

MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, EMPIRICAL
METHODS, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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17. Choral Singers and Spiritual Realities: A Perspective from St Mary's Catholic Cathedral

Michael Ferguson

Since the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church, music-making has had an important role in Catholic worship and spirituality.¹ The Mass, which the Church understands as the source and summit of Christian life, is often characterised as an 'inherently musical' mode of worship.² The centrality of music within the Church's liturgical life has meant that throughout the history of Catholicism, music-making has shaped,

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- 1 At the Last Supper, Christ and the apostles sang a hymn before going out to the Mount of Olives (Mt 26:30; Mk 26:3). Scripture does not tell us what was sung, but the Passover tradition suggests it was the Jewish Hallel (Ps 113–18). For good accounts of the centrality of music in the early Christian Church, see Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); and John Arthur Smith, 'Music in Early Christianity, 1: The First to the Early Third Centuries', in Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 167–87. For discussion of the changing scholarly assumptions about the relationship between Jewish and early Christian liturgical practices, see also James W. McKinnon, 'Christian Church, Music of the Early', in *Grove Music Online*, rev. Martin V. Clarke (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05705>
 - 2 See, for example, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 'Liturgical Music Today (1982)', in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, ed. by David Lysik et al., 2 vols, 4th ed. (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004), I, 367–84 (at 370), which uses the 'inherently musical' phrase. See also Second Vatican Council, 'Sacrosanctum Concilium', *Vatican.va*, 4 December 1963, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, art. 112, in Lysik, *The Liturgy Documents*, I, 26, which states that music 'forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy'.

and has been shaped by, Catholic spiritual realities. What, however, do we mean when we talk about spiritual realities in a Catholic context? Today, 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide share a collective spiritual life as members of the Catholic Church, worshipping and believing within a single, global institution, under the doctrinal and spiritual leadership of the Holy See. For all of these Catholics, regardless of their location or circumstances, the contemporary Catholic experience is defined to some extent by the official statement of doctrine and beliefs outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the official liturgy of the Mass as defined in the *Third Typical Edition of the Roman Missal*, the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) adult catechesis programme for new Catholics, and more generally, the centralisation of doctrinal and spiritual authority in the Vatican under the headship of Pope Francis.³ These shared doctrinal and liturgical truths reflect a kind of shared spiritual reality for Catholics, where the boundaries of the faith are defined by the institutional Church, albeit Catholics in their different territories live out their religious lives in many different ways.

This fundamental role of the institutional Church in defining the spiritual realities of Catholics sets Roman Catholicism apart from Protestantism, which in broad terms rejects the *Magisterium* of the Church as the primary source of spiritual authority, in favour of spiritual realities defined principally by the personal faith of the individual, and rooted primarily in the authority of the Bible.⁴ Nevertheless, Catholicism

3 The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), for example, is responsible for promulgating and defending Catholic doctrine throughout the Church worldwide. For a centralised, official source of information about the Catholic Church, including an online version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and a central repository of Church documents, see the website of The Holy See: <https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>. For a printed version of the *Catechism*, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019).

4 See, for example, Mark A. Noll, 'Chaotic Coherence: *Sola Scriptura* and the Twentieth-Century Spread of Christianity', in *Protestantism after 500 Years*, ed. by Thomas Albert Howard and Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 258–80. As Noll points out, 'from the very beginning of the Reformation, Protestants proclaimed *sola scriptura* ["the Bible alone"] as their foundational principle of God-given authority' (p. 258); 'They [Protestants after Martin Luther] would follow the Bible before all authorities [...] "my conscience"; or the individual Bible reader, aware of standing before God, would be the principal guide for interpreting the supremely authoritative scripture' (p. 263). See also Mark A. Noll, *Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford

has sometimes been described as a union of contraries: it tends towards *both/and* paradoxes in its nature and beliefs, rather than *either/or* binary alternatives.⁵ In this way, the Catholic faith is *both* institutional *and* personal in its nature. Catholics are called to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, sustained in private prayer, personal devotion, and communal worship, and yet Catholics are also called to live out this personal relationship as a member of 'Christ's body on earth', i.e., the Church, in a way that integrates human persons into the whole without erasing their individual uniqueness. In a 'both/and' Catholicism, where opposites can co-exist stably, the spiritual realities of Catholics are potentially characterised both by a shared, collective spiritual reality, and by a uniquely personal spiritual reality, in a way that is complex, and yet that is stably integrated.⁶

