

Introduction

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The burgeoning scholarly interest in the relationship between music and theology reflects an increased awareness that the two are frequently intertwined in both thought and practice. Such scholarship attempts to understand and explain the meaning of music in religious contexts, to explore the reasons behind the composition, advocacy and performance of particular pieces and genres, with regard to the theological values held by individual composers and religious groups, and to probe philosophical ideas about music's origins and meaning. That such connections are being explored is hardly surprising, for, as Don Saliers notes, 'in most theistic traditions, seeing and hearing have a primary place in awakening, sustaining, and deepening awareness of the divine-human relationship'.¹ The experiential aspects of music and spirituality have often been connected by thinkers from both backgrounds and music's communicative ability has made it central to almost all forms of organized religion.

The essays that follow reflect many of these concerns through consideration of a wide variety of topics, united by their historical location within the long nineteenth century in Britain. In religious terms this was a period of considerable change with the emergence of many new groups both as individual entities and within pre-existing religious institutions, as well as legal changes, such as the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829). Scholarly interest in music flourished too, while both music and religion were naturally affected by external changes and developments both practical and intellectual.

The interactions of music and theology in nineteenth-century Britain can be seen to reflect changes in religious practices and beliefs and musical preferences and understandings, both within and beyond the confines of the church in its various denominational manifestations. As well as these immediate influences, such interactions were often shaped by changes and developments in other spheres, both intellectual and practical, including aesthetics, philosophy, science, technology, historical awareness and architecture, as well as shifts in population centres, employment patterns and social activities. Music continued to play a significant role in religious activities during the century and the ways in which it was created, used and understood need to be interpreted in the light of theological considerations that prevailed at the time.

The degree to which musical and theological practices and attitudes reflected wider cultural values and developments is a theme that emerges in several essays. As

¹ Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville, 2007), p. 1.

noted by Iwan Rhys Morus, developments in scientific thought and understanding ‘had significant connections with and consequences for a whole range of concerns embracing art, industry, literature, politics and religion’.² In Chapter 11, Bennett Zon demonstrates how such ideas were absorbed into considerations of music’s origins and meaning, as he explores the notion of spiritual selection in Joseph Goddard’s writings on the philosophy of music. Similarly, in Chapter 5, Charles McGuire demonstrates how one particular aspect of technological and pedagogical development, Tonic Sol-Fa notation, was taken up by British missionaries as a means of expounding their Evangelical theology and understanding of civilized religion. Conversely, conservatism and a desire to distance musical practices from contemporary trends were also situated within a theological framework, as demonstrated in T.E. Muir’s discussion of Ultramontanist in Chapter 3 and my own discussion of the advocacy of plainchant within the Church of England by John Mason Neale and Thomas Helmore in Chapter 2. As both chapters show, such views were challenged by others within the same denominations who sought to embrace more recent musical genres and styles.

Prominent theological emphases within the church also had a profound effect on its music during the nineteenth century. Evangelicalism’s concern with conversion and personal assurance of salvation was a dominant feature of nineteenth-century Christianity and one that crossed denominational boundaries.³ Revivalism emerged as a distinctive feature of religious life, commonly existing beyond the traditional boundaries of church structures, liturgies and identities. Initially emerging in local contexts, often as a result of particular events, ‘as the century wore on, however, spontaneity gradually gave way to arranged revivals’.⁴ Connections between Britain and America were particularly important in this regard, as shown by Mel Wilhoit in his discussion of the influence of Moody and Sankey and the ways in which their use of music embodied the directness and personalization of religion that underpinned their methods in Chapter 6. James Deaville focuses on the more spontaneous aspect of revivalism through consideration of the Welsh Revival of 1904–5 in Chapter 7. This also highlights the particularly strong popular perception of the important role of music in Welsh revivalism. Meanwhile, transatlantic commonalities and the personalization of religious devotion are also key themes in June Hadden Hobbs and C. Michael Hawn’s consideration of female hymn writers and the tunes associated with their texts in Chapter 4. One important feature noted there is the individualization of

² Iwan Rhys Morus, ‘The Sciences’, in Chris Williams (ed.), *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell Reference Online: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); available at <<http://www.blackwellreference.com/>>, accessed 24 Mar. 2011.

³ Mark A. Smith, ‘Religion’, in Chris Williams (ed.), *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Blackwell Reference Online: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); available at <<http://www.blackwellreference.com/>>, accessed 25 Mar. 2011.

⁴ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), p. 116.

the relationship between tune and text that was to become a feature of nineteenth-century hymnals. This practice developed a model adopted by John Wesley towards the end of the eighteenth century and was further strengthened by the increasing use and popularity of hymnody within the Church of England during the nineteenth century, which saw the publication of a plethora of collections of texts and tunes. This individualization reflected a common compositional concern to respond to the nuances of a particular text both in terms of their imagery and sentiment. In Chapter 1, Ian Bradley explores the degree to which nineteenth-century hymn tunes can be seen as having a theological identity through exploration of their musical characteristics and their relationships with particular texts.

Understandings of tradition played an important role in the relationship between music and theology in nineteenth-century Britain. My own chapter examines how appeals to tradition were used as a means of establishing hymnody's place in the Church of England and giving theological justification for it. T.E. Muir demonstrates how theological understandings of the Mass alongside other aspects of Roman Catholic theology elicited various musical responses and attitudes both in terms of repertoire and liturgical function. In a rather different way, Peter Horton reveals in Chapter 8 how rapid and wide-ranging changes took place in the selection of texts set by composers in choral anthems during the nineteenth century, from a tradition where verses from the Psalms were used almost exclusively to one where they were but one source alongside other biblical and non-biblical texts and in which composite texts grew in popularity. These changes are set against a backdrop of theological and liturgical change within the Church of England and the influence of various composers' appointments and professional backgrounds.

In Chapter 9, David Brown also examines the importance of text, showing how the libretti of various nineteenth-century oratorios reflected a variety of theological concerns and illustrating how the relationships between words and music can be explained more clearly if the theological perspective of the libretto is properly understood. Brown shows how the selection, manipulation and linking of biblical and non-biblical texts, coupled with distinctive musical settings, can have a profound effect on the theological understanding of the story and also opens up the possibility of using the composer's own religious viewpoint and experience as a means for understanding their compositional output. Jeremy Begbie pursues this approach in his detailed study of the theological emphases of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in Chapter 10, interpreting Elgar's musical language in view of his oscillation between religious confidence and anxiety.

These essays encompass a diverse range of musical and theological practices, viewpoints and experiences, yet they are united in highlighting the interaction of music and theology as a way of understanding aspects of religious, cultural and social life in nineteenth-century Britain.