

# Singing With the Heavens: How Can Contemporary Sacred Choral Music Be Used to Meet the Liturgical Expectation of UK Charismatic Evangelicals to “Touch Heaven”

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/stl](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/stl)**Calum Carswell** 

University of Aberdeen, Scotland

## Abstract

For centuries, choirs were at the heart of the Church’s worship. Yet, despite the UK Charismatic Evangelical movement favoring contemporary worship bands, a question must be asked: *What liturgical role could choirs play in modern liturgy to benefit worship?* The fundamental aim of this research is to establish what that role could be. By examining how Contemporary Sacred Choral Music (CSCM) could aid in the liturgical expectation of a believer to “touch heaven” in worship, this article suggests how a choir might seek to advance such an expectation. From flexible choral music in the “ministry time” to a CSCM accompaniment during the “time of worship,” specific liturgical roles are set out and examined, detailing how and why a choir would benefit Charismatic Evangelical worship.

## Keywords

Christian, Charismatic Evangelical, liturgy, worship, choirs, composition

## 1. Introduction

Choirs have played an undeniably pivotal role throughout the history of the Church’s musical life. Indeed, for many churches to this day, the choir is at the heart of musical worship. Yet one of the defining characteristics of the Charismatic Evangelical (CE) movement is the use of contemporary worship bands over choirs.<sup>1</sup> The rise of the worship band was necessary for the movement, not only because organ-led music was

1. Although rare, there is currently a small number of non-CSCM choirs active in the movement, led by worship leaders such as Geraldine Latty. Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician’s Guide to Leading Modern Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006)

## Corresponding author:

Calum Carswell, University of Aberdeen, First Floor, 2 St Mary’s Place, Aberdeen AB11 6HL, Scotland.

Email: [calum@calumcarswell.com](mailto:calum@calumcarswell.com)

too rigid for their free-flowing liturgy, but because worship bands were better suited to the inclusive nature of the UK CE's postmodern worship style. The adoption of bands, however, has often caused the movement's worship music to become overly simplistic. Indeed, Mark Porter describes the musicality of the movement's worship as being of the "lowest common denominator."<sup>2</sup> When Thomas Long examines what is described as the "worship war," he suggests that the band-led music of the CE Church is fundamentally simplistic, going so far as to describe its worship as using four words with three chords, yet still lasting for two hours. He goes on to suggest that this resulted in the downsizing of the movement's faith into something that is too simple and naïve to handle sufficient complexity.<sup>3</sup> Such simplification raises significant liturgical concerns, particularly as this is a movement that often elevates worship leaders to a position of theological authority which rivals that of its clergy.<sup>4</sup> The band's elevated status of authority means that the overly simplistic theology used in song lyrics can be significantly detrimental to the movement as a whole. Despite these concerns, it would be a mistake to seek to replace worship bands altogether, particularly as they provide the flexible and postmodern worship experience on which CE liturgy so heavily relies.

The influential role of choirs in the Church's historical worship suggests that they could play a role in the CE movement today by reclaiming sung music's ability to, as Calvin described it, "inflare the hearts of men [*sic*] to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal (*pour invoquer et louer Dieu d'un zele plus vehement et ardent*)."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, when discussing how to address the problems associated with band-led worship, it is credible to look at the musical depth that Contemporary Sacred Choral Music (CSCM) already contributes to liturgy in other parts of the church through composers such as Paul Mealor and Sir James MacMillan. When considering CSCM within a CE context, a fundamental question arises which this research seeks to address: *What liturgical role could CSCM choirs play to uniquely complement worship bands and mitigate their shortcomings?*

While this article is concerned with how CSCM can be used beneficially, there is a need to address the required presumption that it is indeed possible for CSCM to aid CE liturgy. In a previous article, through the use of a research experiment, I concluded

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121–23; Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017) 2–3.

