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A Theologically Informed Compositional  
Exploration of ‘Transcendent Beauty’ for  
Integrating Choirs into Charismatic  
Evangelicalism**

Calum Carswell

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# Music Shaped by the Heavens: A Theologically Informed Compositional Exploration of 'Transcendent Beauty' for Integrating Choirs into Charismatic Evangelicalism

*By Calum Carswell\**

*Academic composers operate at the point where methodological academia converges with the enigmatic act of composition. This paper intentionally uses theological and sociological research to inform the composition process, thereby enabling a compositional exploration of 'transcendent beauty' within Charismatic Evangelical liturgy. The experience of 'transcendent beauty' is an artistic appreciation of worship music which leads to a transcendental engagement with heaven, therein meeting the liturgical expectation of congregants to 'touch heaven' in worship. The musical impact upon the resulting composition is explored within the context of the informing research, and practicably demonstrates a compositional exploration of 'transcendent beauty'.*

**Keywords:** *Composition, Choirs, Theology, Liturgy, Charismatic Evangelicalism*

## Introduction

The composition process is inherently enigmatic; a wide-range of inspirations and influences act upon a composer – both consciously and unconsciously – which instils the compositional act with an elusive nature. Yet the academic composer must operate at the point where the elusive nature of composition converges with the methodological nature of academia. Despite this seemingly contradictory relationship, a research-based input will be used in this paper to consciously inform the composition process, followed by an examination of the subsequent musical outworking. The research-based input used in this paper is based on theological and sociological research undertaken by me, which has been published in two previous journal articles, and will be set out below.<sup>1</sup> The impact of this research upon the composition process will be examined alongside its musical outworking. The academic compositional approach allows for informed music, thereby taking the research beyond the theoretical, and providing a practical answer to the research question of whether choirs can use 'transcendent beauty' to enhance the worship of the Charismatic Evangelical (CE) Movement.

Choirs have played a pivotal role throughout the Church's history by guiding believers towards the heavens through the music of their worship. The ability of music to lead a person to engage with God runs deep within Christianity; the study

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<sup>1</sup>Calum Carswell, 'Inviting Choirs Back into the Fray: Composing Choral Music that Benefits UK Charismatic Evangelical Worship', *Anaphora*, 15 (2021–1–2), 109–25. Calum Carswell, 'Singing with the Heavens: How Can Contemporary Sacred Choral Music Be Used to Meet the Liturgical Expectation of UK Charismatic Evangelicals to "Touch Heaven"', *Studia Liturgica*, 53 (2023–1), 107–119.

of Theological Aesthetics is a field dedicated to understanding the interplay of art and divinity. Although the musical nature of this paper makes it an inappropriate arena for an in-depth examination of Theological Aesthetics, it is important to understand the core principles. Theological Aesthetics is based on the notion that beauty comes from God, and is thereby transcendent by nature.<sup>2</sup> Beauty therefore has a revelatory ability, and through revealing the heavens, it is able to lead people to meet with God.<sup>3</sup> In the context of this research, the term 'heaven' – taken from the Greek word *Ouranos* – refers to the heavenly realm, which can be considered synonymous with God.<sup>4</sup>

With the rise of the UK CE Movement in the 1990s, contemporary bands were unambiguously crowned the leaders of worship, thereby causing choirs to disband and vanish from liturgy.<sup>5</sup> To suggest this be reversed would be misguided; the rigidity of the 'old tradition' choral style is fundamentally incompatible with the CE need to experience an authentic and emotional postmodern response which goes beyond the rational, and for flexible liturgy that can respond to the moving of the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that legitimate questions can be asked regarding the nature of a worship leader's shaping of liturgy to respond to the Holy Spirit, and whether it should be considered them emotionally manipulating the congregation. However, to allow meaningful discussion on the research question, this paper will take the theological beliefs of Charismatic Evangelical Christians at face value, including the belief that congregants genuinely engage with the moving of the Spirit. The band's flexibility and style of music allows is to create postmodern authenticity, whilst also shaping the liturgy to focus the moving of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite their significant benefits, the reign of worship bands has arguably led to an overly simplistic worship scene, both musically and theologically.<sup>8</sup> The reintroduction of choirs in reimagined roles singing Contemporary Sacred Choral Music could potentially remedy the issue of oversimplification, whilst still maintaining the

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<sup>2</sup>Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic Volume I: Seeing the Form*, eds. Joseph Fessio S. J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 36. Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 138.

