MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES, EMPIRICAL METHODS, AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

EDITED BY
GEORGE CORBETT
AND SARAH MOERMAN

MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

Music and Spirituality

Theological Approaches, Empirical Methods, and Christian Worship

Edited by
George Corbett and Sarah Moerman

OpenBook Publishers

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

©2024 George Corbett and Sarah Moerman (eds). Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapter's authors.

This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

George Corbett and Sarah Moerman (eds), *Music and Spirituality: Theological Approaches, Empirical Methods, and Christian Worship*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0403

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication may differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations. Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at https://archive.org/web

Updated digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/0403#resources

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-302-7
ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-303-4
ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-304-1
ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-305-8
ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-307-2

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0403

Cover image: Hans Memling, *Christ with Singing and Music-Making Angels* (1483–1494), Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Musicerende_engelen,_Hans_Memling,_(1483-1494),_Koninklijk_Museum_voor_Schone_Kunsten_Antwerpen,_779.jpg
Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpa

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Notes on Contributors xi

Introduction 1
George Corbett and Sarah Moerman

Foreword: A Composer's Perspective 13
James MacMillan

I. THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES 19

1. Encountering the Uncontrollable: Music's Resistance to Reductionism and Its Theological Ramifications 21
Jeremy Begbie

2. Cross and Consolation: Music's Empathic Spirituality 41
Peter C. Bouteneff

3. Music, Breath, and Spirit 55
Michael O'Connor

4. An Adorative Posture towards Music and Spiritual Realities 73
Férdia J. Stone-Davis

5. Religion, Science, and Music: An Augustinian Trinity 87
Bennett Zon

6. Dissonant Spirituality: A Hermeneutical Aesthetics of Outlaw Country 109
C.M. Howell

II. EMPIRICAL METHODS 137

7. From the Sacred to the Ordinary through the Lens of Psychological Science 139
Yeshaya David M. Greenberg

8. An Inquiry into Musical Trance 159
Dilara Turan

9. An Ethnomusicology of Spiritual Realities 193
Jeffers Engelhardt

10. The Concept of 'Atmosphere' as a Bridge between Music and Spirituality 209
Bernard Łukasz Sawicki OSB

11. Spiritual Subjects: Musicking, Biography, *and* the Connections We Make 233
Maeve Louise Heaney VDMF

12. The Impetus to Compose: Where is Fantasy Bred? 255
Richard E. McGregor

III. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP 271

13. Music in Christian Services as a Means to Induce Religious Feelings 273
Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann

14. Spiritual Cultures: Innovations in Choral and Classical Music 285
Jonathan Arnold

15. Listening to the Lived Experiences of Worshippers: A Study of Post-Pandemic Mixed Ecology Worship 305
Elspeth Manders

16. An Abductive Study of Digital Worship through the Lenses of Netnography and Digital Ecclesiology 327
Tihomir Lazić

17. Choral Singers and Spiritual Realities:A Perspective from St Mary's Catholic Cathedral 355
Michael Ferguson

18. Music and Spirituality in Communal Song: Methodists and Welsh Sporting Crowds 371
Martin V. Clarke

Afterword: A Psychologist's Perspective 389
John Sloboda

List of Figures and Tables 399

Bibliography 401

Index 451

Acknowledgments

Sarah and I would like to thank the Templeton Religion Trust for a project grant contributing to its research cluster *Art Seeking Understanding*. As part of our project, we sought to develop a three-way interdisciplinary conversation between theology, musicology, and psychology and neuroscience, which led to an international workshop on Music and Spiritual Realities, as well as, in due course, to this volume. We would like to thank Christopher Brewer and all the staff of TRT and the wider ASU 'community of practice' for their help and advice on our project.

Our project team in the University of St Andrews brought together colleagues from the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts (ITIA) in the School of Divinity; the Music Centre; and the School of Psychology and Neuroscience. We would like to thank especially our two senior research collaborators—Michael Ferguson (musicology) and Ines Jentzsch (cognitive neuroscience)—as well as our advisors—David Brown, James MacMillan, Andrew Torrance, and Brendan Wolfe—who contributed invaluably at different stages of the project. We are also particularly grateful for their assistance, in different ways, to Christopher Bragg, Oliver Crisp, Kate Dove, Michael Downes, Tania Holland Williams, Claire Innes-Hopkins, Susan Millar, Lyndsay Mitchell, Elizabeth O'Keeffe, and Deborah Smith.

Our workshop formed part of the annual meeting of the European Academy of Religion at the University of St Andrews in June 2023, and we are grateful to the organisers, and especially Brendan Wolfe and Sterling Yates, for their collaboration. We would like to thank all the speakers at our workshop (and contributors to this volume), as well as the many workshop attendees who contributed to the rich intellectual conversations both inside and outside the scheduled sessions. We hope you will continue to be part of the ongoing scholarly conversation which this volume seeks to foster.

We were delighted to collaborate with Open Book Publishers on this project, and we are grateful to the OBP team for their support in developing this edited volume. Thank you, in particular, to Alessandra Tosi, Adèle Kreager, Jeevanjot Nagpal, and to the two anonymous peer reviewers. Finally, I would like to thank the School of Divinity's Deas Fund for funding a research assistant, and Rosemary Williams for her meticulous work in preparing the bibliography, as well as the University of St Andrews' Institutional Open Access Fund which co-funded, with TRT, the subvention grant.