2. Mark Porter, *Contemporary Worship Music and Everyday Musical Lives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) 116.
3. Thomas G. Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (Durham: The Alban Institute, 2001) 58–59.
4. The term "worship leader" is used by the CE movement to refer to the band leader, who leads the congregation's sung worship. Clayton J. Schmit, *A Worship Manual for the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) 88.
5. Jean Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia Vol. 6*, ed. G. Baum, Ed Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss (Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke, 1867) 169. English translation of the original French text found in: Grantley McDonald, "The Debate over Church Music between Jacob Andreae and Théodore de Bèze at the Colloquy of Montbéliard (1586)," in *French Renaissance Music and Beyond: Studies in Memory of Frank Dobbins*, ed. Marie-Alexis Colin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) 455–79, at 456.

that it is possible for CSCM to benefit CE liturgy.<sup>6</sup> To answer the current research question and build upon my previous findings, I will assume these findings to be correct and use this article to address how CSCM can be used liturgically. The research experiment that was undertaken comprised two services, a band-led control service and a band-and-choir-led service that introduced CSCM. The control service took place at a typical CE Sunday service with worship music led by a band, after which participants responded through an open-ended response form that asked them how the music affected their worship. The second service, which was organized by me, followed a typical CE liturgy (as set out in section 4.1, below), except that the music was led by both a band and a chamber choir, albeit sometimes separately. Immediately after the service, participant feedback was collected through two response methods: an open-ended response form, and an “audio free space” in which participants freely verbalized their responses to the same question in a private space with a recorder. In both methods, similar to the control service, the participants were asked how the choral music affected their worship. Semi-structured participant interviews were subsequently carried out with two experts in the field who were present at the second service. When the participant feedback from the three response methods was examined, two findings became evident: the CSCM choir was able to benefit the participants’ worship without noticeably detracting from the benefits of the band, and secondly, it did this predominantly through a phenomenon defined as “transcendent beauty,” which was not present in the band-led worship. “Transcendent beauty” is fundamental to understanding how CSCM can uniquely benefit CE liturgy. The participants described “transcendent beauty” as being an act of aesthetic appreciation of the CSCM which led them to engage with the heavenly realm in worship. When describing their act of aesthetic appreciation, participants made references to the beauty of the music, its harmonic richness, and its musical depth; these comments made no aesthetic judgements, beyond that of appreciation, as to what made the music beautiful. In all three experiment service response methods, participants described their aesthetic appreciation of the choral music as directly leading them to engage with the heavenly realm. The congregation’s experience of interacting with heaven was intrinsically linked to the CE liturgical expectation of “touching” (and thereby joining) heaven’s worship, as will be examined in subsequent sections. When viewed through a rudimentary theological aesthetic lens, the revelatory ability of beauty (which is transcendent by nature) led the participants to transcendently engage with the heavenly realm.<sup>7</sup> This article will seek to examine how the experience of “transcendent beauty” can be used to meet a CE congregation’s liturgical expectation to “touch heaven” in sung worship. As “transcendent beauty” was unique to the experiment’s CSCM, it may provide a

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6. Calum Carswell, “Inviting Choirs Back into the Fray: Composing Choral Music that Benefits UK Charismatic Evangelical Worship,” *Anaphora* 15.1–2 (2021) 109–25.

7. See author’s previous article for in-depth examination of “transcendent beauty” and its theological aesthetic implications: Carswell, “Inviting Choirs” 120–23. See also Karl Rahner, “Theology and the Arts,” in *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. Gesa E. Thiessen (London: SCM Press, 2004) 218–22; Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 103–4.

way for choirs to benefit liturgy in a way that bands cannot, while simultaneously mitigating the downsides of a worship band's simplistic nature.

The article will begin by briefly examining the band-led music of the UK CE Church, and the choir-led music of the CSCM genre. The term "transcendent beauty" will then be contextualized within the liturgical expectations of the movement, and, with the use of examples, it will set out how choirs can be used to help worshippers "touch heaven." Drawing on the findings of the research experiment, possible liturgical roles for CSCM choirs in CE liturgy will then be examined.