<sup>3</sup>Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 91. Karl Rahner, 'Theology and the Arts', *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. Gesa E. Thiessen (London: SCM Press, 2004), 218–222 (p. 218–220).

<sup>4</sup>William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaption of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, Fourth revised and augmented edition 1952 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 599. Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 129.

<sup>5</sup>The theological term 'liturgy' refers to the form of a church's communal worship – in this case, services at Charismatic Evangelical churches.

<sup>6</sup>Greg Scheer, *The Act of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 212. Constance M. Cherry, *A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 263.

<sup>7</sup>James H. S. Steven, *Worship in the Spirit: Charismatic Worship in the Church of England* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002), 147.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas G. Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (Durham: The Alban Institute, 2001), 57–59.

benefits of a worship band. To examine this, a research experiment was undertaken in which participant feedback from a band-led control service was compared to that of a choir-and-band-led service with originally composed music. The findings suggested that the choral music did not notably detract from any element of the worship, and that it uniquely improved participants' worship through an experience of 'transcendent beauty'. This experience was then considered within a theological context, and used to inform a compositional exploration of 'transcendent beauty'. By intentionally informing the composition process in this way, it was possible to create choral music that was liturgically appropriate, theologically and musically substantive, and uniquely beneficial through the means of 'transcendent beauty'.

A concise definition of both Charismatic Evangelicalism and Contemporary Sacred Choral Music will be set out in this paper, and the informing theological and sociological research will be outlined. Compositional examples of the musical impact will then be examined within the context of the informing research.

## Setting the Scene

### *Charismatic Evangelicalism*

UK Charismatic Evangelicalism is a movement within the Protestant Church with far-reaching influence. Alongside a substantial network of churches, annual Charismatic Evangelical (CE) events – such as New Wine and Soul Survivor – have frequently boasted attendances in the tens of thousands over recent decades. The size of the movement has also afforded it the resources to pioneer large-scale projects, such as the Alpha Course which runs globally in over 30,000 organisations.

The movement is part of the Evangelical family, yet it is distinct due to its adoption of the spiritual elements of Charismaticism, including the gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12, such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. Despite the ambiguity of the movement's varying beliefs, a prototypical definition offers three core elements which run through the CE belief system: the divine authority of the bible; the requirement to repent and accept salvation, resulting in the bestowal of spiritual gifts through grace; and the need for a personal relationship with Jesus, which is deepened through the use of spiritual gifts.<sup>9</sup>

CE worship music is broadly of the easy-listening soft-rock genre.<sup>10</sup> The band leader – also referred to as the worship leader – sings lead vocals whilst playing an acoustic guitar or piano. The band also typically comprises a backing singer, an electric guitarist, a bass guitarist, a keyboard player, and a drummer.<sup>11</sup> The songs are musically simple; harmony is predominantly restricted to I, IV, and V with limited exceptions, there is a significant use of musical repetition, and the lyrics are often theologically-simplistic, causing Porter to describe the worship style as being

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<sup>9</sup>Donald McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 96.

<sup>10</sup>Scheer, *Art Worship*, 14.

<sup>11</sup>Mark Porter, *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives* (Abington: Routledge, 2017), 19

the 'lowest common denominator'.<sup>12</sup> The liturgical purpose of the band-led music is broadly two-fold: to guide the congregation towards engaging with the Holy Spirit during sung worship, which might involve congregants praying, speaking in tongues, or receiving words of knowledge; and to function as an instrumental backdrop during the 'ministry time', over which the service leader encourages congregants to engage with the gifts of the Spirit, such as healing, prophecy, and tongues.<sup>13</sup>

The fundamental expectation of congregants to engage spiritually with God guides and shapes the entire liturgy, thereby requiring the service to adapt and respond to how the Spirit is moving in the moment. The flexibility and musical style of worship bands suits the CE need for liturgical freedom and postmodern authenticity, whereas the organs, anthems, and hymns of the 'old tradition' remain firmly rejected for being cold, dreary, and restrictive; during the research experiment, an unprompted control participant expressed strong distain for 'old tradition' choral music, and asserted that any reintroduction of it would destroy the movement's worship.