Notes on Contributors

Jonathan Arnold is Executive Director of the Social Justice Network in the Diocese of Canterbury. Prior to this, he was Dean of Divinity and Fellow of Magdalen College at the University of Oxford, and, for many years, a member of the professional choir The Sixteen. His publications include *The Great Humanists* (2011), *Sacred Music in Secular Society* (2014), and *Music and Faith: Conversations in a Post-Secular Age* (2019).

Jeremy Begbie is Thomas A. Langford Distinguished Research Professor of Theology at Duke Divinity School, and the McDonald Agape Director of Duke Initiatives in Theology and the Arts (DITA). His publications include *Theology, Music and Time* (2000), *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (2007), and *Abundantly More: The Theological Promise of the Arts in a Reductionist World (2023).*

Peter C. Bouteneff is Professor of Systematic Theology and Kulik Professor of Sacred Arts at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, where he is also founding director of the Institute of Sacred Arts. His publications include *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth* (2006), *Arvo Pärt: Out of Silence* (2015), and *How to Be a Sinner: Finding Yourself in the Language of Repentance* (2018).

Martin V. Clarke is Senior Lecturer in Music at the Open University. He is the author of *British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage and Experience* (2018), editor of *Music and Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2012), and he co-edited, with Trevor Herbert and Helen Barlow, *A History of Welsh Music* (2022).

George Corbett is Professor of Theology at the University of St Andrews. His publications include *Dante and Epicurus* (2013), *Dante's Christian Ethics* (2020), and, as editor, *Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century* (2019).

Michael O'Connor is Associate Professor at St Michael's College in the University of Toronto, and former Director of St Michael's Schola Cantorum. He is the author of *Cajetan's Biblical Commentaries: Motive and Method* (2017) and co-edited, with Hyun-Ah Kim and Christina Labriola, *Music, Theology, and Justice* (2017).

Jeffers Engelhardt is Professor of Music at Amherst College. He is the author of *Singing the Right Way: Orthodox Christians and Secular Enchantment in Estonia* (2015), and he co-edited, with Philip V. Bohlman, *Resounding Transcendence: Transitions in Music, Religion, and Ritual* (2016) and, with Andrew Mall and Monique Ingalls, *Studying Congregational Music: Key Issues, Methods, and Theoretical Perspectives* (2021).

Michael Ferguson is Lecturer and Coordinator of Academic Music at the University of St Andrews, and Director of Music at St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh.

Yeshaya David M. Greenberg is a psychologist and social neuroscientist. He is the founding director of CHIME (Center for Health Innovation, Music, and Education), and an honorary research associate at the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University. He has published the largest studies to date on autism (*Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences*, 2018), on music and culture (*Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 2022), and on theory of mind (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2022).

Maeve Louise Heaney VDMF is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy, and the Xavier Chair for Theological Formation, at Australian Catholic University. She is the author of *Music and Theology: What Music Says about the Word* (2012) and *Suspended God: Music and a Theology of Doubt* (2022).

C.M. Howell is a doctoral researcher at the University of St Andrews, where he is working on the theological aesthetics of Eberhard Jüngel.

Tihomir Lazić is Senior Lecturer in Systematic Theology at Newbold College of Higher Education, a musician and worship leader, and the author of *Towards an Adventist Version of Communio Ecclesiology: Remnant in Koinonia* (2019).

James MacMillan is one of today's most successful composers, whose works are performed and broadcast around the world, and he is also internationally active as a conductor. He is Professor of Theology and Music at the University of St Andrews, founder of The Cumnock Tryst, and was awarded a knighthood for his services to music in 2015.

Elspeth Manders is a doctoral student at the University of St Andrews. Prior to this she obtained an MLitt in Sacred Music from the University of St Andrews, and a BA (Honours) in Music from the University of Oxford.

Richard E. McGregor is Professor Emeritus of Music at the University of Cumbria, and he currently lectures at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He edited *Perspectives on Peter Maxwell Davies* (2000), and he is the author, with Nicholas Jones, of *The Music of Peter Maxwell Davies* (2020).

Sarah Moerman is a Research Fellow in Theology and Music at the University of St Andrews. She also holds a research fellowship in social cognition from the University of Birmingham which provides psychology cross-training for theologians. Her research focuses on the various intersections between music, theology, and psychology.

Bernard Łukasz Sawicki OSB is Associate Professor in Theology at the Pontifical University of Saint Anselm in Rome. His publications include *The Concept of the Absurd and its Theological Reception in Christian Monasticism* (2005), *W chorale jest wszystko* [In Gregorian Chant Is All] (2014), and *The Music of Chopin and the Rule of Saint Benedict* (2014).

John Sloboda is Emeritus Professor at the University of Keele, where he founded and directed the Study of Musical Skill and Development, and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. His publications include *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* (1985), *Exploring the Musical Mind: Cognition, Emotion, Ability, Function* (2005) and, as co-editor with Patrik N. Juslin, *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications* (2009).

Férdia J. Stone-Davis is Senior Scientist for the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) Research Project 'The Epistemic Power of Music', and Director of Research at the Margaret Beaufort Institute, Cambridge. She is the author of *Musical Beauty: Negotiating the Boundary between Subject and*

Object (2011), editor of *Music and Transcendence* (2015), and co-editor, with M. J. Grant, of *The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations* (2013).

Dilara Turan is a Research Assistant in the Department of Music, Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey, where she also received her doctorate. Her current research focuses on the spirituality of music and the cultural study of avant-garde music practices.

Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann is Director of the Department of Music at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (MPIEA) and Professor of Systematic Musicology at the Goethe University, Frankfurt/Main. Her publications include *Welterkenntnis aus Musik: Athanasius Kirchers 'Musurgia universalis' und die Universalwissenschaft im 17. Jahrhundert* [Knowledge of the World from Music. Athanasius Kircher's 'Musurgia universalis' and Universal Science in the Seventeenth Century] (2006), *'Ein Mittel wider sich selbst': Melancholie in der Instrumentalmusik um 1800* ['A Means Against Itself': Melancholy in Instrumental Music around 1800] (2010), and as co-editor, with Klaus-Peter Dannecker and Sven Boenneke, *Wirkungsästhetik der Liturgie: Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven* [Aesthetics of Liturgy: Transdisciplinary Perspectives] (2020).

Bennett Zon is Professor of Music at Durham University. He is Founding Director of the International Network for Music Theology and Inaugural President of the International Nineteenth-Century Studies Association. His publications include *Music and Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2000), *Representing Non-Western Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2007), and *Evolution and Victorian Musical Culture* (2017).

15. Listening to the Lived Experiences of Worshippers: A Study of Post-Pandemic Mixed Ecology Worship

Elspeth Manders

The COVID-19 pandemic—which temporarily restricted in-person worship but increased access to worship services online—has indelibly changed the profile of contemporary worship in the Church of England. According to worshipping and visitor data collected in 2021 from England's forty-two cathedrals and Westminster Abbey, 94% of cathedrals now offer online worship in addition to in-person services.[1] New practices, such as online worship, require time for reflection, as the Emeritus Dean of Chelmsford indicated in a monthly newsletter,

> … where crises of one kind or another appear to be threatening, there is often more pressure to come up with urgent solutions to avert catastrophe and change direction … The implications of this (the pandemic) for our theology and our ministerial practices and priorities … will be something that it will take years or generations rather than mere months to explore.[2]

1 The Church of England, 'Church of England Cathedrals Showed Recovery in 2021 amid Covid-19 Measures', *The Church of England*, 24 March 2023, http://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/church-england-cathedrals-showed-recovery-2021-amid-covid-19-measures

2 Nicholas Henshall, 'The Dean's Letter for 5th February', online video recording, *Chelmsford Cathedral*, 5 February 2022, https://www.chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk/media-clips/the-deans-letter-for-5th-february

©2024 Elspeth Manders, CC BY-NC 4.0 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0403.15

Furthermore, worship leaders, musicians, and worshippers have different views about the purpose of worship in this new age, the faithfulness to scripture in an increasingly secular context, and the influence of online worship on religious narratives, to name just three areas of contention.

To contribute to a developing reflection on, and response to, post-pandemic worship, I conducted an empirical investigation for music in contemporary worship practice in 2023. While there have been several empirical studies exploring the status of worship following the pandemic;[3] a mixed-method survey conducted by Chelmsford Cathedral in 2021 formed the basis for my own research. The 2021 study uncovered some limitations: as one participant, for example, responded—'it is difficult to express opinions freely in this format'.[4] Recognising that lived Christian realities are highly complex, and difficult to capture via a questionnaire, I sought to unpack lived worshipper experiences using interviews. I thus thematically analysed five interviews with lay musicians from Anglican and Catholic denominations in the Diocese of Chelmsford to understand the experiences of churchgoers. My aim was to consider how qualitative research methodology—specifically, reflexive thematic analysis—can be used to inform the planning and implementation of mixed ecology worship following the pandemic. In this chapter, I introduce the contextual frameworks, qualitative methodology, and findings of my research on post-pandemic mixed ecology worship. In doing so, I outline the scope and limitations of this study, which used a controlled, purposive sample. Throughout the chapter, I use the term 'mixed ecology' to refer to worship that is receptive to new ways of accessing faith, specifically, online worship.[5] I

3 See, for example, Simon Dein and Fraser Watts, 'Religious Worship Online: A Qualitative Study of Two Sunday Virtual Services', *International Association for the Psychology of Religion* 45.2 (2023), 191–209. This study investigates the experiences of thirteen participants in two Sunday virtual services, with data drawn from interviews and analysed with thematic analysis.

4 Dean and Chapter of Chelmsford, 'Cathedral Survey Results: Pandemic 2020–2021' (unpublished empirical study, Chelmsford Cathedral, 2021). I am grateful to the Dean and Chapter for permission to use the survey here.

5 For a helpful summary of digital mixed ecology, see Ruth Perrin and Ed Olsworth-Peter, 'The Mixed Ecologists; Experiences of Mixed Ecology Ministry in the Church of England' (The Church of England, May 2021), https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/focussed-study-2-the-mixed-ecologists.pdf: 'The rise of hybrid church, where physically gathered and digital church combine. This

use the term 'post-pandemic' to refer to the cultural landscape shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic (encompassing various belief systems and non-belief orientations).

