Annunciations

Sacred Music for the Twenty-First
Century

EDITED BY GEORGE CORBETT

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3. Mary as a Model for Creative People: Establishing Theologian-Composer Partnerships with James MacMillan

George Corbett

James MacMillan's understanding of the history of classical music, and of sacred music in particular, presents a challenge to a contemporary cultural climate frequently characterized as secular:

Music is the most spiritual of the arts. More than the other arts, I think, music seems to get into the crevices of the human-divine experience. Music has the power to look into the abyss as well as to the transcendent heights. It can spark the most severe and conflicting extremes of feeling and it is in these dark and dingy places where the soul is probably closest to its source where it has its relationship with God, that music can spark life that has long lain dormant.¹

MacMillan's conviction about the intrinsic relationship between music and spirituality emerged, nonetheless, in reaction to a prevalent attitude 'in university environments' of his generation: that music 'was complete in itself' and that 'anything else was extraneous and irrelevant'.² MacMillan subsequently considered such a retreat or 'divorce' from 'resonances and connections with life outside music' as sterile, a cerebral playing around with notes on the page in 'train spotterist fashion', a music which delighted in its own inaccessibility and unpopularity.³ Only when — against this university music culture — he allowed the 'spiritual dimension to emerge' did

1 James MacMillan, 'God, Theology and Music', *New Blackfriars*, 81.947 (January 2000), 16–26 (p. 17). This article is reprinted in *Composing Music for Worship*, ed. by Stephen Darlington and Alan Kreider (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), pp. 35–50.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.* MacMillan again emphasizes the 'pre-musical or extra-musical starting point or impetus, its genesis, its inspiration' in James MacMillan and Richard McGregor, 'James MacMillan: A Conversation and Commentary', *Musical Times*, 151.1912 (Autumn 2010), 69–100 (p. 74): 'music is

MacMillan find his true voice as a composer.⁴ He came to relish the ‘extra-musical or pre-musical’ impetus, and to compare the transformation of these ideas into music as ‘to use a Catholic theological term, a transubstantiation of one to the other.’⁵

In this chapter, I first consider MacMillan’s theology of music in relation to the book’s theme of ‘annunciations’. I suggest that, for MacMillan, the Annunciation may serve as a theological paradigm for the composition, performance, and reception of music. In being mentored by MacMillan, the composers on the TheoArtistry scheme were invited to reflect on his understanding of artistic inspiration. However, we neither required any faith commitments on the part of the composers (in order to apply), nor prescribed a particular approach, in the confidence that engagement with scripture of whatever kind (reverent, reactive, playful, etc.) would be generative of powerful new music and striking theological expressions or perspectives. In the chapter’s second part, I outline how we approached the practical and theological issues that arose in setting up theologian-composer partnerships.

I. Composition as ‘Annunciation’: A Perspective on MacMillan’s Theology of Music

Exploring the theme of ‘annunciations’, we focused on scriptural episodes in which God communicates directly with men or women. But, for MacMillan, the Annunciation also has resonances with the life of the Christian and with the vocation of the Christian artist. Describing his own compositional process, he draws on scriptural accounts of the interplay between divine and human creativity in the Old and New Testaments. He reflects on the word ‘inspiration’, as ‘from the Latin *inspiratio*, mean[ing], “in-breathing”, an arousal or infusion of an impulse of illumination that impels a person to speak, act or write under the influence of some creative power.’⁶ MacMillan considers the Old Testament model of creativity par excellence to be Adam. In Genesis, ‘God presents his limitless love for humanity in the gift of Creation and yet,

plugged in to something more than the notes on the page or the concept of moving those notes about the page in as successful a way as possible.’

- 4 MacMillan, ‘God’, p. 18. It is interesting to note that the composer Roxanna Panufnik (b. 1968), a decade on, had a similar reaction to the teaching of musical composition in the academy: ‘I left music college swearing never to write another note again, because I wasn’t getting good marks. It was during the mid-1980s when esoteric and cerebral avant-garde music was still considered the right kind of music to be writing. [...] I felt very false and that I wasn’t being true to myself in writing that kind of music, so I didn’t.’ See Roxanna Panufnik, ‘Beyond a Mass for Westminster’, in *Composing Music*, pp. 76–85 (p. 84).
- 5 MacMillan and McGregor, ‘James MacMillan: A Conversation and Commentary’, p. 75.
- 6 MacMillan, ‘God’, pp. 21–22. MacMillan notes that ‘the engagement between theology and culture, between religion and the arts is now such a faded memory for most people that a whole generation has grown up without an understanding of the true meaning and implication in the word “*inspiration*”. And when a creative person comes across the definition for the first time, it is a discovery made with undisguised delight — a recognition of a primal truth that has lain hidden for a long time’. See also MacMillan, ‘Sandford Lecture’, cited in Arnold, *Sacred Music*, p. 151: ‘I believe it is God’s divine spark which kindles the musical imagination now, as it has always done, and reminds us, in an increasingly de-humanized world, of what it means to be human’.