### *Contemporary Sacred Choral Music*

The style of music used in the research experiment was Contemporary Sacred Choral Music (CSCM) – specifically the 'New Sacred Simplicity' style – therefore it was the style of music subsequently composed. Composers of this style include Sir John Tavener, Morten Lauridsen, and Paul Mealar. The genre has come to the forefront of public consciousness on multiple occasions in recent decades. Sir John Tavener's *Song for Athene* was performed to a global audience at Princess Diana's funeral in 1997. Similarly, Paul Mealar's *Ubi Caritas* played a prominent role during the royal wedding of William and Catherine in 2011. The style broadly features slow moving tempi, tonal or modal harmonies featuring added seconds, sevenths, and ninths, and typically utilises a choir a cappella, or with light accompaniment.

It is important to state that the compositions featured in this research do not fall under the banner of the Charismatic Evangelical Movement's 'old tradition', particularly as the research suggests any reintroduction of 'old tradition' choral music would be rejected. The music of the 'old tradition' was based around the parish choir, whereby hymns, anthems, and evensongs were sung with organ accompaniment. The music typically stemmed from sacred choral traditions of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, causing it to be considered outdated by the late-twentieth century. By rejecting this style and adopting CSCM, the choral music seeks to engage with Charismatic Evangelical liturgy without encountering the animosity felt towards the 'old tradition'.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 116.

<sup>13</sup>Steven, *Worship Spirit*, 151–155.

## The Informing Theological and Sociological Research

The theological and sociological research used to inform the composition process stems from research published in two of my previous journal articles. The first sets out a research experiment used to examine whether originally composed Contemporary Sacred Choral Music (CSCM) could benefit Charismatic Evangelical (CE) worship.<sup>14</sup> This was done through a sociological experiment which compared participant feedback from two services; a typical CE band-led service which acted as a control, and an experiment service which used original compositions and arrangements to integrate choral music into a CE service alongside a worship band. Participant feedback was gathered under experiment conditions through three response methods to allow for verification of the data through triangulation. The data was compared and analysed, and two conclusions were drawn: first, the choral music benefitted the participants' worship without notably detracting from any of the music's liturgical purposes, such as creating space to meet God, enhancing fellowship, or allowing congregants to engage with the theology of the lyrics; secondly, the choral music uniquely benefitted worship through the use of 'transcendent beauty'. The participant responses regarding the experience of 'transcendent beauty' were contextualised through the lenses of Theological Aesthetics and Philosophical Aesthetical Appreciation, thereby allowing the participants' experience to be understood as an act of artistic appreciation of beauty which facilitated a transcendent engagement with heaven.<sup>15</sup> Most notably, this experience of 'transcendent beauty' was unique to the choral music, and was not present in the band-led control service.

The second research paper examined the notion of 'transcendent beauty' within the context of the liturgical expectation of believers to 'touch heaven' in worship.<sup>16</sup> In adopting the spiritual elements of Charismaticism, CE theology incorporated the notion that the earthly worship of believers is inherently intertwined with the worship of the heavens, thereby allowing the two to meet.<sup>17</sup> The movement's subsequent desire of congregants to 'touch heaven' plays a fundamental role in worship.<sup>18</sup> This expectation can be met if congregants experientially engage with God – for example, through exercising the gifts of the Spirit, or experientially joining with heavenly worship. The notion of transcendent engagement is subsequently embedded in liturgy; worship song lyrics frequently reflect notions of

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<sup>14</sup>Carswell, 'Inviting Choirs'.

<sup>15</sup>Betty Oliver Seabold, 'Defining Art Appreciation', *Art Education*, 54 (2001–4), 44–49 (p. 45) Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics*, 2nd Edition (London: SCM Press, 2002), 154, 160.

<sup>16</sup>Carswell, 'Singing With'.

<sup>17</sup>Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 123.

<sup>18</sup>Matt Redman, 'Cell, Congregation, Celebration: Worship Leading in Three Contexts', *The Heart of Worship Files*, ed. Matt Redman (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003) (Kindle edition) locations 1034–134 (1056–58). Monique Ingalls, 'Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship', *Ethnomusicology*, 55 (2011–2), 255–279 (p. 260–262). W. David and O. Taylor, *The Theatre of God's Glory: Calvin, Creation, and the Liturgical Arts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 61–67.

heaven or transcendence, approximately fifteen minutes is set aside in each service to allow congregants to engage with the Spirit (called 'ministry time'), and the liturgy is structurally flexible to react and respond to the moving of the Spirit.<sup>19</sup> The concept of 'transcendent beauty' was considered through a Theological Aesthetical lens as a unique means in which choral music could meet this liturgical expectation, thereby allowing subsequent liturgical roles for choirs to be examined.