When discussing how certain styles of worship music may or may not benefit congregational worship, legitimate questions are raised around the nature of such benefit. For example, it is reasonable to ask whether, by acting in a specific way to enhance the congregation's worship, the worship leader is genuinely facilitating an engagement with the Holy Spirit, or whether they are simply manipulating an emotional response from the congregation. This article, however, is not the appropriate arena for such a discussion. To avoid getting needlessly tangled in such a debate, this research shall take the beliefs and liturgical expectations of the CE movement at face value, including the belief that worship bands foster a postmodern, authentic, and immersive atmosphere that acts only as a facilitator to enable the congregation to engage spiritually with God. In a similar manner, the CSCM that is being proposed should be considered to act in the same facilitatory way, as opposed to acting in a manipulative manner.

## 2. Setting the Scene

### 2.1. Charismatic Evangelicalism

The ambiguity of the UK CE movement makes itself difficult to define; however, it can be considered to be a faction of the Evangelical church that has been influenced by the Charismatic movement. A prototypical UK Evangelical believes in the divine authority of the Bible, the good news of the gospel which requires believers to repent and accept the grace of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, and the need for a personal relationship with Jesus that leads to an active outworking of their faith.<sup>8</sup> The Charismatic influence on the movement is predominantly based on the need for believers to exercise the gifts of the Spirit as delineated in 1 Corinthians 12, particularly healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. The spiritual influence of Pentecostalism is demonstrated by the 1994 Toronto Blessing, a formative moment in the founding of the UK CE movement.<sup>9</sup> During a series of worship gatherings at Toronto Airport Vineyard Fellowship, believers experienced the Holy Spirit in a tangible and powerful way. James Steven describes congregants at the services as responding to the Spirit in a number of physical ways (including trembling, laughing, and wailing), and as

8. Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1–14, at 1. The emergence of the Catholic Evangelical movement in recent decades nullifies Larsen's stated prerequisite of Protestantism.

9. James H. S. Steven, *Worship in the Spirit: Charismatic Worship in the Church of England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002) 33–34.

having “mystical experiences, such as the receiving and proclaiming of prophetic insights and visions.”<sup>10</sup> If a prototypical approach is undertaken to examine the theological entwining of the “Evangelical” and “Charismatic” frameworks, then the UK CE movement can be viewed as having three defining characteristics: a belief in the divine authority of the Bible; a need for believers to repent, accept salvation, and, through God’s grace, receive and exercise the spiritual gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12; and finally, the need for believers to experience a personal relationship with Christ that is deepened through the use of spiritual gifts, and which has a visible outworking, such as regularly reading the Bible or engaging in social action. CE liturgical music is broadly of the soft rock genre, with a band that is led by a worship leader who sings lead vocals and typically plays an acoustic guitar. In addition to the worship leader, the band typically comprises a backing singer, an electric guitarist, a bass guitarist, a keyboard player, and a drummer.<sup>11</sup> The liturgical purpose of the band-led music is broadly twofold: it guides the congregation towards God in worship so they can engage with the Holy Spirit, and it provides an atmospheric backdrop during the “ministry time” while the service leader encourages congregants to exercise the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> The “ministry time” occurs towards the end of a service and lasts for approximately ten minutes, during which the service leader encourages the congregation to respond spiritually to the sermon by exercising the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

While some Christians may consider the abandonment of choral music to be a mistake, the CE movement considers band-led music to be a necessity, for two significant reasons. First, it was a rejection of the organs, hymns, and anthems of the “old tradition,” whose pre-worship-band choral music is still greatly disliked by the CE movement for being too cold, dreary, and restrictive. Despite not being asked about choral music, a participant from the control-service of the research experiment wrote a scathing response, stating that the reintroduction of “old tradition” choirs would destroy the CE movement. The second reason that bands became necessary was that, unlike choirs of the “old tradition,” they could easily change, extend, or end a song in the moment to suit the service leader. Such flexibility allowed for a less-restricted liturgical framework, thereby allowing the service to be shaped by how the Holy Spirit was moving in the moment. The liturgy’s ability to be shaped around the moving of the Holy Spirit is of particular importance to the movement, as congregational engagement with the Holy Spirit is one of the fundamental aims of CE liturgy.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2. Contemporary Sacred Choral Music