This chapter explores the connection between music and spiritual realities in relation to one group of Catholics with a particularly important role to play in the Mass: namely, Catholic choir singers. In the first part, I underline the embodied nature of Catholic worship and music, which is anchored in a basic tenet of the Catholic faith: the Church's rejection of a dualistic anthropology, in favour of the complete integration of matter and spirit in the human person, which is understood as a body–soul composite.⁷ Catholic spirituality is, in other words, by definition embodied, such that one cannot talk about spiritual realities as separate or as distinct from material, bodily realities. In fact, the body can, and should, represent an important starting point in our attempt to understand the spiritual realities of Catholics in relation to

University Press, 2011), where Noll remarks that 'it is challenging to write a coherent history [of Protestantism] because of the sheer multiplicity of Protestant and Protestant-like churches in the world today' (p. 9) but, nevertheless, that 'the authoritative importance of the Bible for all Protestants ... is probably the best reason why it is still possible to speak, in admittedly very general terms, about a common Protestant history' (p. 6).

- 5 For more discussion, see, for example, Robert Barron, *Vibrant Paradoxes: The Both/And of Catholicism*, 2nd ed. (Des Plaines, IL: Word on Fire, 2017). Barron points out Chesterton's assertion that Catholicism keeps its beliefs, 'side by side like two strong colours, red and white ... It has always had a healthy hatred of pink' (cited in Barron, *Vibrant Paradoxes*, p. xiii; see also G. K. Chesterton, 'The Paradoxes of Christianity', in G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), pp. 74–94 (at 90).
- 6 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, arts. 787–96.
- 7 For a fuller discussion, see Robert Barron, *The Strangest Way: Walking the Christian Path* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 13–30.

music-making. In light of this, I turn, in the second part of the chapter, to my own first-hand experience of directing choirs at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh. I point to three specific areas—bodily positioning in the liturgical space, clothing and robes, and the individual vis-à-vis the ensemble—which, in my view, are worthy of further, more systematic investigation. Whilst my role as Director of Music involves managing many practical resources, the end is ultimately spiritual.⁸ In seeking to carry out this role as effectively as possible, I am thus motivated to understand more fully how the Cathedral's musical life might best serve the spiritual realities of the musicians, singers, congregations, and clergy with whom I work.

I. The Embodied Nature of Catholic Worship and Music

Before considering the musical life of St Mary's Cathedral in more detail, it is worth reflecting on how body and spirit might actually come together to shape the realities of Catholic music-makers. The official documents of the Catholic Church present an unambiguous concept of the human person: essentially, 'though made of body and soul, man is one'.⁹ Catholicism rejects any kind of dualistic understanding

8 As Director of Music, I help to shape the musical life of a busy city-centre cathedral, the Mother Church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh. I do this by working with the cathedral clergy to plan and realise an overarching strategy for music, managing resources including voluntary and paid musicians, choosing repertoire for services, acquiring new music, and working in a hands-on way each week to direct the different choirs and ensembles. Alongside the cultural and social benefits of this musical activity, the primary aim of the music-making is spiritual. Indeed, there is a basic assumption at St Mary's Cathedral that its musical life will have a positive effect on the spiritual realities of the community, in a way that makes music-making essential to the life of the cathedral. Thus, music has been part of its liturgical and spiritual life since it became the pro-cathedral of the new Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh at the restoration of the Scottish Catholic hierarchy in 1876. For a history the life of St Mary's Cathedral, including its music, see Darren Tierney, *St Mary's Metropolitan Cathedral, Edinburgh: A History 1814–2014* (Edinburgh: Scottish Catholic Historical Association, 2018). I am a life-long believing and practising Catholic and I have been in the role of Director of Music at St Mary's Cathedral since 2018.