Three compositionally relevant conclusions can be drawn from the informing research. Firstly, the composition of choral music can benefit CE worship, although not through returning to the 'old tradition' style of choral music, as this has been firmly rejected by the movement. Secondly, there is scope to compose music that experiments with the choir's liturgical role. Thirdly – and most relevant to this paper – a compositional exploration of 'transcendent beauty', which was unique to the choir-led liturgy, would allow choral music to further benefit worship through facilitating the expectation of congregants to 'touch heaven'.

A thirty-minute choral piece, *Smoke of Incense*, was written as a compositional exploration of 'transcendent beauty', and was intentionally informed by the research outlined above. The piece was composed for main choir, chamber choir, and percussion, and is formed of five sections. It was written to be sung outside the restrictions of typical liturgical services, and is designed to act as standalone liturgy and be sung as a service in its own right. The act of worshipping through listening to music is not uncommon in Christianity; choral anthems play a significant role in many liturgical traditions, and congregants in CE services might spiritually engage with God whilst listening to the lyrics of a worship song. By viewing *Smoke of Incense* as an act of liturgy, the listener's experience becomes an act of worship in which congregants can spiritually engage with God.

### **The Musical Impact of Using Research to Intentionally Inform the Composition Process**

*Smoke of Incense* acts as a compositional means of exploring the intangible notion of 'transcendent beauty' by intentionally using methodological research to inform the composition process. The music is also informed by liturgical considerations, such as the Charismatic Evangelical need for theological and biblical fidelity. The musical impact of the research-based approach is significant, and will be examined under the headings of thematic and textual, structural, vocal textures, and other musical considerations.

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<sup>19</sup>To allow for a comprehensive liturgical understanding of Charismatic Evangelicalism within the research, the 'Sunday 5pm Brompton Road' service at Holy Trinity Brompton – the church where the UK Charismatic Evangelical Movement began – was observed from the perspective of the congregation on three occasions as part of a case study.

### *Thematic and Textual*

The five movements of *Smoke of Incense* are based on imagery from the biblical Book of Revelation.<sup>20</sup> The notions of beauty and transcendence can be problematic within the Charismatic Evangelical (CE) Movement, as their intangibility causes them to be considered inherently vague and unrooted from theological grounding. By using biblical source material, the music seeks to mitigate this problem by rooting itself in the bible, whose divine authority is central to CE beliefs. The Book of Revelation is often avoided by congregants and clergy as it is considered too theologically complex. However, it can be argued that the book would be simple had centuries of theological complexities not been layered over it, especially since it was originally written to be read aloud for an illiterate and uneducated audience.<sup>21</sup> Theological Aesthetics states that beauty reveals divinity, thereby enabling music to act as non-verbal theology, because theology is an understanding or revelation of God.<sup>22</sup> By considering *Smoke of Incense* through the lens of non-verbal theology, congregants can theologically engage with the Book of Revelation without encountering the baggage attached to the book's verbal theology. By rooting the piece in a biblical source text, it allows for a unique and meaningful theological engagement with the book which remains firmly grounded in CE theology.

The choice of language plays a significant role in compositionally exploring 'transcendent beauty'. Protestantism – and by extension, the CE Movement – have historically rejected non-English music as part of their reaction to Catholicism's use of Latin. Despite this, consideration was briefly given to using short excerpts of Latin in the piece as a way of enhancing a sacred soundscape. However, the movement's rejection of Latin prevails to this day, as it is considered too unbiblical and lacking in theological roots. The majority of *Smoke of Incense* is therefore in English, with Ancient Greek used as a secondary language. The biblical nature of Ancient Greek allows for an unfamiliar linguistic sound to contribute to the ethereal soundscape, whilst firmly rooting the music in the original translation of the bible. Liturgical consideration was also given to whether intelligibility of the English text should take priority over musicality. A piece written with the sole intention of being acceptable for CE worship would prioritise word clarity, because the movement places great value upon lyrical theology. However, *Smoke of Incense* is a compositional exploration of 'transcendent beauty', so a balance is required which values word clarity without detrimentally prioritising it over the soundscape. To aid this balance, compositional techniques are utilised which allow for word clarity amidst overlapping parts. Figure 1 shows how the text is passed through the parts with sustained notes to allow for intelligibility. However, this technique is limited as words must have the sound of their final syllable extended, thereby restricting what words can be used (for example, 'lord' has an extended 'or' sound, meaning

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<sup>20</sup>When discussing the Book of Revelation, this paper primarily refers to the narrative visions described in chapter four onwards, and excludes the church letters which precede them.