The genre of music used in the previous research experiment to establish whether choirs could benefit worship was CSCM (of the “New Sacred Simplicity” style). From a musical

10. Ibid, 33.

11. Scheer, *Art of Worship* 121–23.

12. The term “service leader” has been used as there is no universal term that exists throughout the CE Church. Other terms within this bracket include “service pastor,” “leader,” and “host.”

13. The term “ministry time” is examined in more detail in section 4.1.

14. Monique Ingalls, “Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship,” *Ethnomusicology* 55.2 (2011) 255–79, at 260–62.

perspective, CSCM typically features tonal or modal harmonies which incorporate seconds, sevenths, and ninths, a cappella instrumentation, and slow-moving tempi. Composers of this genre include Sir John Tavener, Morten Lauridsen, and Paul Mealor. In recent decades, CSCM has come to the forefront of public consciousness on multiple occasions. During Princess Diana's funeral in 1997, Sir John Tavener's piece, 'Song for Athene,' was performed to a global audience. Similarly, at the royal wedding of William and Catherine in 2011, Paul Mealor's 'Ubi Caritas' was performed by the choir of Westminster Abbey.

Having established what CSCM broadly is, it is important to establish what type of choral music is not being proposed in this article. First and foremost, for choirs to be accepted, the hymns and anthems of the "old tradition" must not be reintroduced, as they already have been firmly rejected by the CE movement. From a musical perspective, CSCM is different from the "old tradition" choral music with a number of key distinctions. For example, it does not use the organ, preferring instead to use an a cappella choir or an eastern percussive accompaniment. While this article is not the arena to discuss musicality further, it should be understood that the musical distinction of CSCM from the "old tradition" allows it to be used without encountering the same animosity typically felt by CE congregants towards the "old tradition."

### 3. The Choir's Role within the Context of Liturgical Expectations

#### 3.1. Contextualizing "Transcendent Beauty" within the Liturgical Expectations of Charismatic Evangelicalism

The term "transcendent beauty" (examined in detail in my previous article) refers to an experience described by participants during the experiment service that was unique to choir-led worship.<sup>15</sup> Participants described the experience of "transcendent beauty" as being an aesthetic appreciation of choral music that led to a transcendental engagement with God. Rather than re-examine this term, this article shall seek to contextualize the believers' experience of "transcendent beauty" within the CE liturgical expectation to "touch heaven," and then examine the implications. The participant's experience of "transcendent beauty" in the experiment service was unique to the liturgy that included a choir, and it was not present in the band-led control service. That is not to say that worship bands are unable to meet the liturgical expectation to "touch heaven"—indeed they can—but it suggests that this specific way of meeting the expectation is unique to CSCM. In addition to making a unique liturgical contribution, CSCM's rich musicality allows it to meet the congregation's expectation to "touch heaven" in a way that, unlike contemporary worship bands, is not limited by a simplistic style of music.

Throughout the history of the Protestant Church movement, and by extension evangelicalism, the Church has placed the word of God firmly at the center of its worship.<sup>16</sup>

15. Carswell, "Inviting Choirs" 119–23.

16. Susan Hardman Moore, "Worship and Sacraments," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Vol. 1: The Post-Reformation Era, 1559–1689*, ed. John Coffey (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2020) 409–34, at 428.