I. The Post-Pandemic Landscape

(a) Theological Considerations

Post-pandemic worship, specifically online worship, raised several theological implications for the practice of religious ritual online. Much Christian worship is based on incarnational theology, which stresses corporeality: '…and the Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1:1–14). However, online worship challenges the constitution of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, rendering the sacramental viability of online worship unclear. The legitimacy of online worship, specifically the extent to which it upholds orthodox Christian values, requires examination. Coming together in worship is also a central part of the Christian ethos. As theologian Andrew Louth suggests:

> To be a Christian is not simply to believe something, to learn something, but to be something, to experience something. The role of the church then, is not simply as the contingent vehicle—in history—of the Christian message, but as the community, through belonging to which we come into touch with the Christian mystery.[6]

St Paul builds on this insight in his teaching: 'For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members

---

represents a new form of local mixed ecology in its own right. A digital mixed ecology has begun to emerge, with some fostering "church online," livestreaming what happens in the physical space of church, whilst others have experimented with "online church" where they have sought to form community and worship in the digital space'. See, also, Barry Hill, 'Why a Mixed Ecology Matters', *Church Times*, 12 November 2021, http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/12-november/comment/opinion/why-a-mixed-ecology-matters: 'The mixed ecology cannot be either/or, or even both/and, but learn/with, where we encourage the best in those worshipping communities that are most different from how we would do things'.

6 Andrew Louth, 'Tradition and the Tacit', in Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 74.

one of another' (Rom 12:4–8). However, online worship has changed how Christians come together by facilitating communities that worship and socialise together online.

Empirical studies show variation in how worshippers view the theological viability of online worship. Some participants in the 2021 Chelmsford Cathedral study found that online worship was not sufficient because 'we need each other in the flesh, not just on an interactive screen. We need social contact'.[7] Others, however, found online worship spiritually sustaining, based on the idea that God's revelation can occur in any physical space: 'we don't have to be physically present or together for worship to be meaningful, sometimes we just have to go with it'.[8] The positive outlook reflects theologies which stress that even when the sacrament is not consecrated, there is theological integrity because of Christ's presence in the ordinary. As Simon Podmore summarises, 'incarnational theology encompasses the notion that God is revealed in the material, the mundane, the everyday as well as in the sublime and transcendent which seems to point beyond what is immediate'.[9] The suitability of online worship can therefore depend on the theological conviction of the worshipper.

(b) Musical Considerations

Theological considerations also arose for how to implement music in online worship. Congregational song has historically been celebrated as a means of active participation with the music,[10] which aligns with theological narratives that stress singing together as a theological imperative.[11] In the Chelmsford Cathedral study, the important role of

7 Dean and Chapter of Chelmsford, 'Cathedral Survey Results'.

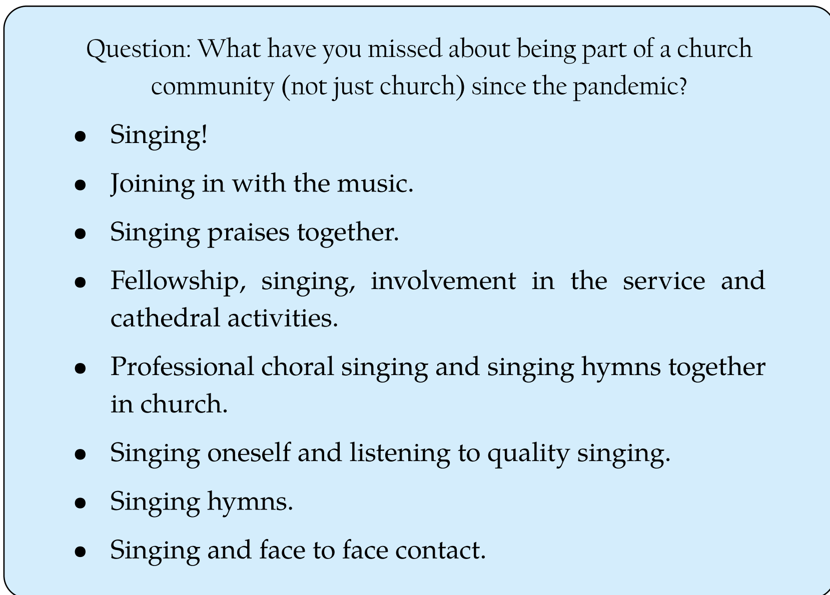
8 Ibid.

9 Simon D. Podmore, 'Introduction Transforming Presence: Incarnation between Transcendence and Immanence', in *Christian Mysticism and Incarnational Theology: Between Transcendence and Immanence*, ed. by Louise Nelstrop and Simon D. Podmore (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp. 1-12 (at p. 3).

10 Martin Luther argued that psalms, and especially hymns, should have a place in church life and the education of young people: see Gesa Thiessen, *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (London: SCM Press, 2004), pp. 144–45.

11 See Joseph Ratzinger, 'On the Theological Basis of Church Music', in *Collected Works Theology of the Liturgy Volume II*, ed. by Michael J. Miller, trans. by John Saward, Kenneth Baker, S. J. Henry Taylor, et al. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2014), pp. 421–42.

active participation in the music was highlighted by several participants: when asked what they missed about being part of a church community since the pandemic, they mentioned singing (see Figure 15.1). However, the parameters for active participation in music have changed by inviting online worshippers to sing online. Singing online raises further implications, therefore, for evangelism as well as for the construction of religious identity.


Question: What have you missed about being part of a church community (not just church) since the pandemic?

- Singing!
- Joining in with the music.
- Singing praises together.
- Fellowship, singing, involvement in the service and cathedral activities.
- Professional choral singing and singing hymns together in church.
- Singing oneself and listening to quality singing.
- Singing hymns.
- Singing and face to face contact.