at the same time invites Adam, the archetype, to make his own sense of this new world. [...] Humanity's inner creativity is being inspired to express itself in the face of God's immeasurable love.'⁷ The creation of Eve from Adam's rib is an image for how composers 'have always taken fragments of material, consciously or unconsciously, from elsewhere and breathed new life into them, creating new forms, new avenues and structures of expression'.⁸

It is nonetheless Mary, the second Eve, who provides MacMillan with the true model for the Christian composer:

It is not just Mary's fecundity that is inspiring to a creative person. A more powerful and more pertinent metaphor for the religious artist is the balance between, on the one hand, Mary's independent free will and, on the other, her openness to the power of the Holy Spirit. There is something in the instinct of an artist or a composer, or any creative person, or any Christian for that matter, which is inexorably drawn to the idea of Mary's 'vesselship' — the notion of making oneself as a channel for the divine will.⁹

MacMillan has highlighted that 'the Christian believer is paradigmatically female: receptive to the seed of God's word. Receptive of the potency of God, the believer is waiting to be filled, longing to bear the fruit which will result from his or her union with God, to bring Christ to birth in our own life stories'.¹⁰ This is a standard theological reading of the Annunciation, of course. Commenting on the words of St Paul ('My children, for whom I am again in labour until Christ be formed in you'; Galatians 4.19), Aquinas comments that 'just as the blessed virgin conceived Christ corporeally, so every holy soul conceives him spiritually'.¹¹ However, MacMillan draws out from this paradigm the very conditions of his own compositional process:

Mary opens the door to the very heart of God, and in the silence of my own contemplation, in that necessary stillness where all composers know that music mysteriously begins, the following words from our sacred liturgy have lodged themselves in the womb of my soul, trapped in a scarlet room, gestating gently with a tiny pulse:

Hail Mary, full of grace,

The Lord is with thee

Blessed art thou among women

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.¹²

7 MacMillan, 'God', p. 22. See also MacMillan, 'Parthenogenesis', in Begbie (ed.), *Sounding the Depths*, pp. 33–38 (p. 34): 'All art is a kind of mirror image or a response to divine creation, to the first gesture of creation by the Creator. In many ways, artists have a tiny glimpse into the pathos with which God, at the dawn of creation, looked upon the work of his hand'.

8 MacMillan, 'God', p. 22. As MacMillan highlights, his own work *Adam's Rib* (1994–1995) is 'simply an acknowledgment of this eternally regenerative process of music as it develops through the ages'.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

11 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 30, a. 1, arg. 3, trans. by the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1981), Vol. 4, p. 2173.

12 MacMillan, 'God', p. 26.

MacMillan's compositional understanding is, then, incarnational: 'Mary, who was receptive to God; Mary who was filled by God; Mary who bore God's son. Mary is a paradigm of our receptivity [...] a model for all creative people [...] and an example for all Christian believers'.¹³

Springing from his faith, MacMillan's music is always, therefore, a witness to this faith. And that faith by virtue of the Incarnation is bodily as well as spiritual: 'I've always been drawn to a theology of music which emphasises [...] a sense of the physical, the corporeal, rather than a sense of the spirit being in some way divorced or set apart from the corporeal'.¹⁴ Through the Incarnation, as through music itself, MacMillan believes that one can come to intimacy with God: 'there's an analogy between music and the mind of God: that in music there is, we see or even feel something of the thinking of God'.¹⁵ But this is a journey to God *through* and not *away from* the body.¹⁶ On reflecting on the first workshop performance of the six new compositions in the TheoArtistry scheme, MacMillan returned again to this incarnation metaphor:

It is a huge thing for a composer to hear their work come alive in the hands and voices of interpreters. Up until the first rehearsal the composition remains in the inner imagination of the composer. But it comes to life, incarnationally, when conductor and singers (in this case) start to transform it into live musical flesh. The open rehearsal of these new works [...] was the moment when composer and theologian began to realise where their joint discussions had led.¹⁷