However, the influence of Charismatic Pentecostalism on the CE Church has played a formative role in shaping their liturgical attitudes. By embracing Pentecostal spiritualism, the CE movement has placed significant importance on congregants personally engaging with the Holy Spirit during liturgy, and thereby exercising the gifts of the Spirit. The adoption of Pentecostal spiritualism has profoundly shaped CE attitudes towards worship, thereby causing a congregation's earthly worship to be viewed as fundamentally entwined with the worship of the heavenly realm. By adopting the notion that a congregation's earthly worship is a reflection of heavenly worship, a liturgical expectation arises whereby, as the influential worship leader Matt Redman described it, believers seek to "touch heaven" and partake authentically in its worship.<sup>17</sup> Although immense liturgical importance is placed upon the need to "touch heaven," it is an inherently vague notion that, due to the simplicity of CE theology expressed in liturgy, is partly considered by CEs to be too spiritually enigmatic to truly understand. The expert interviewees in the experiment (a church pastor and the head of music at a church) described the importance of "touching heaven" at length, but when pushed on the specifics of the experience, their answers were vague and unspecific. At the Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) case study (detailed below), the service leaders also spoke repeatedly about congregants "meeting with God" and "touching heaven," but while doing so, their language was broadly abstract. Despite its ambiguity, the expectation of "touching heaven" is reflected in both the movement's worship songs, and in the service leader's language during the "ministry time," in which they seek to guide the congregation to engage with the worship of heaven. For example, they may encourage members of the congregation to join in with the worship of heaven, to reach out and "touch heaven," or to sing with the heavenly host.

The liturgical expectation of congregants for a transcendental engagement in worship, although often considered too transcendent to be fully understood by humans, is pivotal to the potential role of choirs in liturgy. If, through "transcendent beauty," choirs can allow a congregation to experience an aesthetic appreciation of the choral music, and the subsequent transcendental engagement with heaven, then they can provide a unique and effective way of meeting the congregation's liturgical expectation to "touch heaven." Therefore, if choirs are to play an effective role, then composers and worship leaders should seek to explore further the notion of "transcendent beauty" in their music.

### 3.2. *The Application of "Transcendent Beauty"*

As a composer, I have sought to compositionally explore the notion of "transcendent beauty" by writing a piece of choral music, 'Smoke of Incense,' which thematically and musically examines the concept. 'Smoke of Incense' seeks to provide a practical example of how "transcendent beauty" can be explored in such a way that it facilitates the liturgical expectations that were examined in the previous section. The entire piece

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17. Matt Redman, "Cell, Congregation, Celebration: Worship Leading in Three Contexts," in *The Heart of Worship Files*, ed. Matt Redman (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2003) (Kindle edition) locations 1034–34, at 1056–58.

lasts for approximately thirty minutes and, although it is not suitable for typical CE liturgy, it is designed to exist as a separate standalone service.

‘Smoke of Incense’ draws directly from four of the ethereal images in the Book of Revelation, thereby firmly establishing the piece’s ethereal theme. There are already worship songs that draw from the Book of Revelation, and it is not uncommon for worship songs to include a verse about the Second Coming in relation to the salvation story. These songs, however, only scratch the surface as they are theologically simplistic and, therefore, do not delve into the book’s rich imagery. Contrastingly, ‘Smoke of Incense’ seeks to use the music in a way that engages the listener with the ethereal imagery. The listener’s engagement with the text is of particular significance to the CE movement as it fundamentally roots the listener’s experience of “transcendent beauty” in a biblical foundation. When approaching the notion of “transcendent beauty” within a CE setting, it is vital that the piece does not become too far removed from the congregation’s deeply held theological and biblical roots. If the experience is interpreted as not being sufficiently rooted in CE theological beliefs, then it is at risk of being dismissed as either unbiblical, or as being incompatible with the congregation’s own theological framework. The Book of Revelation (with the exception of the church letters) is typically avoided by preachers as there is a widespread notion that laypeople, and indeed many preachers, will be unable to understand the theological complexities of the book. However, the Book of Revelation was originally penned for a broadly uneducated audience, thereby suggesting there is a way for laypeople to move past the exegetical difficulties and engage with it. By using the notion of “transcendent beauty,” ‘Smoke of Incense’ seeks to use the music as a non-verbal theology that roots the listener within the ethereal imagery, thereby bypassing the complexities associated with the Book of Revelation’s verbal theology.