<sup>21</sup>David Pawson, *Unlocking the Bible: A Unique Overview of the Whole Bible* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 1263–64.

<sup>22</sup>Rahner, 'Theology Arts', 218–220.

the word would sound as 'lor', with the 'd' not sounding until the very end of the sustained note). The need for the music to reflect the intangibility of 'transcendent beauty' causes lyrical intelligibility to become less essential. However, by rooting the music in biblical source material, a biblical language, and in non-verbal theology, the music gains the freedom to dilute word clarity whilst maintaining a strong theological and biblical root.

**Figure 1.** An example of a text being passed between the voices to allow for word clarity amidst overlapping parts. *Smoke of Incense, third movement, bars 21-26.*

### Structural

The musical impact of the informing research can be observed in the piece's structure of themes, sections, and tonality. The Book of Revelation is a series of visions which occur in an illogical and unchronological order, yet an overarching narrative exists, journeying from the present, to the near-future, to the far-future. In viewing *Smoke of Incense* as non-verbal theology, the book's structure is reflected in the music. The piece's five distinct movements draw on five distinct images from the Book of Revelation, and chart a journey from present, to near-future, to far-future: the throne of light (present), the Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Light (near-future), the city of light (far-future), the river of life (far-future), and eternity (far-future). When the Book of Revelation reaches the far-future, a distinct shift occurs as the narrative moves beyond the fast-paced action of the near-future, to the stillness of the far-future where believers reach the peace of their eternal destination. This change in narrative is reflected by a musical exploration of the notion of stillness – as will be examined in section 4.4 – and through the structural shift occurring in the third movement, where the music's journey reaches the far-future. The third movement – the city of light – acts as a musical resting point for the listener; the SATB choir is unaccompanied and uses minimal *divisi*, the harmonic texture is thinned, and lyrical intelligibility is prioritised, thereby contrasting the preceding movement's use of double choir and percussion, clashing harmonies, and overlapping textures. It can be suggested that a composition of this nature should accurately reflect the full narrative of the book's visions, so as to ensure theological and biblical fidelity in the listener's worship experience. Yet by using a theological understanding of the books structure – an illogical series of visions containing an overarching journey – the music places value on reflecting the book's overarching narrative without needing to reflect its every aspect, thereby

allowing the music freedom to only draw on five visions whilst ensuring theological fidelity.

**Figure 2.** *The tonal structure of Smoke of Incense*

Movement:	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Key:	F major	B $\flat$ dorian to B $\flat$ minor	D $\flat$ major to A $\flat$ major	E $\flat$ major to B $\flat$ major	F major

Tonality was an area significantly impacted by theology. The broad tonal structure of *Smoke of Incense* is depicted in figure 2. The last three movements ascend the cycle of fifths, reflecting the ascension of believers into eternity. Revelation 22:13 describes God as the ‘Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End’; this description of divinity is reflected by echoing elements from the opening movement in the final movement, and is reinforced tonally by a return to F major. By tonally connecting the beginning and end movements in this way, it allows the F major of the final movement to be experienced as the destination of the ascending cycle of fifths, rather than merely another step in its journey, thereby enhancing the movement’s notion of finality in reaching eternity. The theological impact on the tonal structure allows for a meaningful journey rooted in the theological structure of the Book of Revelation, and which draws the listener towards a transcendent ascension into eternity.