As the Annunciation provides a model for his composition of music (and for artistic 'conception' itself), so Christ incarnate is, for MacMillan, the pattern for musical performance — the transformation of the 'joint discussions' and 'inner imagination of the composer' into 'live musical flesh'. As music may represent the Incarnate living word through whom Christians come to know God, so musical creation is always fulfilled through the sensual, bodily communication of performance.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁴ MacMillan and McGregor, 'James MacMillan: A Conversation and Commentary', pp. 82–83: 'That's certainly a very Catholic way of understanding the theology of the body, the theology of spirituality which is about the here and now, as well as a sense of the Other. It's about the interaction — for us it has to be about — the interaction of the here and now, the mundane, the everyday, the joys and tragedies of ordinary everyday people, and some concept of the Beyond or something that we stretch towards, something that we're not completely fully aware of. And that tension brings about the great hope and potential for human beings to rise to the heights of what humanity is capable of'.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁶ In this way, MacMillan distances his own theology of music and compositional language from those of his contemporary, John Tavener. See *Ibid.*, p. 98: 'I [MacMillan] don't share his [Tavener's] disparagement of the Western canon and indeed modernism, and I think we're even different kinds of Christian thinkers as well. And the way he talks in, I think, rather pessimistic terms about the body, although he, as a product of the 60s, is clearly someone who has taken full cognisance of hedonistic tendencies, probably more so than I have. But he talks about the body as quite distinct from the spirit and that always strikes me as rather odd, and a negation of full human potential. It seems an uneasy relationship in which to have the corporeal and the spiritual, and one could easily be dropped in relation to the other, and that worries me'.

¹⁷ MacMillan, 'A New Generation of Christian Artists', p. 21.

The Annunciation may also be, at the performance stage, a model for the reception of music and for how God may encounter a person through music: 'Being openly receptive to the transforming power of music is analogous to the patient receptivity to the divine that is necessary for religious contemplation.'¹⁸ Indeed, MacMillan sees music as not only 'a striking analogy for God's relationship with us' but as a 'phenomenon connected to the work of God':

Music opens doors to a deepening and broadening of understanding. It invites connections between organised sound and lived experience or suspected possibilities. In the connection is found the revelation, a realisation of something not grasped before. Such 'seeing' offers revelations about human living and divine relationships that can affect changes in our choices, our activities and our convictions.¹⁹

MacMillan therefore suggests a model for his 'ideal listener' who 'has to be not just open minded or open eared [...] but a hungry listener, a curious listener'.²⁰

Maeve Louise Heaney underlines the Annunciation as a paradigm for the receptivity of the listener in remarkably similar terms: 'to be open and receptive to Christ's continued presence among us now through art and music is a doorway to a transformed and transforming experience of life and faith; a transforming presence theology needs to both receive from and speak to.'²¹ Drawing on Bernard Lonergan's emphasis on an embodied experience of God, Heaney presents music as 'a gift of God to humanity' that frees a person from the 'pragmatic' to the 'contemplative', and opens a space or, in John Henry Newman's terms, a 'disposition' for the experience of God.²² The encounter with the aesthetic is, in George Steiner's terms, 'the most "ingressive" transformative summons available to human experience' and, in the Annunciation, he sees the 'short hand image [...] of a "terrible beauty" or gravity breaking into the small house of our cautionary being'.²³ For Heaney, then, music 'enters "the small house" of our embodied self in a much more powerful way than any other form of art. It changes us. To not accept its potential at the service of a faith that is always experienced as Another entering one's life, be it in the invitation of a gentle breeze, be it as an interruption or intrusion, would be shortsighted.'²⁴ The model of Mary at the Annunciation is an invitation not just for the composer,

18 MacMillan, 'God', p. 25. MacMillan speaks or writes eloquently about the transformative power of music on many other occasions. See, for example, MacMillan, 'Parthenogenesis', pp. 35–36: 'Whether they are religious or not, people can and do speak in religious terms about the life-enhancing, life-changing, life-giving transformative power of music. This quasi-sacramental aspect of the form proves that music has a power and depth to touch something in our deepest secret selves, for music cannot be contained in its abstract parameters. It bleeds out into other aspects of our existences and experiences'.

19 MacMillan, 'God', p. 25.

20 MacMillan and McGregor, 'James MacMillan: A Conversation and Commentary', p. 87.

21 Maeve Louise Heaney, 'Towards a Theological Epistemology of Music', in her *Music as Theology: What Music Says About the Word* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), pp. 135–82 (p. 163).

22 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 167–68.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

then, but for the listener who, in receptive response to music, may be open to the communication of the divine.