The thematic considerations of ‘Smoke of Incense’ are reinforced through a number of musical considerations that seek to compositionally explore “transcendent beauty” through the piece’s timbre (or musical feel). While this article is not the appropriate forum to offer an in-depth musical analysis, the musical considerations included: the use of an eastern percussion, such as the Tibetan singing bowl, to create an ethereal sound; vocal textures, such as a muddled chant; the tonal ascension of the cycle of fifths throughout the piece to reflect the ascension into the heavenly realm; and the use of harmonic stillness through tintinnabulation. Finally, ancient Greek was used alongside English, thereby altering the linguistic soundscape and rooting the music in a biblical foundation.

#### **4. Possible Liturgical Roles**

While examining the possible liturgical roles of CSCM choirs, it should be made abundantly clear that choirs should not replace contemporary worship bands. Not only would such a move be impractical (for example, choirs require substantially more rehearsal time than bands), but it would be a grave mistake. The flexible nature of a worship band and its easy listening, soft-rock style enhances CE liturgy in ways choirs cannot, particularly in relation to the postmodern nature of the liturgy, and the congregation’s need for authentic engagement within a contemporary setting. While large parts of the CE movement view



choirs of the “old tradition” as the antithesis of band-led music, it would be wrong to view CSCM in such a simplistic manner. Instead, as the research experiment demonstrated, it is more than possible for CSCM to be used alongside band-led worship in such a way that it uniquely benefits liturgy.

#### 4.1. *The Choir’s Possible Roles within Current Liturgy*

To suggest possible roles for a choir, it is necessary to establish the current elements of a typical CE service. As little scholarly work has been undertaken in regard to UK CE worship, I undertook a case study of the “Sunday 5 pm Brompton Road” service at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), whereby I observed the service on three separate occasions from the perspective of a participant.<sup>18</sup> Although services in the movement do vary, the HTB case study allowed for the following prototypical example of CE liturgy to be compiled:

- The service leader gives an informal welcome to the congregation and says a prayer as the band plays quietly in the background.
- The band transitions seamlessly into the “time of worship,” a period of congregational singing led by the worship leader that typically lasts twenty to thirty minutes with four or five worship songs.
- The sermon is given by the preacher.
- The service leader begins the “ministry time” without interrupting the liturgical flow—this section typically lasts no more than fifteen minutes, and is comprised of three sections:
  - The service leader asks the congregation to respond spiritually to the sermon by inviting them to pray for healing, for their hearts to be softened, or for them to hear God’s voice. The congregation is also encouraged by the service leader to “touch heaven” and join with the worship of the heavenly realm. Throughout this section, members of the congregation will respond by exercising the gifts of the Spirit described in 1 Corinthians 12, in particular tongues, prophecy, and healing. Throughout this section of liturgy, the band (*excluding the vocalists*) plays atmospheric music in the background by repeating a short chord pattern.
  - When the service leader deems it appropriate, the band transitions into a congregational song that is sung by those not otherwise preoccupied with their own spiritual response.
  - The band transitions back to the repeated chord pattern, and the service leader creates space for people to continue exercising the gifts of the Spirit.
- The service leader ends the service with a prayer when they deem it appropriate.

The expectation of believers to “touch heaven” means that the “ministry time” is of paramount liturgical importance; therefore, through the use of “transcendent beauty” a choir

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18. HTB was chosen as it is one of the most influential UK CE churches—not only did it play a notable role in the foundation of the CE movement, but its significant resources and extensive church-planting network affords it substantial influence to this day.

