creators and think about artworks, and particularly music, as cultural objects that significantly reflect the particular creativity of the person who created them as well as the broader culture, time, and place of which that person was or is a part.

It is in this particular context that the course engages Stravinsky, first in dialog with Martin Buber. In preparation for class, students read the opening pages of Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (Buber, 1970: 53–62) together with Stravinsky's "The Composition of Music." Students are asked to consider these readings in relation to the framing question:

How can these readings inform our encounter with a piece of music? Students process this question with each other and the professor through discussion in class. The next class session invites students to deepen their consideration of Stravinsky and Buber on artworks as products of human creativity and culture by adding T. S. Eliot (1921) to the dialog and asking students to process these ideas and perspectives in writing in the following assignment:

On the basis of Stravinsky, "The Composition of Music," T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, write a short perspective essay (400–600 words) that focuses on some aspect of Christian engagement with works of art. In particular, consider from a Christian perspective the significance of the real artistic stuff that people create. To put it another way, why does it matter that we as humans make music, that we make art?

The conversation around these sources and questions continues in class through each student reading their paper aloud and the ensuing discussion. The goal of this reading and writing is to encourage students further to consider art and creativity as fundamentally human traits through which all persons reflect the image of God. So, in the context of this course, Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music* serves as an important conversation partner around issues of Christian faith and the making of art and music.

The second context into which the first author draws Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music* is a global music course entitled People Making Music at Trinity Christian College. In this context, he places ideas from the same Stravinsky lecture in a very different dialog, that is, with Japanese Taiko drumming. Stravinsky's contribution is to help students consider a Japanese understanding of tradition that differs significantly from common conceptions of tradition in North America today, where it is often seen as the repetition of antiquated practices.

The particular point in question is the regular representation of Taiko as a traditional, national, music of Japan, whereas Taiko itself was created only in the 1950s. Within the context of this question, students are invited to consider a conception of tradition that is rooted in both borrowing and innovation by way of this quote from Stravinsky's "The Composition of Music": "Far from implying the repetition of what has been, tradition presupposes the reality of what endures. It appears as an heirloom, a heritage that one receives on condition of making it bear fruit before passing it on to one's descendants" (1970: 75).

Students first engage the quote in small group discussion during which they are asked to brainstorm their own examples of this understanding of tradition, which they then share with the full class. This leads to deeper study of Taiko in relation to Japanese culture, exploring both ways that Taiko reflects long-standing elements of Japanese culture and, even more significantly, how Japanese culture has long valued patterns of borrowing, assimilation, and recreating. This discussion closes by considering the words of ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon on Japanese culture: "On the whole, Japan's culture combines a deep respect for tradition with creativity and flexibility" (Titon, 2009: 160). Stravinsky's perspective on tradition in *Poetics of Music* thus serves as a catalyst for

deeper insight into this Japanese perspective on tradition and the particular example of Taiko as a cultural product.

## **Reading *The Poetics of Music* in the context of music literature and theory**

The second author takes a different approach to teaching with Stravinsky's *Poetics*, at Dordt University. Students read each lecture of the *Poetics* and complete specific assignments in advance of several class periods. A leading learning objective for doing so is to form students with the ability to engage an entire work and respond to its complete structure. Additional learning objectives for reading Stravinsky's *Poetics* in this class are that doing so provides opportunity to engage the philosophy of one of the most important composers of the 20th century, thereby understanding his compositions more fully, and to form commitments within students with regard to their own lives as believing people invested in musical culture.

The class Contemporary Music Literature and Theory is described in Dordt University's catalog as "A study of musical theories, compositional techniques, and literature of the 20th and 21st centuries with emphasis on the development of personal commitments to and strategies for promoting a Christian vision of life as a musician." The decision to combine literature and theory in this course, effectively combining a music theory and music history class in one, was recommended after the music department's last periodic program review. Essentially, students engage examples of contemporary music as literature to be studied and performed, while honing analytical tools to describe the underlying compositional processes. Students registering for this course are music majors and minors, mostly in their second and third years of university study.

The following describes each lecture as well as the pedagogical practices employed while engaging with students.

### **Lecture 1: "Getting Acquainted"**

Lecture 1: "Getting Acquainted" serves as Stravinsky's introduction to the six lectures, presenting his goals and what his audience should expect. Stravinsky speaks in broad terms, placing his descriptions of musical making within the larger category of artistic making. Drawing upon long-established traditions, Stravinsky references the Greek verb *poiein* ("to do or make," from which we get the English word poetry) and its use in Aristotle's own treatise *De Poetica*. Stravinsky's approach is essentially neo-classical or formalist, a perspective affirming that art should be essentially constructive, that formal processes must proceed from a principle, that artistic work extends from personal conscience and faith, and that intentionality, coherence, and good taste should govern a creative act.