### *Vocal Textures*

Vocal textures are a significant feature of *Smoke of Incense*. In the opening movement, the secondary choir uses a style of chant typically found in the choral liturgy of the High Anglican or Catholic traditions. Although the Charismatic Evangelical (CE) Movement was founded as a firm rejection of this worship style, ‘old tradition’ choral music was composed to embody Theological Aesthetics, whereby listening to choral anthems was an act of worship which used beauty to lead listeners to God. To reintroduce ‘old tradition’ choral music would be fundamentally detrimental, but by engaging with elements of the style in a considered way, new compositions can draw upon and reflect the Theological Aesthetical roots of the old style – although this should be done in a limited way to avoid rejection. Using an ‘old tradition’ inspired chant allows the music to paint a soundscape which draws upon the sacred and consecrated elements of the style. However, an Ancient Greek text is used to prevent the chant from becoming too similar to the ‘old tradition’, whilst also utilising a foreign linguistic sound to contribute a sense otherness. The chant’s sense of ethereal otherness is also enhanced tonally through the use of F Lydian’s raised fourth. The culmination of these compositional considerations results in a soundscape which is informed by the theology of the ‘old tradition’ to explore ‘transcendent beauty’, whilst avoiding any overt similarity to the style.

The second movement uses vocal textures to portray the theological dichotomy of the Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothes in Light. The identity of the

Woman Clothed in Light is subject to theological debate, yet the music's non-verbal theological nature allows it to draw on the biblical imagery without being constricted by such debate, thereby allowing the music to focus on the dichotomy of the characters' relationship. The structure of this movement is  $A_1BA_2$ , whereby  $A_1$  represents the Women Clothed in Light, B represents the Great Red Dragon and the ensuing battle, and  $A_2$  represents the Dragon's lasting impact upon the Women Clothed in Light, despite her victory. Figure 1 and 2 depicts the vocal texture used in  $A_1$ , which takes inspiration from the separate and muddled chanting used in MacMillan's *Sundogs*.<sup>23</sup> The linguistic sound of the Ancient Greek text contributes to the soundscape's sense of otherness, over which the secondary choir sings overlapping folk-style melodies in English. The chanting vocal texture is continually shaped as it slowly journeys from woman to dragon, thereby allowing the music to theologically engage with the notion of entwined dichotomy, wherein the Woman and the Dragon are inherently linked despite being cosmic opposites. The chant begins with the Woman Clothed in Light; singers chant the key's tonic or dominant notes to create a thin harmonic texture, the Ancient Greek text focuses around soft and breathy 'h' sounds, and a small number of singers begin the chant with the remaining choir gradually being added. The chant then ends with the Great Red Dragon; the harmony is thick with clashes and augmented 4<sup>th</sup>s, the Ancient Greek text is harsher and delivered in an angry tone, and the sound keeps gradually growing until it reaches *fortississimo*. The transition from woman to dragon occurs over an extended period, during which singers are directed to gradually move one-by-one *ad lib.* from the Woman's chant to the Dragon's, thereby allowing the vocal texture's journey to be seamless and sustained. The theological consideration of entwined dichotomy is further reflected in tonality;  $A_1$  uses B $\flat$  dorian, but the Dragon's section replaces this with B $\flat$  minor for the remainder of the piece, including the Woman's reintroduction in  $A_2$ , thereby reflecting the lasting impact the Dragon has on the Woman. Although music as a medium is unable to convey specific theological concepts, by intentionally allowing theology to inform the composition process – in this case structurally – the music is able to communicate by acting as non-verbal theology.

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<sup>23</sup>James MacMillan, *Sundogs* (2006).

**Figure 3.1 and 3.2.** *The muddled chant which is used to reflect the entwined dichotomy of the Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Light. The chant is used from bars 2–72; figure 3.1 shows the start of the chant in bar two, and figure 3.2 shows bar 33, where the chant shifts towards the Dragon. Smoke of Incense, second movement*

**Figure 3.1.**

Figure 3.1 shows the beginning of the chant in bar 2. It features four vocal staves: S. Hagios (Soprano), A. Hagios (Alto), T. Hagios (Tenor), and B. Hagios (Bass). Each staff begins with a *ppp cresc.* dynamic marking. The lyrics for all parts are: "Hagios hagios hagios kurios ho Theos ho ên kai ho ðn." The music is in a 6/8 time signature with a key signature of two flats.

- ★ Words should be delivered in a fast chant with a soft and breathy tone. Individual voices should be separate and muddled. Begin with only a few singers, then gradually add voices ad lib. over bars 2–25. Begin the chant as a whisper and gradually grow the sound into the *fortissimo* in bar 67.