could play a significant role at this point. The music's liturgical role in the "ministry time" is two-fold: to provide an atmospheric musical backdrop against which the service leader speaks, and to help guide the congregation towards engaging with God through song. Because the service leader shapes the "ministry time" to respond to the moving of the Spirit, it is essential that the band's musical backdrop is adaptable. The band achieves flexibility by using a repeating chord pattern that is both spontaneously and musically developed by the worship leader, with the band members typically in communication with each other through hand signals or other similar methods. On the surface, the apparent rigidity of choral music suggests that a choir would struggle to contribute to the "ministry time." It is more than possible, however, to compose flexible choral music whereby a choir would be as flexible as a worship band, if not more. An example of flexible choral music can be found in the research experiment, where the choir led the music of the "ministry time" to great effect. By composing a short passage of wordless music (approximate thirty seconds) that a choir can repeat, a conductor is able to develop the music while having the flexibility to transition to the next section when needed. When the flexible choral music was sung during the experiment, the conductor developed the sound by moving the choir members from singing *mm* to *oo* to *ah*, and altering the dynamics. Flexible choral music could be further developed with the composition of multiple short passages which the choir could transition to and from. Indeed, one benefit of a choir is that its conductor can direct and control the music. Although a worship leader is able to control the band members through the use of hand signals, this method of communication is limited, especially since musicians require both hands to play their instruments. Therefore, in terms of providing an effective and flexible backdrop, a choir has the ability to play a significant role.

The "ministry time" would also be an effective place for the choir to sing a piece of music that created liturgical space in place of the band-led song. While the "time of worship" is a time for corporate singing, the "ministry time" is for spiritual reflection, such as the exercise of spiritual gifts. A distinction must be drawn between the choral anthems of the "old tradition" and what is being proposed here. However, drawing a distinction between the two can be difficult as they share a fundamental liturgical purpose, to allow the congregation to worship by listening to the music. Yet the proposed CSCM means that, not only is there a clear musical distinction, but that the proposed music must link thematically into the wider service and facilitate a spiritual response to the sermon. To benefit the liturgy, the piece must be viewed by the congregation within the context of the wider "ministry time," and as being a fundamental part of their spiritual response. The integration of a choral piece into the "ministry time" was done to great effect in the experiment service, predominantly because the choral music was able to seamlessly transition between the different sections of the "ministry time," and it was composed specifically as a response to the sermon. Therefore, in leading the "ministry time," the choir was able to facilitate the liturgy while contributing to the congregation's liturgical expectation through the means of "transcendent beauty."

Aside from the "ministry time," there are other liturgical roles that a choir can play. Although the "time of worship" is a participatory section of liturgy, there is an opportunity, albeit limited, for a CSCM piece of music to facilitate a congregation's worship through listening, similar to what has been proposed for the "ministry time." While a

choir-only piece of music worked effectively in the experiment's "time of worship," the choir was more beneficial in this section when it sang alongside the band. By composing a CSCM accompaniment to the band-led worship songs, the choir was able to musically contribute to congregational worship during the experiment's "time of worship" in two ways: the participants described their worship as being benefited by the choral music's "transcendent beauty," and they described the choir as enhancing their sense of fellowship. The participant's mention of fellowship is understandable as, when placed alongside a worship band, the nature of a choir, and its multi-layered harmony, creates a sense of multiple voices joining together in worship. In both the band-led and choir-and-band-led services, fellowship was described by participants as being important to their worship. From a practical aspect, it is possible to compose a CSCM accompaniment alongside a lead sheet to allow the band and choir to work together.<sup>19</sup> When the music for the experiment was written, additional notation (for example, letters to mark certain sections of the musical compositions) was used to help facilitate communication between the band and the choir. As the conductor was able to communicate effectively with the worship leader during the service, the band and choir were able to sing together in an effective way that did not hinder the flow of the worship. The need for worship music to flow smoothly in CE liturgy should not be understated, as interruptions intrude on the immersive experience of a congregation.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.2. *The Choir's Possible Roles Outside of a Typical Sunday Service*