9 Second Vatican Council, 'Gaudium et spes', *Vatican.va*, 7 December, 1965, art. 14, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

of the human being, which might seek to separate body and soul, or to divide matter and spirit within the person. Rather, body and soul form an inseparable union in a way that, in the words of the *Catechism*, 'is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body...i.e. it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature'.¹⁰ This Catholic understanding of body and soul has important implications. The body is not somehow an afterthought, superfluous, or antagonistic to the spiritual life. Rather, it is an integral, necessary, and fundamental part of the human person's spiritual reality. Not least, this renders the body worthy of respect, to the extent that if one harms or abuses the body, one also harms and abuses the soul; body and spirit are intertwined and inseparable, and the dignity and infinite value of the human person encompasses their soul and their body on equal, composite terms.¹¹ It is reasonable to assume, then, that the body might allow one access to, or knowledge of, the spiritual domain in a fellow human person.

It is worth considering too that Christianity is often characterised as 'The Way' (Acts 9:2). Rather than primarily being a system of philosophical ideas, or a theological lens through which Catholics interpret the world, Catholic Christianity is, in its purest sense, a 'path that one walks'¹²: Catholicism is principally a way of acting in the world, physically, materially, and bodily. This essential reality of Catholicism forms the backdrop, for example, to theologian Hans von Balthasar's call for a 'kneeling theology', which is rooted in the embodied practices and devotions of Catholic life, as distinct from a more abstract, intellectually determined 'sitting theology'.¹³ In particular, the embodied practice of Catholic spiritual life is centred on the sacraments. The seven sacraments of the Church—Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony—are efficacious signs of God's

10 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 365. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 52, art. 1.

11 See, for example, 'Gaudium et spes', art. 14: '...man may not be allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honourable...'

12 Barron, *The Strangest Way*, p. 13.

13 See especially Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'Theology and Sanctity', in *Explorations in Theology, Vol. 1: Word Made Flesh*, trans. by A.V. Littledale and Alexandre Dru (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), pp. 181–209.

grace, instituted by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the Church, whereby visible, physical signs, symbols and rites make present the invisible, spiritual reality that they symbolise.¹⁴ The sacramental expression of Catholicism par excellence is the Sacrament of the Eucharist. As Jesus said at the Last Supper, 'This is my body... This is my blood... Do this in memory of me', so in the Mass Christ becomes physically present in the bread and wine, and the worshipping congregation physically unites with Christ, body to body, when they receive Holy Communion. This material coming together of Christ in the Eucharist and the Catholic faithful at Mass is the very pinnacle of Catholic spirituality, and it is the end to which the whole sacramental and spiritual life of the Church is orientated.¹⁵

In Scotland, the essentiality of this bodily dimension of Catholic spiritual life was brought to stark attention following the COVID-19 lockdowns. In early 2021, the Catholic Church in Scotland, alongside other church denominations, took the Scottish Government to court over the forced closure of church buildings during the early stages of the pandemic. The key argument from a legal perspective was that the Scottish Government had overstepped its powers to infringe upon the freedom of religion in Scotland that is enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. The collective case brought by the Scottish churches was successful, with the judge Lord Braid ruling that the Government's policies had indeed infringed these rights.¹⁶ What is arguably more interesting, though, is that when spelling out its case in the public realm, the Scottish Catholic Church foregrounded the essential bodily dimension of Catholicism, underlining that Catholics coming together in a physical way at Mass is essential to the Catholic faith, that the bodily celebration of the Eucharist is indispensable for the spiritual well-being of Catholics, and that, crucially, this cannot adequately be supplanted by remote, online streamed services.¹⁷ This

14 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, arts. 1084, 1113, 1114–30.