Fig. 15.1 Participant responses about singing.[12] Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

The rhetorical profile for music in worship has also been impacted by worshipping online, as the expectations for worship practices upheld before the pandemic change in the new post-pandemic conditions. Such expectations regard, for example, the appropriateness of style (including the desired balance between traditional styles of music and contemporary worship music),[13] presentation (including the balance of

12 Dean and Chapter of Chelmsford, 'Cathedral Survey Results'.

13 Some participants reflected on rhetorical variety, preferring modern styles of music such as contemporary worship music: 'We think there could be more variety in services and liturgy and especially the music. We love what we do

sung and spoken aspects of the liturgy, and who sings them),[14] and the quantity and quality of music in worship.

II. Building a Methodology

Whilst empirical data from questionnaires offers important insights into statistical findings, I sought to generate further insights by considering lived narratives. I chose reflexive thematic analysis (RTA)—which necessitates considering the relationship between the researcher, the research topic, and the design of the research process—as a fruitful qualitative research methodology, and I interweave a phenomenological approach throughout.

(a) Limiting Qualitative Research

To justify qualitative research methodology as a viable research method for listening to and analysing contemporary worshipper realities, it is critical to examine the relationship between researcher and participant. There is a phenomenological dialectical relationship between participant and researcher, which, because of respective contextual milieus, impacts the validity of the data-gathering process. As Martin Heidegger underlines, 'interpretation is never a pre-suppositionless apprehending of something to us'; individuals are 'always already in an environing world'.[15] Qualitative research methodologies therefore consider interactions between researcher and participant data, semantic literacies regarding the participant and their data (for instance, does the

---

but miss more modern styles of worship and would also doubt how accessible the services are for those who grew up in different or without tradition' (ibid.). John Frame defends Contemporary Worship Music on the basis that it edifies old and new, noting that 'to accent either pole of this dialectic without the other is to lose them both' (John Frame, 'Tradition and Contemporaneity', in John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defence* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 1997), p. 130).

14 Participants in the Chelmsford Cathedral study commented on the balance of music they could partake in with music sung by the choir: 'I am finding current Sunday eucharists very choir heavy—more like attending a concert than a service' (Chelmsford Cathedral, 'Cathedral Survey Results').

15 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (London: SCM Press, 1962); Martin Heidegger, 'Traditional Language and Technological Language', *Journal of Philosophical Research* 23 (1998), 129–45.

researcher understand the words in the same way as participant?), and attempts to understand the contextual milieu from both perspectives.[16] Understanding that the researcher is the central analytic instrument and their research uncovers dual perspectives from the phenomenon and researcher is central to qualitative research. Prior to undertaking qualitative research by interviews, I therefore engaged in consistent hermeneutic reflexivity to explore critically my own assumptions from different angles. I engaged in informal presuppositional interviews, the aim of which was to leaf 'through the language, ambiguities, contradictions, certainties and interconnections with the phenomena in questions, [...] to unfurl the layers of [the researcher's] own story [...] to probe into [the researcher's] relationship with the research and its purpose'.[17] This enables the researcher 'to move beyond [their] familiar way of Being to identify other perspectives as well as re-examine [their] well-trodden and comfortable paths of knowing'.[18] Considering this, I actively engaged in conversations with colleagues and acquaintances within the Diocese of Chelmsford, inviting input regarding my research questions.

I carefully considered the location, timing, frequency, and candidates for interviews. Two participants chose to interview online. Following the suggestions of Hilary Engward *et al.* for conducting remote qualitative interviews, my aim was to offer a safe space which could enable communication.[19] I asked colloquial questions to facilitate a natural sense of space, checked if the participant was comfortable, if they had any questions, and invited questions about the research itself. Two participants chose to interview online, for which I actively accounted in the interview process. In determining the interview questions, I followed Kathryn Roulston's suggestion to use core and open-ended questions to provide an outline structure to steer the interview, with probing and

16 Ibid.

17 Lewis Barrett-Rodger, Sally Goldspink, and Hilary Engward, 'Being in the Wood: Using a Presuppositional Interview in Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research', *Qualitative Research* 23.4 (2022), 1062–77 (at 1076).

18 Ibid., 1066.

19 Hilary Engward, Sally Goldspink, Maria Iancu, Thomas Kersey, and Abigail Wood, 'Togetherness in Separation: Practical Considerations for Doing Remote Qualitative Interviews Ethically', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 21 (2002), 1-9.

supplementary questions used to add greater detail to the description.[20] I adopted a loose framework of questions to contextualise the phenomena regarding the research question, with the aim of generating directive but not limiting prompts.

Finally, I used purposive sampling to invite five lay musicians and employees who worshipped and worked in Catholic and Anglican contexts in the Diocese of Chelmsford to participate. In limiting my sample size, my goal was to implement RTA effectively. I recognised, of course, the potential limitations of a reduced sample, which did not include young people under the age of eighteen due to ethical considerations pertaining to consent. Clergy were not invited to participate, in order to manage the quantity of narratives for analysis. Moreover, insights into spiritual experiences from the perspective of ethnicity were not accounted for in the sample. Further considerations included my position as an employee within the Diocese of Chelmsford with a background in the Christian faith tradition, and my dialogic presence with the interviewees. I also recognised that participants undertook insider roles within the Diocese as staff or organisational leaders, in addition to worshipping. These role frameworks offer specific positionalities, which must be distinguished from worshipper narratives more generally and which may have limited the findings.

