



## preface

Over centuries, Christian spirituality has routinely stressed attentive listening. Growth in the Christian life entails not only proclamation of the gospel and works of love (words and deeds) but quiet, contemplative listening. The great teachers of the church urge us to listen: to preaching, to teaching, to the rhythms of creation, to sisters and brothers in the community of faith. When we listen attentively to these voices, we are better able to discern the still, small voice that is God's, and we can better hear God's voice through these other voices. But most of these teachers have also warned us against listening to the wrong things: to voices that would turn us away, rather than toward, the living God. The wrong voices can inhibit and obstruct faith rather than nurture it. Often in Christian tradition, popular music has been deemed to be one of these kinds of destructive voices.

Don Compier's book encourages us to listen again to the varied chords of popular music: not as a diversion, not simply as entertainment but as a profoundly spiritual practice. As he offers reflections on how hearing the Beatles for the first time changed the way he listened, he invites readers to listen to the soundtrack of their own lives. As he surveys the breadth of Christian traditions on listening

to music, he attends to the ambiguities of our theological heritage: its stunning capacity to recognize grace in unexpected places as well as its tendency to turn away from grace. As he examines popular music, he opens our eyes and ears to the consumerism, greed, sexism, and racism that often characterize the music industry. But amid this sometimes confusing din, Compier turns our attention to the prophets and spiritual teachers that compose and sing the tunes we simply cannot stop listening to (and sometimes sing ourselves). The theological conviction that drives this book is that God's grace is always active and present everywhere, turning tragedy and despair into blessing and hope. As Compier urges us to listen more attentively, he also introduces us to a wider vision of the communion of saints: where Johnny Cash *and* John Calvin, Aretha Franklin *and* St. Francis, have much to teach us about the Christian life. Listen closely.

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