15 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, art. 1324

16 See the judgement summary on the *Judiciary of Scotland* website: 'Judgement Summaries: Success of Churches in Court of Session Action', *Judiciary of Scotland*, 24 March 2021, <https://judiciary.scot/home/sentences-judgments/judgments/2021/03/24/success-of-churches-in-court-of-session-action>

17 For example in Lucinda Cameron, 'Churches Reopen for Communal Worship after Legal Victory', *Evening Standard*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/>

was not the case with streamed Evensong services in the Anglican Church, for example, or morning worship services in the Church of Scotland. For these denominations, bodily presence in the liturgical space is, from a theological perspective at least, less essential.

Just as the body is inextricably bound up with Catholic spiritual life, so the body is inextricably linked with music. In the last fifty years, musicologists have moved away from the primary study of abstract, disembodied musical works, towards an understanding that the full meaning of music can only really be known in action or, as Christopher Small famously puts it, in 'musicking'.¹⁸ Modern scholarship now acknowledges the fundamentally embodied nature of music, and demands that this be taken seriously. Nevertheless, the study of Catholic music has been quite slow to catch up. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the understanding of Catholic music was shaped by influential movements such as the plainchant revival, and the Caecilian reform movement. These movements were predicated on the idea that the spiritual value of music is embodied principally in its musical score, where the authenticity and the intrinsic sacredness of music is determined by the provenance of its printed sources, or by abstract notions of style represented by particular arrangements of notes on the page.¹⁹ These ideas have continued to shape the scholarship around Catholic music since the Second Vatican Council, and particularly some attempts to address the perceived problems in post-conciliar music.²⁰ Studies have often centred on critiques or recommendations of musical repertoire, or of particular technical

churches-catholic-church-court-of-session-scotland-government-b926255.html; see also Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 'The Church and Internet', *Vatican.va*, 28 February 2002, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_church-internet_en.html

- 18 Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). See also Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), for an insight into what Goehr calls 'the work concept'.
- 19 For discussion of both movements in this context, see Anthony Ruff, *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform: Treasures and Transformations* (Chicago, IL: Hillenbrand, 2007), chapters 6 and 7.
- 20 See, for example, Edward Schaefer, *Catholic Music Through the Ages: Balancing the Needs of a Worshipping Church* (Chicago, IL: Hillenbrand, 2008); and Joseph Swain, *Sacred Treasure: Understanding Catholic Liturgical Music* (Collegetown, MN:

styles of musical composition. Authors have generally been less interested in who will realise the compositions, and how they might do so.²¹ Arguably these approaches, which focus on the promotion of ideal repertoires in a very abstract way, have had limited success in actually achieving the type of reform or improvement they seek. In my own work, I have argued instead for the need to take as a first consideration those music-makers who must ultimately realise in a practical way liturgical music in order for it to exist at all.²²

II. A Perspective from St Mary's Catholic Cathedral

Thus far, I have underlined that both the Catholic faith, and music(king), are fundamentally embodied practices, in which the body is essential for, and fundamental to, the meaning and reality of each. For music-makers in the Catholic liturgy, bodily reality is not something to get past in order to reach a spiritual reality that lies beyond. Rather, bodily reality is spiritual reality, or at least it is an integral part of a whole-story reality that integrates body and spirit. With this in mind, I shall now reflect on how the embodied nature of choral singing might shape the spiritual realities of choir singers at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral.

I will mention two choirs in my reflections: the Schola Cantorum of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, and the cathedral's all-ability voluntary choir. Both ensembles were formed in 2018 and sing at the weekly Sunday 12 noon and 9 p.m. Masses, respectively. The Schola Cantorum comprises eight singers, and primarily sings the repertoire of the European sacred music tradition, from plainchant and Renaissance polyphony to newly composed works. The octet is 'professional', in that

Liturgical Press, 2012), both of which recommend the promotion of Gregorian chant repertoire as a solution.