II. The TheoArtistry Composers' Scheme: Forming Theologian-Composer Partnerships

Alongside setting scriptural, liturgical and secular texts to music, MacMillan has actively sought collaborations with other artists and theologians.²⁵ As he commented on the TheoArtistry scheme, 'collaborations between musicians and others can be wonderful things and can push the composer beyond their comfort zone to see the impact of their music outside of purely abstract considerations'.²⁶ Foremost amongst MacMillan's collaborators is the poet Michael Symmons Roberts. MacMillan first set Symmons Roberts' collection of poems as *Raising Sparks* (1997), considering his poetry as 'a search for the sacred that needs to ruminate in your mind' — a search which his music could 'enable and enhance'.²⁷ However, after over a decade of collaborations, he sought a more dialogic creative process: 'I really wanted to work with him from scratch on a piece so that we could both have some input into the other's work'.²⁸ This has led to a series of collaborative ventures, including *Quickening* (1998), *Parthenogenesis* (2000), *The Birds of Rhiannon* (2001), *Chosen* (2003), *The Sacrifice: Three Interludes* (2005–2006), *Sun Dogs* (2006), and *Clemency* (2009–2010).²⁹ Although their roles as poet-librettist and composer are delineated, MacMillan and Symmons Roberts see themselves as part of the other's creative process.³⁰ Underpinning the collaboration, moreover, is a shared

25 See MacMillan, 'Parthenogenesis', pp. 34–35: 'Many of my works begin with an extra-musical starting-point. The pre-musical inspiration is an important factor on the specific nature and character of the music itself. It is important that this connectiveness between the pre-musical and the musical is always palpable and audible in the final creation'.

26 MacMillan, 'A New Generation of Christian Artists', p. 21.

27 Rhiannon Harries, 'How We Met: James MacMillan and Michael Symmons Roberts', <http://www.independent.co.uk/extras/sunday-review/regulars/how-we-met-james-macmillan-michael-symmons-roberts-5340496.html>. As MacMillan notes, *Raising Sparks* 'sprung forth initially from Michael's reading of the eighteenth-century Hasidic mystic and theologian Menahum Nahum' (MacMillan, 'Parthenogenesis', p. 33).

28 Harries, 'How We Met'.

29 Where *Quickening* (1998) celebrates the 'mysterious fragilities and ambiguous sanctities of human life', *Parthenogenesis* (2000) confronts head on the moral and theological issues of embryo research and genetic experimentation and manipulation: 'areas that are uncomfortable, messy and disturbing [...] theologians need to engage in these areas and be involved in debates pertaining to the nature of human life which are currently raging in our culture' (MacMillan, 'Parthenogenesis', pp. 33, 36). See also, for a brief discussion of some of these collaborations including *Parthenogenesis*, Michael Fuller, 'Liturgy, Scripture and Resonance in the Operas of James MacMillan', *New Blackfriars*, 96.1064 (July 2015), 381–90 (esp. pp. 286–90).

30 MacMillan credits Symmons Roberts, indeed, with helping him to articulate his own theology of music. See MacMillan, 'God, Theology and Music', p. 20: 'Michael Symmons Roberts, whose poetry I have set a lot, has used the term "the deep mathematics of creation" about music. This is a term that chimes with me because music does seem to be a kind of calculus, a means of calculating something of our very nature. And because we are made in the image of God, music can be seen as a calculus of the very face of God'.

passion for the theological and human issues at stake: 'We spend a lot of time talking around our subjects, trying to get to the root of it before we work.'³¹ As someone who highly values, and has considerable experience of, collaboration, MacMillan was an ideal mentor for the TheoArtistry Composers' Scheme.

For the project, *Theology Through the Arts* (TTA), Jeremy Begbie invited MacMillan and Symmons Roberts to collaborate, in addition, with Rowan Williams. Symmons Roberts reflects on this creative process in his poem 'Study for the World's Body', which concludes:

'[...] an intimacy
takes two people by surprise.
It may be, in the world's eyes

they should not be here,
but without their risk the house is bare'³²

Collaboration involves risk, but such risk — such openness to the other — is potentially generative. This is 'the open-endedness and risk involved in making any worthwhile art, and any worthwhile theology'.³³ Begbie's project yielded a provisional model for the TheoArtistry Composers' Scheme.³⁴ Four insights proved especially important for constructing these six theologian-composer partnerships: first, practical guidelines; secondly, the recognition of the revelatory power of such collaborations; thirdly, the emphasis on the value of *praxis*; and, fourthly, the issue of artistic integrity.