Willing to be polemical, Stravinsky addresses directly themes he found problematic in some contemporary music, for example, revolution for its own sake, cacophony for shock value, sensation in place of rationality, and, in some quarters, an unwillingness to acknowledge that music must always change. The first lecture concludes with an indication

as to where Stravinsky's presentations will lead, to his understanding of the highest aim and profoundest meaning for music and all art: "communion, a union of man with his fellow-man and with the Supreme Being" (Stravinsky, 1970: 25).

To prepare for class discussion over the first *Poetics* lecture, the second author asks students to complete a "3, 2, 1 Assignment": Students are to note three important takeaways from the reading for them personally, two questions that they would like to ask the author (if he were alive), and one thing that the class needs to discuss together. In class, students start off working in small groups of 3–4 people comparing notes, and one student is assigned to summarize the group's most pressing ideas in response to this reading assignment. The professor records these ideas on a white board, to reference in a larger class discussion. Social Learning Theory offers some justification for this approach (Denzine, 2008). Since learning cannot be separated from a social context, students are often able to achieve more—and learn more—through collaboration and sharing their ideas with their colleagues than they would be able to on their own. Therefore, a successful classroom learning environment will fully leverage a learner's ability to interact with peers and the teacher through discussion, collaboration, and feedback.

In the larger conversation, students initially question Stravinsky's writing style and appreciate learning about the translation processes at work behind their English text. They become willing to overlook what they take to be convoluted expressions once they understand that English was not Stravinsky's first (or second) language. Learning about Stravinsky's ghost writers presents another layer of complexity to a text that many students took straightforwardly; that is, they assumed it was written by Stravinsky himself in English. Noting the popular, colloquial etymology of the word "assume" can be helpful here. Asking students to consider how easy it is to make assumptions invites reflection on a proper posture when reading or engaging art generally (Lewis, 1961).

Students often want to discuss Stravinsky's criticism of "revolution," which he takes to be needlessly destructive with regard to the past, in order that one may create something new. Noting the futility of revolutions generally, Stravinsky quotes G. K. Chesterton's apt observation that revolutions (speaking plainly) eventually bring you right back where you started. In contrast, students consider how a reformational approach might profitably build upon tradition, while living intentionally in the present. During class discussion, students imagine together the contexts in which they will work as musicians, after graduation. For example, they consider what a revolutionary approach might look like as they join the music program at a school or church. What could be the fallout of such a tack? The role of imagination in asking "what if" questions like these can be a powerful pedagogical tool. As explained by Smith (2018: 68ff.) and Smith and Felch (2016), both teachers and students can benefit from cultivating a Christian imagination.

## Lecture 2: "The Phenomenon of Music"

Lecture 2: "The Phenomenon of Music" contextualizes our human music making in the natural world of sounds that surround us. Here Stravinsky affirms that art provides something beyond the basic necessities of life; it addresses another need we feel as humans. Stravinsky elects not to speculate about music's origins in our distant past as a



species, because firm conclusions about music in pre-history are not possible, so separate are we from those actual sounds. Stravinsky considers *sound* and *time* to be elemental to the phenomenon of music, so he defines music as a chronologic art, as painting is a spatial art.

Drawing upon the theories of Pierre Souvtchinsky (who, it should be noted, was one of Stravinsky's ghost writers and had a hand in writing this lecture), Stravinsky discusses two types of music: that based upon ontological time, which flows with the passage of time in our lived experience and, so, is characterized by similarity, and that adhering to psychological time, which unstably runs ahead and falls behind and proceeds by contrast. Stravinsky affirms the former as expressing his preferred side of the age-old philosophical debate between unity and variety, the one and the many.

Decentering music from the context of classical tonality, Stravinsky explains that tonality is just one possible context in which to create music, one other system within which music may unfold in obedience to a larger principle: the force of attraction toward a pole of sonority. Stravinsky's weightier point, although, is that either context, tonality or non-tonal music constructed with reference to a center, has structure, takes form, and fulfills a musical dialectic.