Table 15.1 Participant biographies. Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

Role	**Length of interview (minutes)**	**Location**
Church music practitioner	57	Online
Church music practitioner	26	In-person
Pastoral officer	40	In-person
Communications operator	69	Online
Church music practitioner	49	In-person

20 Kathryn Roulston, *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (London: John and Wiley Sons, 2012).

(b) Reflexive Thematic Analysis

After the interview methodology had been systematically applied, I used RTA to interpret the findings. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke describe RTA as 'a theoretically flexible method' for 'developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset'.[21] A central component of RTA is that the researcher's position is unavoidable; the process involves 'critically interrogating' the researcher's influence and explicitly bringing forth these values in analysis.[22] Furthermore, Braun and Clarke suggest that RTA 'identifies, analyses and reports patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and scores your data in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic'.[23] This approach suited a key goal of my research: namely, to listen to worshipper narratives. Thus, using RTA allowed me to form outcomes using inductive generation of subjective codes and themes, driven entirely by the data.[24]

The RTA approach is characterised by six steps. The first step requires familiarisation with the data, which involved detailed review of the interview transcripts. Second, the data is coded by looking for recurring words, key patterns, and emergent themes. Third, the coded data is then re-organised into these emergent themes. Fourth, the arising themes are developed and grouped according to character or meaning (such as past/present/future narratives, or conceptual ideas/opinions/experiences). Fifth, the grouped themes are further refined and developed. Table 15.2 indicates the themes and sub-themes that emerged from my research. Finally, the sixth step is to produce the report using compelling examples to illustrate the findings. In the next section, I examine the interpretations and findings which arose in accordance with this sixth step, and I have structured the participant narratives according to the key themes in Table 15.2 below.

21 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE Publications, 2022), p. 4.

22 Ibid., p. 5.

23 Ibid., p. 79.

24 Ibid.

Table 15.2 Themes and sub-themes pertaining to step five of RTA. Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

Theme	Sub-themes
The post-pandemic situation	Ideological tensions Literacy and understanding
Online worship	Access Music Active Participation Outreach
The philosophy of music in mixed ecology worship	Tradition Outreach Aesthetic
The choral musician's lifestyle	Lifestyle and Family Relationships
Music in practice in mixed ecology worship	Tensions regarding music and liturgy Rhetoric Communication

III. Key Findings from RTA

(a) The Post-Pandemic Situation

Participants noted ideological tensions pertaining to religious ideas in the contemporary world. This included tensions regarding the relevancy of church in contemporary lifestyles, such as 'now we're competing against loads of stuff. In my childhood, on Sunday mornings there was church or you stayed at home', and 'another challenge is to make the church relevant in busy people's lifestyles, and to show them that it's attractive and that children are welcome'.[25] Furthermore, 'as in lots of

25 Anonymous participant, 'Listening to the Lived Experiences of Worshippers: Planning and Implementing a Mixed Ecology Worship following the Covid-19

things, people got out of the habit of going'. Ideological incongruency and change, including the de-prioritisation of worship in lifestyles because of busyness, competition with other opportunities, and lack of habit formation are aspects of the post-pandemic religious situation. Participants also acknowledged that religious, musical, and digital literacy is problematising access to the church and sacred music. This is particularly an issue for 'children and families who have no experience or understanding of the church' which leads to 'anxiety about even going through the doors'. Regarding online worship access, one participant noted that it needs to be as simple to use as possible:

> So they haven't got to battle the technology and find Facebook and then see where they can search for it and find it streaming, which if you're used to doing it, is very easy, but if you're not used to the technology and you're one of these people, that kind of slow motion stops their finger on a button.

Participants recognised that intuitive online mechanisms are important for those who struggle to access and navigate online platforms. This is relevant given that 36.4% of the Church of England's worshipping community, as of 2021, are over seventy.[26]

(b) Online Worship

Overall, participants celebrated online worship; as one participant said, 'huge fan. I don't see a downside'. Several commented on its cultural relevance and, particularly, its congruency with modern lifestyles. For example, one participant engaged with different styles of worship at different times of day, and globally:

> I watch Morning Prayers at the Cathedral. I watch Evensong, mostly somewhere else if I see some music come up that I particularly want to listen to. I'm linked to Saint Hippo at Leytonstone, St Martin-in-the-Fields, St Thomas's Fifth Avenue and St. James in Australia... Absolutely love it, being able to access a tradition so far away from me.

Pandemic', interviews by Elspeth Manders, January–March 2023, audio. All subsequent interview quotations are as above.

26 Church of England and Ken Eames, *Statistics for Mission 2021* (London: Data Services, 2022), https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/2021-statistics-for-mission.pdf

This reflects the greater dissemination of religious ideas, transcending geographical barriers. Participants also identified rhetorical and financial concerns that have emerged for musicians because of online worship. Philosophically-minded participants considered the impact of livestreaming on the ontology of worship, noting that the length of time music is shared online (and whether it is accessed in real time or after the event) affects the distinction between service and performance. One participant said: 'once you go into something that's permanently there, that's not a service. It's a performance'. Another participant noted:

> If it's something that's going to have your name attached to it and be out on the internet forever, you could say it was a performance, and it will be paid for differently. I think that the principle of taking it down after 24/48 hours really ought to be there to protect musicians.

Whilst participants shared an appreciation for music online, there were concerns regarding the safe implementation of online practice. Participants wished to establish parameters for sharing music online to ensure musicians are paid fairly.