Begbie set up TTA in 1997 in Cambridge but, from 2000–2008, the academic work of TTA was undertaken at the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts (ITIA) in St Andrews. TTA's stated aim was 'to discover and to demonstrate the ways in which the arts can contribute towards the renewal of Christian theology in the contemporary

31 Harries, 'How We Met'. In a revealing BBC radio interview, MacMillan comments: 'When I set poetry [...] I live with the poem for a long time, a necessarily long time, so that I can fully understand it, and the music can wrap itself around the words in a way that brings about the deeper meaning which is not immediately apparent in first encounter'. See Susan Hitch, 'Poetry and the Divine. In Conversation with James MacMillan', Proms Literary Festival, BBC Radio 3, 24 August 2010, <http://bobnational.net/record/390312>

32 Michael Symmons Roberts, 'Study for the World's Body', in Begbie (ed.), *Sounding the Depths*, pp. 39–40 (p. 40).

33 Symmons Roberts, 'Author's Note', in Begbie (ed.), *Sounding the Depths*, p. 39.

34 The theologians and composers on our scheme were asked to engage with Begbie's research as well as with the reflections of James MacMillan, Michael Symmons Roberts and Rowan Williams on the fruit of their collaboration, *Parthenogenesis* (see Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, pp. 1–13 and pp. 17–53). *Parthenogenesis* focused on an intriguing story, or urban myth, of 'a young woman in Hanover in 1944', who was injured by an Allied bombing raid, and gave birth nine months later to 'a child whose genetic profile was identical to hers. She insisted that she had not had intercourse before conceiving' (*Ibid.*, pp. 21–22). In addition to a methodological model, *Parthenogenesis* (etymologically, 'virgin-creation'), with its theme of a peculiar 'dark-Annunciation', provided, of course, a prompt for our own theme of 'Annunciations'. Although our collaborations explored 'positive' Annunciations — God communicating directly with humankind and, at the Incarnation, becoming man (and of the lived and artistic experiences associated with this) — one cannot but be acutely aware in contemporary Western culture of the 'negative mirror image of the Annunciation' (MacMillan, 'Parthenogenesis', p. 37) in the destruction and manipulation of human life at its earliest and most vulnerable stage.

world'.³⁵ Begbie brought together theologians and artists working in different media (poets, composers, sculptors, playwrights), and other interested parties (historians, local clergy, commissioners) to collaborate on new works of Christian art. Each of the four 'pod groups' was different, and the meetings arranged were flexible (some 'pod groups' met more frequently, others less so; some always together, others in smaller and bigger groupings). The freedom of the 'pod group' had many advantages, not least that the artistic work could develop organically through meetings: MacMillan describes fastening on to a 'common concept that provided the basis for much discussion and thought, bearing artistic fruit in due course'.³⁶

For the TheoArtistry Composers' Scheme, we experimented with a more compact and formal structure for the artistic collaborations, with a time frame of just six months.³⁷ The key collaboration was between one theologian and one composer; nonetheless, this 'theologian-composer partnership' was nourished by the mentoring of MacMillan, the wider research community of ITIA, the school of Divinity, and the University of St Andrews Music Centre. We established a strict framework for these partnerships: in the first two months, the six theologians researched six Old Testament 'annunciations', and the six composers were able to select one of the passages which resonated with them. At the first TheoArtistry workshop, the theologians then shared and discussed their research, and the composers also received guidance and mentorship from the faculty in theology and music. For the next three months, the theologians and composers collaborated through three scheduled one-to-one meetings (via Skype) and continued email correspondence, as the compositions started to take shape. In the final month, first drafts of the new compositions were given to St Salvator's Chapel Choir to rehearse before a second one-day workshop with MacMillan in which the six new choral pieces were performed.

We encouraged the theologians and composers involved to be receptive to the revelatory capacity of the arts 'to "open up" and disclose in unique ways [...] to contribute to *theology*'.³⁸ Begbie presents the arts as 'vehicles of *discovery*', as 'the materials, not simply the channels, of learning', citing Rowan Williams's insight, which it is worth reproducing once again:³⁹

35 Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, p. 3. In 2009, Jeremy Begbie was appointed as the Thomas A. Langford Research Professor of Theology at Duke Divinity School, where he directs similarly dynamic projects at the interface of theology and the arts. See 'Duke Initiatives in Theology and the Arts' (DITA), <https://sites.duke.edu/dita/>

36 Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, p. 33.

37 For a discussion of the scheme from the perspective of a participating theologian, see Margaret McKerron, 'TheoArtistry: Practical Perspectives on "Theologically Informed Art"', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 1.5 (2018), 354–68 (pp. 355–57).