In preparation for a class discussion over the second lecture, the second author assigns a 500-word essay comparing and contrasting Stravinsky's second lecture with an excerpt from Arnold Schoenberg's "Composition with 12 Tones" (Schoenberg, 1998: 1355–1366). The Schoenberg text, from 1941, is read by students and discussed in class earlier in the semester, when learning how to use set theory to analyze both tonal and non-tonal music. Schoenberg justifies and outlines his non-tonal, dodecaphonic (i.e., twelve-tone) system of composing, and, as he makes his case, Schoenberg appeals to the biblical creation account, general artistic values, and historical necessity. Discussing in groups, students wrestle with the facts that tonality, though generally accepted—even unquestioningly—underwent profound changes over centuries and manifests just one approach to musical expression. Here, the second author engages students with Stravinsky's ideas as a dialog partner with Schoenberg's, in a way similar to the first author's teaching of the third *Poetics* lecture, discussed above.

By extrapolation, the professor asks students to think globally: How we cultivate music in the world's many human cultures can be vastly different, with diverse musical systems, conceptions, and goals. Just as many students come to terms with music beyond the familiar comforts of diatonicism, they can hear with new ears that the world's different music cultures are not merely quaint and exotic—they represent entire worlds containing their own conventions and references. Here, as a meaningful example, the professor includes a brief explanation of the cyclical, interlocking structures used in Javanese gamelan music and their deep resonances with Javanese concepts of time.

### *Lecture 3: "The Composition of Music"*

In Lecture 3: "The Composition of Music," Stravinsky describes the human act of musical creation as a response to being created ourselves, participation within a tradition, work requiring observation, imagination, and good taste, and a manifestation of the ongoing

creative work of the Holy Spirit. Stravinsky's recourse to the Holy Spirit, here, in a discussion about artistic creativity, implies fascinating questions for class discussion and speaks to contemporary theological discussions, for example, [Bacote \(2005\)](#), [Guthrie \(2011\)](#), and [Johnson \(2014\)](#).

Certainly, there are many spirits at work in human culture; for example, we commonly refer to the "spirit of an age." Stravinsky suggests something more fundamental: God is present and active in human culture, mysteriously and to ends we may never understand. So, if the Holy Spirit is at work in our culture, what should characterize our cultural engagement? How should we be discerning and responsive—and to what end? Here, the professor challenges students to reconsider contemporary music they may have dismissed or overlooked (non-tonal music, microtonal music, popular music, music of other cultures, etc.). The class discusses what good things are happening in these genres, how the promises of music are being kept, how God's good will for music is being fulfilled. Then, taking a walk on the other side of the street, students consider the music they accept and participate in uncritically; are there aspects here in which music has broken faith?

This discussion prompts students to think more carefully about culture and to appreciate its complexity, to view themselves both connected to what is right as well as potentially implicated in the wrongness. Stravinsky's conclusion is to emphasize the freedom of the artist to make art, and the freedom of her public to assess its function and effect, learning from it all we can, not to deny its right to existence.

For Stravinsky, creation is a natural response for humans, having been created ourselves. Understanding the creative processes employed by composers can be thorny, though, and Stravinsky emphasizes the role of discovery in a composer's work. That is, the composer, awake to the richness of the world around her, observes materials ripe for musical exploration (even in the humblest thing) and boldly cultivates them in her art; she does not wait for inspiration.

Above all, Stravinsky describes the creation of art as an ordinary activity of life. As beings rooted in this material world, we can approach creative work like any other task: learning from the past, living within our means, and allowing some controls or limits to check the free flow of imagination. Working within clear boundaries, so Stravinsky claims, is actually freeing, as when one works within a tradition.

In this class, the second author again refers to an article previously assigned to students, Charles Rosen's "The Proper Study of Music" ([Rosen, 1962](#)). Rosen addresses the isolation he observed and thought to be permeative, in 1962, of the academic study of historical music, contemporary music composition, and contemporary performance. As a corrective, Rosen advocates that music be taught from the point of view of the contemporary composer. That is, for Rosen, music of the past is properly studied to identify what remains most vibrant and relevant, to find ideas and techniques that may enrich a composer's creations today.

#### *Lecture 4: "Musical Typology"*

The fourth lecture, "Musical Typology," addresses musical style, how it can be particular to a composer and to an epoch. Stravinsky distinguished two approaches to musical style

taken by composers, whereby they could be considered positively as “signal fires” and “beacons” or negatively as “monoliths.” Signal fires like Mozart or Haydn, when they appear on the historical landscape, show a way forward for subsequent generations and kindle stylistic tendencies and traditions that define a culture. Considered together, these beacons show forth a continuity of artistic cultivation across time and geography. Stravinsky was quick to disavow, though, any consideration of development or progress that proudly holds the present more worthwhile than the past.