**Figure 3.2.**

Figure 3.2 shows the shift in the chant in bar 33. It features eight vocal staves: S. Hagios, S. Idou, A. Hagios, A. Idou, T. Hagios, T. Idou, B. Hagios, and B. Idou. The S. Hagios part has a melodic line with the lyrics "(Hagios hagios hagios kurios ho Theos ho ên kai ho ðn)". The Idou parts (S. Idou, A. Idou, T. Idou, B. Idou) have a more rhythmic, chordal accompaniment with the lyrics "Idou drakôn pyrros megas echôn kephalas hepta kai kerata deka kai epi tas kephalas autou hepta diadêmata." The music is in a 6/8 time signature with a key signature of two flats.

- ★ In bars 33–57, singers in Choir I should gradually transition one by one ad lib. from the old chord and text (Hagios) to the chord and text in the new part (Idou). The new text should be delivered in a harsh and angry tone. The sound should be continuing to grow into the *fortissimo* in bar 67.

*Other Musical Considerations*

The notion of stillness plays a significant role in compositionally expressing the informing theological research. During Charismatic Evangelical services, great importance is placed upon the need for worship music to 'create space' for congregants to engage with God. This was raised by participants in the research experiment as being significant to their worship. As was previously discussed, the Book of Revelation follows a trajectory from present-day, to near-future, to far-future. The far-future contrasts the action-heavy narrative of the near-future, by depicting the peaceful reaching of eternity in which time breaks down. This is explored by compositionally considering stillness through the means of harmonic Tintinnabulation, and the use of minimalist techniques, as a means of creating space.

**Figure 4.** An example of the Tintinnabulation technique fluctuating between *E<sub>b</sub>* major, *F* major, and *B<sub>b</sub>* Major. *Smoke of Incense, fourth movement, bars 46-61*

The figure displays a musical score for the fourth movement of 'Smoke of Incense', bars 46-61. It features four staves: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The lyrics are: 'E-den is re-stored. The throne of light stands a-mongst the peo-ple, they need no lamp nor sun, for they bask in cease-less glo-ry, and their reign shall'. The score includes dynamic markings of *ff* and *f*. A double bar line is present between bars 46 and 55. Below the piano accompaniment, harmonic changes are indicated: *E<sub>b</sub>*, *F*, and *E<sub>b</sub>* for the first system, and *F*, *B<sub>b</sub>*, *F*, and *B<sub>b</sub>* for the second system. The piano accompaniment uses a Tintinnabulation technique, characterized by sustained chords and simple melodic lines.

Tintinnabulation is a harmonic technique first devised by Arvo Pärt in *Für Alina* to create harmonic stillness by only harmonising a melody with the notes of the tonic triad.<sup>24</sup> This technique allows for a static harmonic landscape, whilst maintaining interest through musical movement. Figure 4 depicts the development of this technique in the penultimate movement of *Smoke of Incense*, in which the melody is sung by sopranos and tenors an octave apart, whilst altos and basses harmonise using only triadic notes. Pärt's original technique is developed here by alternating the harmonising triad between E $\flat$  major, B $\flat$  major, and F major – three of the tonal points from the piece's wider ascension through the cycle of fifths. In using Tintinnabulation in this way, harmonic stillness is balanced with the continuing musical journey as it leads towards the final movement's 'eternity'. A similar use of Tintinnabulation is also used in movement's opening section, whereby the altos alternate between E $\flat$  and G or G and E $\flat$  – the tonic and median of the tonic triad. The pace of the alternating increases from sustained notes to crotchets, and then to quavers, thereby allowing the pace of the music to develop without altering the stillness of the harmony. Using these methods of Tintinnabulation allows the music to undertake a theologically informed exploration of stillness, and to examine the notion of time breaking down in eternity.

Minimalist-style techniques are utilised in the latter half of the final movement to explore the notion of eternity as an ethereal paradise where time breaks down, as described in Revelation 22. The music uses four distinct choral textures: sopranos repeat a four-bar phrase; altos repeat a three-bar phrase; tenors repeat a four-bar phrase, under which the basses layer its inversion; and a secondary choir of SATB soloists repeats a four-bar phrase using lyrics which repeat every eight bars. The four elements have staggered entries, and the different lengths of the repeated phrases causes the sound to continually shift, thereby creating a similar effect as the shifting phrases in Steve Reich's *Clapping Hands*.<sup>25</sup> This approach allows for a soundscape which can achieve a sense of musical stillness without diminishing musical substance. The compositional exploration of the ethereal breakdown of time also led to the introduction of Indian bells, which were directed to be played *ad lib.* every 3-5 bars, and then to become less frequent as the piece progresses, thereby contributing the notion of time breaking down. This notion is also enhanced through melodic considerations; the movement's earlier melodic lines revolve around three ascending notes with intervals of a semi-tone and a major third, or a tone and a minor third, but this is developed in the final section by selectively extending the intervals to a tone and a major third, or a tone and a perfect fourth. A theologically informed compositional exploration of the ethereal breakdown of time allows for three considerations to be met: greater musical substance, an engagement with 'transcendent beauty' through ethereally focused compositions, and the biblical fidelity of Revelation 22 through non-verbal theology.