- 21 For a notable exception to this trend, see Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2013). Day deals with the human dimension of what he sees as the 'culture of bad taste' around Catholic music in the US after the Second Vatican Council.
- 22 Michael Ferguson, 'Sacred Art Music in the Catholic Liturgy: Perspectives from the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland', in *Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by George Corbett (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019), pp. 279–95.

the singers are paid for their singing, and they audition competitively for their roles in the choir. The eight singers are a mixture of university students and working people, all of whom engage in other employment and/or study outside of the cathedral. By contrast, the all-ability choir members sing on a voluntary basis each week, and membership of the ensemble is open to all, with no audition, and no limit to the number of voices in the ensemble. The repertoire sometimes overlaps with the Schola Cantorum, but in general the all-ability choir sings music that is less technically demanding, and more musically flexible (for example, in terms of voice parts needed) than the Schola Cantorum.

Until the early 2000s, the principal choir of St Mary's Cathedral consisted of men and boys, after which the choir was reformed to include adults only, with women singers admitted for the first time. The current Schola Cantorum retains this basic model — i.e., it is open to adults of any gender—and it is currently made up of four men (two singing tenor and two singing bass) and four women (two singing alto and two singing soprano). This make-up is shaped to some extent by the singing range demands of the choir's historical European sacred music repertoire (i.e., the pitch span of the different voice parts). It is important, though, to note that much of this music was composed for liturgical contexts where male-only ensembles were the norm. Therefore, the present make-up of the Schola Cantorum is culturally determined: choirs of adults of mixed genders are the norm in church and cathedral choirs in Edinburgh city today, and the musical ensembles at St Mary's Cathedral are influenced by, and also shape, this wider local trend.²³

The make-up of the all-ability choir is much less determined by the need to fill roles with specific vocal ranges, but rather is determined by the singers who happen to proactively volunteer to join the group, where each singer gains automatic entry and is able to choose any voice part they wish. Since its formation in 2018, the majority of singers in the all-ability choir have been women (usually around ten to twelve singers), with men in the minority (around two or three singers). Whilst

23 Churches where adult choirs of any gender are the norm include St Giles Cathedral, Greyfriars Church, Old St Paul's Church, St Cuthbert's Church, Morningside Parish Church, The Robin Chapel, and many others. In contrast, the main choir of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral comprises boy and girl choristers (aged 9–14) from St Mary's Music School, and adult lay clerks and choral scholars of any gender.

it lies outside the necessarily limited scope of the present chapter, the full implications of these gender differences between the two choirs are worthy of more systematic empirical study, particularly in the context of choral singing as a necessarily embodied phenomenon, and in light of the close connection between gender and the body.²⁴

In terms of the ethnicity of the singers, the all-ability ensemble tends to be more international in its membership, though both choirs have a majority white British membership. It is worth mentioning that the Cathedral does not formally gather data about ethnicity of its musicians (nor its congregations), and when the singers audition or volunteer for the ensembles, it is not something that I routinely ask them about as musical director. Therefore, any in-depth exploration would rely upon the specific and systematic gathering of empirical data, which could potentially enhance the overall understanding of the spiritual realities of those involved.

For the purposes of this present chapter, however, I will draw upon my more direct, first-hand insights as Director of Music to suggest three areas that I think are particularly worthy of more systematic empirical research: bodily positioning of choir members in the liturgical space; clothing and robes; and the individual singer vis-à-vis the ensemble.

(a) Bodily Positioning of Choir Members in the Liturgical Space

As I noted above, the conversation about Catholic music after the Second Vatican Council has tended to focus on musical repertoires and styles, with less focussed consideration of who will sing and play this music.