For contrast, in Stravinsky’s telling, Hector Berlioz earned regard as a composer while he lived due to his great originality, but by striking his own path so decisively beyond the stylistic expectations of his day, his music stands out like a monolith, and he is not placed in the line of masters running through Western history. As Stravinsky expounds his distinction between signal fires and monoliths, he laments his own context, in which he describes musical culture as losing a sense of continuity, a common language in favor of innovation and a too eager willingness to break with tradition.

To prepare for this class, students specify and submit their *thoughts* (ideas prompting reflection or connections made beyond the reading assignment), *questions* (ideas upon which students desire further clarification), and *epiphanies* (ideas that caught students by surprise). In class, working initially in small groups, students share their thoughts, questions, and epiphanies, and work together to express clearly and coherently their most important responses to the reading. This collaborative work refining ideas together so that they are expressed most succinctly is a learning objective for group work in this class, with positive examples and teachable moments (Gonzalez, 2021).

At Dordt University, a foundational document called *The Educational Framework of Dordt University* describes the underlying principles for and guides the structuring of the institution’s curriculum, especially four “coordinates” which together provide a coherent curricular framework: Religious Orientation, Creational Structure, Creational Development, and Contemporary Response (Dordt University, 2020). The professor references these coordinates in class to highlight for students an institutional priority at their *alma mater*: A Christian’s calling is to work within culture and in contact with the contemporary context.

When prompted, students can easily name the ways in which Christians, today and in the past, break with the world to create separate genres and platforms (e.g., Christian films, Christian novels, and Christian radio). In contrast, when asked, students can also name historical and contemporary examples of believers who, in students’ estimation, strive to be signal fires instead of monoliths, artists doing generative and culturally transformational work where God has placed them. Using an internet search engine, the professor plays some of these musical examples in class, letting student-generated illustrations drive the discussion.

### *Lecture 5: “The Avatars of Russian Music”*

In Lecture 5: “The Avatars of Russian Music,” Stravinsky dissects Russian music historically and under Communism, seeing in its developments a clear example for his larger argument in the Norton lectures. Among the many and noteworthy achievements in

Russian music, such as those highpoints among the works of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky discerns two disordering tendencies: The overly conservative tends toward academism and works considered derivative, whereas the revolutionary makes and holds music to be a political tool, a means of wielding power.

Here, continuing the recent class conversation about a Christian's calling to participate within culture, the professor asks this class to consider our own cultural moment, loud with protests and political contention. Though far removed from twentieth-century Soviet Russia, in what ways are we, many of us Christians living in neoliberal North America, also ideologically driven in how we participate in culture, especially the arts? Do we privilege art that is consistent with our own ideas and censor those things that challenge our beliefs and values? Students acknowledge the need for a middle way, a perspective enabling one to live purposefully, productively, and creatively in culture, not simply parroting our forebears or breaking irreparably with the past.

If Stravinsky is right, that conservatism must have renewal, and revolution needs tradition to ground it, our cultural work as Christians is always *in medias res*. Our approach should acknowledge that human creation is constituent to, is an extension of God's good creation; we should recognize that God rules over all cultural developments; we must discern the spirits at work in the world today—knowing that one of them is Holy—and, then, respond appropriately, promoting a Christian vision of life.

### Lecture 6: "The Performance of Music" and "Epilogue"

In his sixth and final lecture, "The Performance of Music," Stravinsky describes a trinity implied in the sharing of music: the composer, the performer, and the listener. In the forgoing lectures, Stravinsky held the composer to a high standard in the creation of music, and, in a similar way, he here names obligations placed upon the performer and listener. By means of execution and interpretation, the performer, in Stravinsky's view, has a moral duty to accurately relay the composer's intention. He is called to take his craft seriously and to embody in it his highest aspirations. The listener is called to resist the oversaturation of music so common in our culture, which deadens the ear and lulls the mind into passivity.

The Norton Lectures conclude with an Epilogue in which Stravinsky addresses what he considers the ultimate meaning of music: communion. The act of creation is attended by the desire to share, and in sharing one person encounters another—we meet and become more together than we were separately. This communion, sought among our fellow humans, echoes our lifelong search for the One in the many, and, thus, music fulfills and nurtures one of our most human needs: for intimacy, to know and be known. It is likely that Stravinsky has in mind here the Orthodox concept of *theosis*, the progressive and ultimate process of union with God, and, if so, Stravinsky is suggesting that music plays a role in *theosis*.

To foster communion among the students themselves, the second author asks his class to work collaboratively and create an alphanumeric outline for each chapter of Stravinsky's *Poetics*. In presenting this assignment, the professor notes that the learned ability to perceive large-scale structures (in films, novels, academic reading, etc.) is part of what it

means to be an educated person. The fact that this work is done with others reinforces the truth for students, that sometimes we need each other to see a bigger picture.