Several participants commented on online worship and active participation. Some liturgical devices were praised; as one participant said, 'I thought the Church of England did cover it quite well in the sense of offerings, prayers of spiritual communion'. However, some found Eucharistic liturgies online more problematic, theologically speaking: 'I think my problem would be a mass because you can't make your communion. You're not fully engaging in it, and that's the central point of the mass'. As with previous empirical studies, there was disparity between the theological virtue of Eucharistic and non-Eucharist liturgies online. Participants also suggested that script planning—including of camera angles and microphone placements according to liturgical moments—prior to streaming can be used to 'make you feel you are part of the service', encouraging active participation.

In addition, participants commented on the outreach potential of online worship. This included the acknowledgement that musical offerings tended to be the most popular items shared online, with comments such as 'music always brings in the most views and the most positive comments, and it speaks to people even online. It speaks to people who don't have to be in the building'. However, whilst social media channels such as Facebook and YouTube are positive marketing

resources for the church, participants suggested they ought to be used strategically and for specific functions. One participant found that softer church initiatives were popular, but 'in the pandemic, Facebook became our broadcast channel, and they all switched off. They unsubscribed'. There needs to be consideration of how often worship is shared online and which platforms it is shared on, as well as how to balance sharing worship online with softer church initiatives.

(c) The Philosophy of Music in Worship

The context for worship has shifted according to societal changes, with implications for the purpose and function of music. Specifically, participants commented on the sustainability of the choral music tradition and the imperative for outreach among church music spheres. This outcome reflects recent reports demonstrating that the sacred music tradition faces a long-term sustainability crisis.[27] A recurring theme was the unsustainability in contemporary practice of the traditional chorister timetable of numerous rehearsals and services a week. It was noted that the chorister timetable 'needs to move several decades ahead. We haven't moved as quickly as we ought to, we need to be much more flexible'. In addition, expanding demographic resources to incorporate 'combining boys with our girls, that kind of close cooperation', was desired. Whilst more ministries incorporate mixed gender choirs in their musical offering, a more diverse pool of resources including equal commitment for boys and girls is recommended.

Music was celebrated as a central facet of church outreach. It was noted that extra-curricular and networking opportunities are important in the chorister timetable and should 'be much, much higher priority'.

27 In 2022, a report commissioned by the Cathedral Music Trust found three areas requiring urgent attention: widening participation, sustaining excellence, and improving affordability. Eighty-one per cent said that widening access for participation in cathedral music—especially for young people—was a critical issue for the future, and that progress has been slow and inconsistent towards ensuring choirs reflect the diversity of the communities around them. See Peter Allwood, 'UK's World-Renowned Sacred Music Tradition Faces Long-Term Sustainability Crisis, New Report Shows', *Cathedral Music Trust*, 2 October 2022, https://www.cathedralmusictrust.org.uk/CMT/CMT/News/Articles/UK%E2%80%99s-world-renowned-sacred-music-tradition-faces-sustainability-crisis-new-report-shows.aspx

Regarding music in worship, participants noted the standard of musicianship in a cathedral as opposed to parish ministry is 'what's different and that's what attracts people to a cathedral'. Participants also shared in a plea to integrate children into church music at an early age, 'get them early, when they are seven, eight or nine, and present them with Palestrina as though this is completely normal'. However, participants also noted an incongruency between the desires of the musicians to perform and the imperative to communicate:

> I think there is an interest in making music and making beautiful high-quality music, but I don't think some people care whether anyone hears it or not. It's the process of making the music that is important, not how many people it reaches.

Whilst all participants celebrated music in worship, they disagreed on the extent to which music programming should consider its accessibility, shareability, and popularity.

Participants highlighted music's capacity to touch on the subjective human condition as an important gateway to the church. Beautiful music is 'fundamental to the worship, in the same way as if people can go into a church and they can be moved by looking at the stained glass or in places where they have them at the wall paintings'. It can also transcend barriers pertaining to church music literacy, because 'the vast majority of the people in congregations probably won't understand music in the way that a trained musician will understand it, but that doesn't matter, because they're being moved by that experience'. Whilst aesthetic experience is a key part of the participant feedback, it is important to acknowledge that the sample centralised musicians and, therefore, their responses to music may not be representative of worshippers in general.

(d) The Choral Musician's Lifestyle

Choirs are a key aspect of musical life in the Church of England. Several participants focused on parameters which impact the church musician's lifestyle and how this affects musical provision in worship. Participants acknowledged the difficulty in sustaining chorister life in the contemporary age. Singing in a choir as a young person

is a commitment which includes the whole family, and demands compromise as a family unit:

> It's an extraordinary commitment, and it's one that I've never played down when I've had a chance to talk to prospective choir parents. It is an absolute lifestyle decision and it impacts on everybody… it's not that the chorister is put first, but all of that timetabling has to come together per family, because there are still hockey games for somebody else or rugby games.

Furthermore, participants identified a disconnect between the commitment of the children and the parents, noting many parents do not engage in the worship but 'just drop their kid off and pick them back up again'. Parents are not fully integrated in church worship, an indication that church worship does not fulfil an ideological or spiritual function for them.

Relationship building with families, schools, and peers was regarded as an imperative for choral musicianship. Participants argued that churches must invest more time into communicating with other organisations to secure a future for church musicianship. For instance, participants celebrated building relationships with schools. Specifically, a specialised communications strategy, implemented either as a distinct role or as a facet within music leadership, should prioritise fostering relations with schools because of the positive implications for recruitment:

> If you had relationships where your music staff had already contacted schools and had relationships, and were going in, for example, to support GCSE music students, or your seventh-grade music students, or going into an assembly, or to help with a summer concert, that's how you build relationships. Other things come from that, it might be recruitment, it might not.