24 See Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth (Engaging Culture): Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). Begbie's concept of 'sonic order' is particularly useful here, which Begbie sees as 'patterns of constraints that exist before any music is actually made' (p. 41). Begbie highlights that there is an intimate connection between the grounded reality of the body—which in the case of choirs are the materials that directly produce the sound—and the 'in the notes' dimension of the musical composition. For one reflection on the implications of gender and the body on spiritual experience of singers in light of Begbie's 'sonic order', see Bertram J. Schirr, 'The Body We Sing: Reclaiming of the Queer Materiality of Vocal Bodies', in *Queering Freedom: Music, Identity and Spirituality*, ed. by Karin Hendricks and June Boyce-Tilman (Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2018), pp. 35–52.

Glaringly, though, there has been almost no in-depth consideration of where—from an embodied, physical perspective—this music might be sung or played in the liturgy.

At St Mary's Cathedral, physical positioning is, nonetheless, an important consideration, with not only musical implications, but also implications that seem to resonate with music-makers' experiences of, and connections to, the liturgy and community. The communication of musical sound is an important consideration for a music director when thinking about positioning a choir within a liturgical space. In one sense, a choir is like a large musical 'instrument', and the positioning of this instrument needs to take into account the particular acoustics of the space, the sound projection possibilities in different parts of the building, architectural elements that might help or inhibit sound projection, and the need to maintain musical balance with other instruments, which may or not be moveable, for example pipe organs, pianos, and instrumental ensembles. One of St Mary's Cathedral's principal choirs, the Schola Cantorum octet, underwent a major change of singing location, first brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change in physical location seems to have affected the realities of the choir members in ways that go beyond the purely musical, and which potentially touch upon the spiritual domain.

The Schola Cantorum was established in 2018, with the aim of singing liturgical music to the highest of standards in cathedral liturgies, and principally at the weekly 12 noon Sunday Mass. The ensemble began its life singing from a gallery in the organ loft, situated at the west end of the cathedral, raised some twenty feet above ground level. The eight singers occupied the space between two sides of the large organ case, facing eastwards towards the Sanctuary, and standing behind the cathedral organist and a large three-manual organ console. To direct the ensemble, I stood to one side of the organ console, facing the singers with my back to the east end. From a musical perspective, this positioning allowed excellent communication between singers, the organist, and me as musical director. Acoustically, the close proximity of the organ pipes caused some difficulties with accompanied repertoire played at very loud volumes, but most of the time the raised gallery singing position allowed the Schola Cantorum to fill the acoustic space of the cathedral effectively. However, in the organ loft, the singers were

unable to see the congregation and clergy during the Mass and were similarly invisible to them. Because of the position of the organ console in front of them, the singers could see very little of the liturgical action going on in the Sanctuary. In this way, whilst the Schola Cantorum singers were sonically present in the worship space during the weekly 12 noon Mass, they were absent in a visible sense, existing instead in the cathedral space as apparently disembodied voices.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in severe restrictions to choral singing across Scotland. When choirs were eventually permitted to sing again in churches following a complete ban, firstly in small groups and then in larger ensembles, distancing requirements for singers meant that the Schola Cantorum's organ gallery position was unsuitable. The choir therefore moved to a new singing position in the nave of the cathedral at floor level, about half-way along its length, to the right-hand (south) side as one faces liturgical east. From a practical perspective, this new position allowed the necessary physical space for distancing between singers. Acoustically, any issues created by the increased distance between the choir, the organ, and the cathedral organist were solved using a camera pointing downwards from the loft to the new position in the nave, with a microphone system relaying the sound of the singers to the organist in the loft as if they were in much closer proximity. This new nave position is flanked on three sides by congregational seating, and so despite social distancing measures, the move put the Schola Cantorum in much closer physical vicinity of the worshipping congregation during the Mass than had previously been the case.