Then, working individually, students create an alphanumeric outline for their own book about music along with a 500-word essay explaining their approach and noting similarities to or differences from Stravinsky's. Students are asked: What musical examples would you include and why? What conclusion do you want to make about the importance of music in human life? What aspects would make your book distinct?

These student essays often begin by describing musical building blocks (pitch, resonance, time, etc.), and students emphasize that these elements, along with human ability to shape them, come from God. Students describe the place for personal enjoyment and expression in music and allow for a variety of styles and approaches in how music is cultivated, reflecting God's own love for pluriformity, for many-ness. Because humans work with God's created materials in making music, students affirm that we remain accountable to God for what we do with them, as in all other areas of life. There are different ways to approach the question of objective versus subjective responses to music; some students emphasize one over the other, and some embrace aspects of both.

Most students echo in writing Stravinsky's own understanding, that music nurtures communion, and the professor dedicates time in class for students to think more about ultimate purposes for music in our lives. He asks students what reliable test can be made for music—all music of all eras—given what they think the purpose for music is. Then, he shares one possible answer, from C. S. Lewis. In Lewis's letter to a Mrs R. E. Halvorson, in March 1956, Lewis describes some fascinating ideas about music (including church music):

I think every *natural* thing which is not in itself sinful can become the servant of the spiritual life, but none is automatically so. When it is not, it becomes either just trivial (as music is to millions of people) or a dangerous idol. The emotional effect of music may be not only a distraction (to some people at some times) but a delusion: that is, feeling certain emotions in church they mistake them for religious emotions when they may be wholly natural. That means that even genuinely religious emotion is only a servant. No soul is saved by having it or damned by lacking it. The love we are commanded to have for God and our neighbor is a state of the *will*, not of the affections (though if they ever also play their part so much the better). So that the test of music or religion or even visions if one has them is always the same—do they make one more obedient, more God-centered, and neighbor-centered and *less self-centered*? "Though I speak with the tongues of Bach and Palestrina and have not charity etc.!" (Lewis, 2007: 731-2)

Students do not miss Lewis's rephrase of 1 Corinthians 13:1 (which mentions music already), and the class reads verses 1–7 together, to conclude.

Remembering that a major objective for this course is "the development of personal commitments to and strategies for promoting a Christian vision of life as a musician," the role of Scripture, in this culminating moment, is intended to establish for students a true North Star in all their cultural work as musicians, joyfully pursuing God's law of love.

## Conclusion: Christian formation in the arts

In sum, when engaging students with Stravinsky's *Poetics of Music* in their respective classes, the main pedagogical choices made by the authors are: assigning written responses to selected readings as preparation for class; drawing upon multiple texts to compare, contrast, and synthesize new insights; initiating student conversations; directing students to seek nuanced, contextual understanding in their work. The second author reads the integral "poetics" with his students, while the first author uses only one lecture, drawing upon multiple texts for comparison. Both approaches have shown to be powerful in their particular contexts, when considering the missions of each institution.

The mission of Dordt University states that it "equips students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life." Similarly, Trinity Christian College's mission affirms "that those who teach and learn are called to be coworkers with Christ in subjecting all cultural activities to the reign of God, and that genuine education must involve the whole person as a thinking, feeling, and believing creature." Taking these mission statements seriously as our starting points for the Christian formation of students in music classes has led each of us to focus similarly on shaping students' views of themselves as creators of culture.

We think this focus on culture-making in Christian perspective can be a foundational theme for curriculum planning in other arts courses, because creativity and culture-making are integral to our humanity. The first things we learn in the Bible are that God exists and that God is a creator: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth..." (Genesis 1:1). Then, the first thing the Bible tells us about humans is that we are made in God's image: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness...'" (Genesis 1:26).

With this theological framework as foundation, we seek to form students in the perspective that each human person is called to create. We emphasize for students that creating music, as one aspect of culture-making, is a fundamentally human activity, a manifestation of our human creativity as persons created in the image of our creator God. We further affirm that this is true for all persons of all times and places, and, thus, we must be open to considering all music as worthy of our attention, respect, and study.

While we do not anticipate that others will necessarily take up the specific text of Stravinsky's *Poetics* in their own courses, we hope that what we share here encourages educators to consider how they might form their students in a Christian vision for creativity and culture-making. Additionally, we hope that what we share will encourage other educators to consider how a historic text, even one that is not explicitly Christian, can be formational for students through an intentional approach to pedagogy and curriculum design.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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