38 *Ibid.*, p. 355. See also Rowan Williams, 'Making it Strange: Theology in Other(s') Words', in Begbie (ed.), *Sounding the Depths*, pp. 19–32 (p. 29): 'Artistic work is always discovery, not illustration. Or, to put it slightly differently, but to connect it with the whole thesis of this essay, artistic work both engages with the real otherness of the environment and itself becomes "other" to the original planning mind as it moves towards its final form. It is not an empty cliché to repeat that the artist genuinely doesn't know until the work is coming to its expression just what is going to be'.

39 Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, pp. 1, 5.

[...] art, whether Christian or not, can't properly begin with a message and then seek for a vehicle. Its roots lie, rather, in the single story of metaphor or configuration of sound or shape which *requires* attention and development from the artist. In the process of that development, we find meanings we had not suspected; but if we try to begin with the meanings, they will shrink to the scale of what we already understand; whereas creative activity opens up what we do not understand and perhaps will not fully understand even when the actual work of creation is done.⁴⁰

This was important in re-approaching the scriptures through the imaginative possibilities of the arts: always being open to how new meanings and perspectives might emerge. As MacMillan put it: 'At the Symposium, we presented the composers with this underlying research. We then encouraged them to engage deeply with their theologian collaborator, to be open to surprises, to what such collaboration might bring to the creative process'.⁴¹

Begbie's emphasis on *praxis* was also influential: 'art is first and foremost not a theory or an "aesthetics", but something done.'⁴² By asking those involved to 'recount the process of collaboration' and 'what the group members believed could be learned from their experiences about the future of theology', Begbie valorises the doing and making of art as revelatory for the enterprise of theology itself.⁴³ He writes:

the very activity of meeting together — praying, listening, responding, agreeing, disagreeing, exploring blind alleys, arguing at rehearsals, and so on — was not only intrinsic to the final result ('the play behind the play', as Ben Quash put it), but also the means through which a vast amount of the most important theology was actually done.⁴⁴

Although research in biblical studies, the commentary traditions, reception history, liturgy and artistic representation was an important first stage, the participants similarly experienced the collaborative process as generative of ideas and theological insights.

Begbie addresses directly the issue of artistic integrity, recognising that his phrase 'theology through the arts' is in itself problematic.⁴⁵ At a theoretical level, Begbie seeks a *via media* between what he perceives as the 'double hazard' of 'theological instrumentalisation' (where 'music is treated as a vehicle; a mere tool at the behest

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2, and see also, Williams, 'Making it Strange', p. 28. More controversially, Williams goes on to draw an analogy with the process of the composition of the Gospels themselves as 'not a story repeated, not a story invented to make a point, as the more mechanically minded critics might argue, but a set of narratives constantly being retold, and altered in the retelling because of what the very process of telling opens up, shows or makes possible' (*Ibid.*).

41 MacMillan, 'A New Generation of Christian Artists', p. 21.

42 Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, p. 4.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11: 'In using the phrase "theology through the arts", I have often met with anxiety from both theologians and artists. [...] To speak of the arts serving theology — I have been told — inevitably means they will be dragooned into some kind of slavery, condemned to being mere carriers of predetermined theological "messages". Even worse, artistic freedom will likely be choked by some inflexible ecclesiastical orthodoxy. Either way, the arts don't get the "room" they need'.

of theology') and 'theological aestheticism' (where an overriding concern with the 'autonomy of music' leads people to give music 'a semi-independent role in relation to theology', and to attribute to it a 'veridical access to the divine').⁴⁶ Begbie's concern with 'theological aestheticism' is that music may be set against the 'norms derived from Scripture and its testimony to God's self-revelation', such that art becomes 'an ultimate measure of theological truth'.⁴⁷ One could argue, of course, that music does have the capacity to disclose the divine while maintaining, from a Christian viewpoint, that this cannot contradict the revealed doctrines of faith. But Begbie opposes this approach, explicitly rejecting 'a norm immanent to musical activity' as well as any 'foundational metaphysics or ontology elaborated prior to, or apart from, the specific dealings of the Christian God with the world'.⁴⁸