In the debates about post-conciliar liturgical music, close integration of musicians and the congregation has often been promoted as a desirable ideal, at least in an abstract sense: i.e., there is a sense that singers should be integrated members of the worshipping community (whatever that might mean), and the more separate or removed they are, the more problematic things become.²⁵ In the case of the Schola Cantorum's relocation to the nave of St Mary's, some of the singers began

25 See, for example, Second Vatican Council, 'Musicam Sacram: Instruction on Music in the Liturgy', *Vatican.va*, 5 March 1967, art. 23 (a), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_instr_19670305_musicam-sacram_en.html, which states that the choir should be placed in such a way as to ensure 'that its nature should be clearly apparent—namely, that it is a part of the whole congregation, and that it fulfills a special role'.

to report feeling a better sense of connection with the congregation and the liturgy, and that this enhanced their own experiences of the Mass. Similarly, some members of the congregation reported feeling more connected to the singers, and expressed a positive reaction in particular to being able to see the singers, in addition to just hearing them.

In hindsight, the original organ loft position made it more difficult for the singers to partake in the bodily gestures and actions of the Mass. In particular, the gallery position did not lend itself well to the physical gestures that form part of the usual congregational experience of Mass, including kneeling, sitting, standing, offering members of the community the sign of peace, and bowing. Moving to the nave allowed the Schola Cantorum singers to see the actions of the community, and it has also encouraged bodily entrainment with this worshipping community. The positive effects of the move, which seem to have extended beyond the purely musical, towards potentially encompassing the more spiritual concerns of connectedness to worship and fellow worshippers have led us to retain the nave singing position as a permanent location for the choir. This is despite the lifting of all distancing restrictions, which would permit a return to the original organ gallery singing position.

(b) Clothing and Robes

The physical attire of musicians is an aspect of liturgical music-making that has largely been overlooked in the academic discussion about Catholic music after the Second Vatican Council. From my experiences at St Mary's Cathedral, however, the physical dress of choir members appears to play an important role in shaping the singers' realities during the Mass.

Since the octet was founded, the eight Schola Cantorum singers have worn royal blue cassocks and white surplices as their regular liturgical attire. As the ensemble has become better known within the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh and beyond, these blue and white robes have become synonymous with the Schola Cantorum to the point that they have become a kind of visual trademark. Whilst the choir is made up of eight permanent members, singers are sometimes absent, and we have a pool of deputy singers who can take their place. As is inevitable, over time the make-up of the ensemble has also slowly

changed as singers come and go, especially as some of the singers are university students, and might only be in Edinburgh for a few years. In the midst of this natural ebb and flow of singers, the blue and white choir robes have given the Schola Cantorum a constant physical identity at St Mary's Cathedral.

Members of the St Mary's Cathedral all-ability volunteer choir, on the other hand, do not routinely wear choir robes. The rationale is that this allows the ensemble to be open to limitless singers whereby participation is not restricted by the number or size of available robes. From the perspective of singing, the all-ability choir's music is more congregationally focussed than the Schola Cantorum: for example, each week the voluntary choir leads the congregation in singing a congregational Mass setting, whereas the Schola Cantorum usually sings a choir-only setting.²⁶ In this context, the all-ability choir members wearing their 'ordinary' clothes, just as the congregation around them do, encourages less physical distinction between choir and congregation than is the case with the Schola Cantorum.²⁷

On some occasions in the Church's year, for example at the Archdiocesan Chrism Mass and the Christmas Eve early evening Vigil Mass, the Schola Cantorum and the all-ability choir are combined within a single service. In the years before COVID-19, all of the singers simply wore black. However, post-pandemic, we have dressed the two choirs differently. Due to the growing renown of the Schola Cantorum, and the expectation of clergy and congregation that the octet will be a visible part of these big celebrations, the robed Schola Cantorum have joined the unrobed volunteer singers for the majority of the repertoire during the Mass, while they have also sung some repertoire as a standalone octet.²⁸

The effect of combining robed and unrobed singers seems to connect in an interesting way with the lived realities of some of the singers. For a small minority of those not wearing robes, performing alongside robed singers in the same liturgy seems to have an unhelpful impact on their

26 The congregational setting is very often Dan Schutte, *Mass of Christ the Saviour* (Portland, OR: Oregon Catholic Press, 2013). Mass settings sung by the Schola Cantorum typically include works by Palestrina, Victoria, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, MacMillan, and others.