Instrumentation is another area informed by theology. Contemporary Sacred Choral Music typically uses a choir a cappella, or with light accompaniment, and it was unnecessary to diverge from this without cause. *Smoke of Incense*

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<sup>24</sup>Arvo Pärt, *Für Alina* (1976).

<sup>25</sup>Steve Reich, *Clapping Music* (1972).

fundamentally explores transcendence, meaning it is important to establish a soundscape with a sense of ethereal otherness. Inspiration is taken from Ešenvalds' use of Eastern percussion in *Stars*, and a light percussive accompaniment is used, comprising a Tibetan singing bowl, Indian bells, a tam-tam, and a 24" suspended cymbal.<sup>26</sup> The sustained sound of the singing bowl's rim plays a prominent role in setting the soundscape; it is used solo for thirty to forty seconds between the first and second movements, and for ten seconds between the second and third movements. The unfamiliar sound of the singing bowl carries a distinctly ethereal timbre, thereby contributing to the soundscape's ethereal nature. Large sections of *Smoke of Incense* are a cappella, so as to avoid instrumentation detracting from the sense of otherness cultivated by the choir, such as through Ancient Greek texts, or through the use of vocal textures.

## Conclusion

Academic composers reside at the point where the methodological nature of academia converges with the enigmatic act of composition. In this paper, a cross-discipline research-based input was used to intentionally impact the composition process. The research drew on a sociological experiment, in which participants described choral music as benefitting their worship through facilitating an experience of 'transcendent beauty'. This experience was examined within the context of the Charismatic Evangelical liturgical expectation to 'touch heaven' in worship, and within the context of Theological Aesthetics. The experience of 'transcendent beauty' can be understood as being the participants' artistic appreciation of the music which led to a transcendental engagement with heaven, thereby allowing the music to act as non-verbal theology to meet the participants' liturgical expectation. This research was intentionally used to inform the composition of *Smoke of Incense*, which was written to act liturgically as non-verbal theology and explore 'transcendent beauty'. The academic compositional approach allowed for this informed musical outworking to take the research beyond the theoretical. The cross-discipline research tangibly informed the music through a number of means, such as thematically and textually, structurally, and through vocal textures. This resulted in the creation of a piece that was liturgically appropriate, theologically and musically substantive, and uniquely beneficial to liturgy through the means of 'transcendent beauty'. This outworking of the compositionally-based research approach presents a practical and informed answer to the research question by demonstrating how choral music can use 'transcendent beauty' as a means to enhance Charismatic Evangelical worship.

The practical nature of the cross-disciplined approach allows for a number of future research avenues. Having practicably examined how music can be composed for Charismatic Evangelical liturgy, a blueprint for liturgically appropriate music has been created, which can be developed to explore different liturgical roles for choirs within Charismatic Evangelicalism, or to compositionally explore different theological aspects, similar to the approach taken with exploring 'transcendent

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<sup>26</sup>Eriks Ešenvalds, *Stars* (2011).

beauty'. There is also the possibility of applying a similar research-based informative composition process to a different section of Christianity, thereby adapting the process to consider different liturgical and theological beliefs. This can be taken a step further, by recontextualising the research-based compositional approach within a different religion, thereby requiring a fundamentally different theological approach, and opening up possibilities for considerations about whether a different ethnomusicological framework would be better suited.

Choirs were fervently rejected by the Charismatic Evangelical Movement, and whilst this was necessary, introducing a new style of liturgical choral music can serve to remedy the movement's self-acknowledged issue of an overly-simplistic worship scene. By intentionally using research to inform the compositional process, *Smoke of Incense* takes the cross-discipline research in this paper beyond the theoretical, and demonstrates how choral music can act as non-verbal theology to facilitate the liturgical expectation of congregants to 'touch heaven' in w