Begbie's *via media* is, then, questionable: that Christian theology must have 'a distinct orientation' as it engages with practices such as music — to the gospel, the dramatic movement of God by which he reconciles us to himself by the Spirit through the Son, witnessed to and mediated normatively by Scripture'.⁴⁹ This avoids 'theological aestheticism', but the claim that this will not 'suppress but enable a faithful honouring of music's integrities' because the Christian God 'is dedicated to the flourishing of creation in its own order (the order out of which music is made)' is, while theoretically plausible, problematic from a practical point of view, unless one works exclusively with Christian artists.⁵⁰ This seems to have been the case with the four 'pod groups' involved in *TTA*: Begbie suggests that it was 'just because of a joint orientation to the triune God of Jesus Christ, who is committed to the flourishing of the world in all its manifold particularity and diversity, that they were able to honour the integrity of the arts with which they were dealing, and the integrity of the artists in each group'.⁵¹

For the TheoArtistry collaborations, however, we did not request that either the theologians or the composers had any faith commitments; at the same time, we maintained that, whatever the individual beliefs of the participants, the compositions could potentially contribute constructively to theology. Gavin Hopps, the director of ITIA, presented new ways to envisage the relationship between theology and music.

46 Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, 'Introduction', in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. by Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 1–24 (pp. 11–12). Although the introduction is co-written with Guthrie, the discussion of instrumentalisation, aestheticism, and orientation seems to expand directly on the passages cited in Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*. See also Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *Music, Modernity and God: Essays in Listening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

47 Begbie and Guthrie, *Resonant Witness*, p. 12; and Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, p. 10. Begbie's concern, in this respect, is not specifically with regard to music but with any of the arts, insofar as an independent 'theology' might be derived from them. See *Ibid.*, p. 10: 'History is replete with examples of the arts over-determining theology: among the subtler forms, the keenness in much contemporary writing to identify the immense psychological power of music, film, painting or whatever as "spiritual" or "religious", and then cultivate some strand of "theology" accordingly'.

48 Begbie and Guthrie, *Resonant Witness*, p. 13.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

51 Begbie, *Sounding the Depths*, p. 11.

He pursued approaches which move beyond Begbie's apparent insistence on pre-emptive Christological criteria, on particular musical forms, and on a privileging of cognitive over affective experiences of music.⁵² The work of David Brown, emeritus professor of ITIA, similarly seeks to validate less exclusive approaches to the presence of God in music, which are particularly valuable when working with theologians and composers in a more secular environment.⁵³ As Frank Burch Brown comments, 'it has become more imperative than ever for theology to expand its scope to consider culture, arts, and specifically music not as somehow illustrational, or as helpful analogies "outside" theology's intrinsic modes of thought, but, rather, as means of reshaping (and in turn being shaped by) that very thought — if, indeed, "thought" is the best word for what is called for'.⁵⁴ The theologians and composers on the TheoArtistry scheme were thus introduced to a rich, and developing dialogue about the contested relationship between theology and music, a dialogue which has been at the heart of ITIA research culture since the institute's inception.⁵⁵

In the theologian-composer collaborations, the relationship between theology and music was, in one sense, somewhat straightforward insofar as the composers (whether Christian or not) were responding to passages from the Old Testament. Perhaps especially because of this, it was important to stress that a 'correspondence', 'applicationist', or 'instrumental' method was but one way of approaching the task at hand. We were keen, then, that the theologians and composers had the license to explore these scriptural episodes with or without regard to particular doctrinal standpoints.⁵⁶

52 See Gavin Hopps, 'Popular Music and the Opening up of Religious Experience', in *The Extravagance of Music: An Art Open to God*, ed. by David Brown and Gavin Hopps (New York: Springer, 2018), pp. 161–296; and Chapter 17, in this volume.

53 David Brown has consistently advocated in his work a 'generous' understanding of God's self-revelation in the world through human history and culture. See, most recently, David Brown, *Divine Generosity and Human Creativity: Theology through Symbol, Art and Architecture*, ed. by Christopher R. Brewer and Robert MacSwain (London: Routledge, 2017). See also *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). In this context, see also Begbie's response to David Brown's approach to theology and music, including his 'misgivings', in Jeremy Begbie, 'Openness and Specificity: A Conversation with David Brown on Theology and Classical Music', in *Theology, Aesthetics and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*, ed. by Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 145–56.

54 Frank Burch Brown, 'Preface', in Brown and Hopps (eds.), *The Extravagance of Music*. See also Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. v–xvii (p. ix).

55 This dialogue, of course, contributes to an international scholarly discussion on the relationship between theology and music. For a descriptive summary of some of these scholarly viewpoints see, for example, Heaney, 'Theological Aesthetics in Contemporary Theology', in her *Theology as Music*, pp. 183–253.