27 Since its founding in 2018, the all-ability choir has always sung from the floor-level nave position in the cathedral, as discussed in the section above.

28 This has usually been an Offertory motet.

perception of their integration within the Mass, and particularly on their perception of their own ministerial role as part of the choir. It is not hard to imagine that different modes of liturgical dress can set up distinctions between robed and unrobed singers. However, there is a sense from at least some of the singers that they also perceive the special spiritual purpose of the all-ability volunteer choir to be somehow undermined when placed side-by-side with singers for whom physical attire—in this case, the wearing of robes—seems to confer higher spiritual purpose.

(c) The Individual Singer vis-à-vis the Ensemble

Ideally, a liturgical choir is like a microcosm of the whole Church: singers are integrated into a unified whole, musically, spiritually, and socially, without erasing the uniqueness of the individual.²⁹ Nevertheless, the singers appear to experience an ongoing negotiation between being part of a musical ensemble, on the one hand, and their responsibilities in the Mass as individual singers, on the other.

There are opportunities in both the Schola Cantorum and the all-ability volunteer group for choir members to step out, musically and sometimes physically, from the ensemble to sing as a soloist. In both choirs, this includes the singing of the responsorial psalm each week, where the verses of the psalm are sung by a single cantor, and the rest of the choir and the congregation answer with an ensemble refrain. For the Schola Cantorum, individual singing also includes solo moments dictated by their repertoire, for example in Mozart Mass settings where whole choir ‘tutti’ moments are interspersed with material written for four soloists.³⁰

When singing as an ensemble, members of both choirs are encouraged to stand near their fellow choir members for the sake of tuning and balance, and to facilitate the blending of voices. Conversely, those singing solos are often encouraged to move away from the ensemble, either moving in front of the rest of the choir, or going to the front of the cathedral, facing the congregation (which is the default position

²⁹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, arts. 813–22.

³⁰ Such settings from the choir’s repertoire include *Missa brevis in C* ‘Coronation Mass’, K.317; *Missa brevis in C*, K.220; *Missa brevis in Bb*, K.275; *Missa brevis in D*, K.194; *Missa brevis in G*, K.140, and others.

for a cantor singing the Responsorial Psalm). This is partly for the sake of acoustics, where standing forward of the main body of singers can make a difference to sound projection. In my experience, however, there appears to be something deeper going on. When the soloist is moved apart from the ensemble, the limits and boundaries of the performance space are redrawn to some extent, with the solo singer potentially having a more obvious physical presence in the liturgical space.

Conclusion

The embodied nature of the Catholic faith, and of music(ing), points to the body as being a crucial access point in the search to understand better how music-making can shape the spiritual realities of music-makers. Whilst the embodied dimension of Catholic music has often been overlooked in scholarly discussions since the Second Vatican Council, considerations of the body—in this case, bodily positioning in the liturgical space, clothing and robes, and the individual vis-à-vis the ensemble—seem to have a resonance, at least in my own experience, which goes beyond the purely musical or practical. Of course, my reflections are rooted in my first-hand experience of working with singers as the Director of Music at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, and there are natural limitations to the conclusions one can draw from this type of personal observation. However, these reflections are offered primarily to suggest three potential starting points for a more systematic investigation into how bodily realities in Catholic liturgical music-making might shape spiritual realities. If we are serious about understanding the spiritual realities of Catholic music-makers, the body is a valid and potentially fruitful place to start. As a Director of Music, the connection between bodily and spiritual realities is also of pastoral importance: when one actively shapes the physical, bodily reality of singers and musicians in the liturgy (as I have done in the cases above), what is the impact on their spiritual realities? A greater understanding of this could be at the heart not just of fulfilling the musical and practical dimensions of the music director role, but also of fulfilling its spiritual ends most effectively.