As was previously mentioned in relation to 'Smoke of Incense,' there is an opportunity for choirs to be used in churches outside of their typical Sunday services. There are CE churches who, in addition to their main Sunday service, hold services that are more open to being liturgically experimental. For example, St Philip's and St James' Church in Solihull (the church used as the control service in the research experiment) has hosted a number of evening services which were more experimental than their typical Sunday morning liturgy. These included a service using African drums during worship, a meditative service that focused around praying with stones, and a service that used an amateur choir as part of its worship. If such a service were to be focused around a purposefully composed piece of extended CSCM, such as 'Smoke of Incense' (approximately thirty minutes long), then the choir would have greater freedom to guide the congregation to worship through listening. For such a service to work, however, it is imperative to establish its distinction from a concert performance. The two have fundamentally different aims, and it is important to ensure that any service of this nature does not blur the distinction. While a concert is performed for an audience to listen to the music, the service that is being proposed would have the choir playing a facilitatory

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19. A "lead sheet" has the melodic line written on a staff with the lyrics below and chords above. "Lead sheets" are often used by contemporary worship bands as an alternative to "chord sheets" that do not have the melody.

20. This was evidenced by the case study worship leader who took care to seamlessly transition the music between sections, and by both expert interviewees from the experiment who commented on the importance of liturgical flow.

role whereby it contributed to the liturgical expectation of the congregation to “touch heaven.” For example, in ‘Smoke of Incense,’ the music takes the listener on a clear journey through a number of ethereal images presented in the Book of Revelation, while using “transcendent beauty” to direct the congregation towards engaging with God. If musical and liturgical considerations are made to avoid the service being perceived as a concert, then the experimental choral service could be a potential liturgical role for choirs, particularly as it would allow churches the freedom to experiment beyond what this article sets out.

## **5. Conclusion**

Given the significant role of choirs in the Church’s musical history, it is more than reasonable to consider how a choir might be used to complement contemporary worship bands and mitigate their shortcomings. As the research experiment that was undertaken suggested, CSCM benefited CE worship through “transcendent beauty.” When viewed within the context of the liturgical expectations of the CE Church, whereby believers seek to “touch heaven,” the “transcendent beauty” associated with choral music can play a unique and significant role. Although “transcendent beauty” is not a tangible notion, it is possible to explore it compositionally through thematic and musical means. Such an exploration was achieved in ‘Smoke of Incense’ whereby the piece sought to use the music as a non-verbal theology in order to direct the listener towards heaven. To enhance the liturgical expectation to “touch heaven,” the piece drew on imagery from the Book of Revelation as a way to root the piece in a biblical foundation, which was then reinforced musically through various means to create an ethereal timbre (or musical feel).

From a liturgical aspect, there are a number of roles that the choirs could play. During the “ministry time,” the choir could use flexible choral music to create an atmospheric backdrop that contributes to the liturgical expectation of “touching heaven.” A CSCM piece also could be used during the “ministry time” in place of the band’s song, thereby allowing the choir to use “transcendent beauty” to enhance the congregation’s spiritual reflection. A choir also could contribute during the “time of worship” with a CSCM piece, whereby the congregation worships through listening, or by singing a CSCM accompaniment alongside the band. Outside of a typical Sunday service, a choir could sing an extended piece in an experimental service whereby the congregation worship through listening.

In conclusion, CSCM choirs have the ability to uniquely benefit CE worship through the liturgical expectation of congregants to “touch heaven.” Possible liturgical roles for CSCM choirs have been examined inside and outside of current liturgical practices. The findings of this research, however, do not warrant an overthrow of contemporary worship bands within the CE movement; rather it suggests choirs should be introduced as a way of complementing them and deepening the Church’s liturgy.


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## ORCID iD

Calum Carswell  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0157-2882>

## Author Biography

Calum Carswell is a freelance composer and PhD music student at the University of Aberdeen. Coming from a Charismatic Evangelical background, he has studied at the London School of Theology and led worship bands across the UK and abroad. Alongside this, Calum has made a significant contribution to the composition of liturgical choral music, having studied under the royal composer Paul Mealar, and having previously held the post of composer-in-residence at St Paul's Birmingham. His music has featured on BBC Four, the *New Choral Voices* album, and has been widely performed across the UK.