56 In this respect, again, we were encouraging theologians and artists to exercise the freedom of their theological and artistic imaginations, without constraining them by excessive concern with scriptural or doctrinal 'orthodoxy' or 'correctness'. In his 'Afterword' to Begbie's *Theology Through the Arts* project, Nicholas Wolterstorff registers his own anxiety about envisaging artistic media as 'media of disclosure': there is, he affirms, always 'the need for critical discernment': a 'theological (or other) interpretation wrought in some artistic medium may prove unacceptable in one way or another; rather than being a means of disclosure, it may be a means of distortion if we allow

In each of the six collaborations, the scriptural passage spoke in a particular way to the theologians and composers; at the same time, the theologians and composers' own cultural beliefs, individual personalities and intellectual interests offered an enriched understanding of the biblical episode in question.

A Thomist paradigm for engaging with non-Christian truths may offer an additional way to articulate how theology may interact with music without infringing music's autonomy or intrinsic capacity to reveal God, while, at the same time, showing how music can be transformed and transfigured by the encounter with theology. Gavin D'Costa draws a parallel between twenty-first-century attitudes to Christian engagement with other religions and the three attitudes characteristic of early Christian engagements with philosophy: first, a rejection of engagement altogether; secondly, a critical encounter and accommodation; thirdly, an uncritical adoption of philosophy such that it determines Christianity rather than being transformed by it.⁵⁷ D'Costa favours the second as the most appropriate way for theology to engage with other disciplines, and sees in Aquinas' theology a key model. What happens, then, in this encounter with theology? Aquinas uses the scriptural image of water and wine: rather than the philosophy (water) diluting theology (wine), philosophical doctrines (water) become, are transformed into, wine. Crucially, as Martin Ganeri highlights, 'the water of [philosophical] thought still remains the material out of which the theology is made and without it we could not have the resultant theology in the form we have it'.⁵⁸ In other words, this wine is new to the cellar of divine wisdom, not replicating what was already there. Although the analogy with theology and music should be treated tentatively, there is a sense in which music (the water) can be transformed by its encounter with Christianity and come not to *serve* theology, but to *be* theology, or, more exactly, *theoartistry*, insofar as it may reveal God and His revelation in a new way through artistry.

ourselves to be led by it' (Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Afterword', in Begbie (ed.), *Sounding the Depths*, pp. 221–32 (pp. 228–29)). This is a valid concern, which Wolterstorff shares, of course, with Begbie; however, an alertness to these dangers need not lead one to restrict the role of theological art to simply communicating a predetermined revelation (as *propaganda fidei*). We maintained, by contrast, that this is just one (albeit highly important) role of theological art, others being precisely to provoke and challenge (as by distortion, play, or irreverence). As Burch Brown insists, theology 'must exist in complementary and dialectical reaction not only with praxis but also with those richly aesthetic arts that can bring these relations imaginatively to life'. See Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 88. There are also important ecclesiological, and inter-denominational issues at stake here. McKerron interrogates the importance — in considering whether art is, in fact, theologically generative (rather than degenerative) — of the artwork's particular context and audience: 'What is "generative" is not necessarily fitting for worship purposes — at least, not without careful attention to ecclesiological, liturgical and even moral considerations' (McKerron, 'TheoArtistry: Practical Perspectives', pp. 362–65 (p. 363)).

57 Martin Ganeri situates his Thomist model for comparative theology in relation to the summary of approaches provided by Gavin D'Costa. See Martin Ganeri, 'Tradition with a New Identity: Thomist Engagement with Non-Christian Thought as a Model for the New Comparative Theology in Europe', *Religions* 3 (2012), pp. 1054–74 (p. 1058). See also Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square: Church, Academy and Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

58 *Ibid.*, p. 1066.

The TheoArtistry partnerships, mentored by MacMillan, encouraged all concerned to reflect on the nature of scriptural exegesis and artistic creation. MacMillan proposes Mary as a model for the creative person, and the Annunciation may help us to understand theologically the performance and reception, as well as the composition, of music. Many composers, however, do not have faith commitments and, in establishing collaborations with artists, we did not want to prescribe an 'orientation' to a particular Christian doctrine or ecclesial denomination. Rather, we sought to highlight the scriptures as rich sources of creativity for artists, whatever their individual beliefs, and to support them in bringing their gifts to reading, seeing, and hearing those scriptures anew. As I think the six new pieces show, music can also go beyond the limits of language, contributing profoundly to the experience and knowledge of God. Hopefully, these new works, and the flexible and open model for collaboration that we adopted, will inspire more theologians to seek out and engage artists, as well as more artists to return to this perennial spring of creativity.