It was also noted that fostering relationships between chorister parents at school institutions is important to manage the practical demands of chorister life, for example, lift sharing. However, this is difficult for parents with children from isolated or individual schools who 'found communication very, very difficult, because we went to school where nobody else attended the Cathedral'. Encouraging parents to communicate online can help to make chorister life more practically

viable for families with children attending schools with fewer connections to a cathedral. One participant suggested WhatsApp groups should be used, because 'that kind of communication that means that one person goes to a sports field and picks up four choristers makes everybody's life so much easier'.

(e) Music in Practice in Mixed Ecology Settings

Belief is central to many accounts of musicianship in the church. Whilst it was recognised that belief is not necessary, having a spiritual calling helped participants when performing music underpinned by faith: 'it is up to me to respond to that and to, to worship God through music to the best of my ability'. For those working with children's choirs, belief was a central part of musical pedagogy. However, in some organisations, there are differing opinions between musicians and clergy regarding how often music should be used in church services. One participant said:

> I would like the clergy to acknowledge, accept and welcome the place of good music in worship, and to see it as a powerful tool of evangelism, rather than seeing it as a threat. There are far too many clergy still who see music as a threat.

Musical rhetoric was also a central concern. Several participants had strong views regarding the type of music that should be used in church worship: '"Shine Jesus shine" makes my toes curl'. Others offered a diplomatic approach to rhetoric, endorsing rhetorical compromise in musical timetabling:

> One needs to be aware that people have different likes and dislikes. So you try and programme as wide a repertoire as possible. Of course, you can't please all the people all the time. You just have to bear in mind that not everyone is going to like what you do. But you can please some of the people some of the time, that famous adage.

Participants worshipping at the Diocesan Cathedral spoke about recent polemics regarding musical devices in liturgy, including arguable compromises on taste. Whilst it was noted that a variety of musical offerings can help worship appeal to more people, clarity on

distinguishing features in services ought to be used so that 'everybody (can) have an opportunity to hear what they like'. In this case, the participant liked 'the idea of a service that doesn't have a choral offering, because that clearly appealed to a congregation who wants to worship without a choir'. On the other hand, participants noted that for people 'that are not potentially regular worshippers', the presence of music is an incentive to worship because 'a lot of the time they will see the music of the day and be sort of pulled along by that'. Part of the conversation regarding the implementation of music in worship therefore involves how often to include a choral offering.

Participants discussed the theological parameters associated with musical rhetoric. A congregational emphasis in the Diocesan Cathedral's Eucharistic service on a Sunday included a 'congregational setting that is known universally and a lot of them can sing off by heart. Also, a nice selection of hymns, a rhetorical psalm with a response line that they can sing along to in between verses'. This was noted as 'a nice way of making sure everyone is involved'. Certainly, active participation in the music was important, reflecting the findings of the 2021 Cathedral questionnaire: 'I like singing. I'm not great singer, but I like joining in with things. So to me, if I've been to a service where I've only stood up once and sung it doesn't feel like worshipping'. However, whilst music can help to make worship more inclusive and accessible, it can also be divisive, because 'the musicians sometimes obstruct in the attempt to making it outward facing, just simple things like not being prepared to take a softer version of music out there'. The choice of musical style, and specifically the balance of traditional and modern music, is directly tied to incentives regarding outreach.

Participants suggested that developing strong relationships between music and communication departments are essential to the church and to the successful implementation of strategic outreach initiatives. It was noted that all church staff, including musicians, 'should be offering a high level of communications'. How music is programmed, and subsequently communicated in marketing and distribution, seems to be essential for integrating and retaining church worshippers in contemporary spheres.

IV. Future Directions

Having examined key themes from participant narratives through the six steps of RTA, I now respond specifically to participant reactions to the question 'what would you like to see in church worship in five years' time?'. For a sustainable church model in this post-pandemic praxis, I suggest the development of strategies for the implementation of music in mixed ecology in four areas: (a) online worship; (b) communication; (c) rhetoric around musical styles; and (d) chorister recruitment and retention. Although I centre my own qualitative research, I acknowledge that further qualitative study is required to develop outcomes.

(a) Online Worship Strategy

Online or digital worship practice requires standardising. Specifically, strategies are required for hybrid worship including the following points:

1. The frequency of worship made available online.
2. The length of time online worship is kept online.
3. The balance of worship offerings that are accessible online or in person only.
4. The angle, duration, and diversity of camera work.
5. How to efficiently use staff resources.
6. Financial sustainability.
7. Ideological and financial protection for musicians.
8. The outreach potential of online worship.
9. The different parameters for parish and cathedral contexts.
10. The theological considerations for accessing worship online.

Fig. 15.2 Online worship strategy. Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

These ten concerns reflect the important role of online worship in worshipper narratives and show the broad scope of the task of implementation. While online worship is, it appears, a beneficial addition, there are significant limitations in terms of participation and the kind of religious experience engendered, and this is particularly relevant for Eucharistic liturgies. Furthermore, participants found the lack of clarity regarding the role of online worship in the church's mission led to disagreements between musicians and church leaders, negatively impacting music in both in-person and online worship contexts. Regarding the further implementation of music in mixed ecology worship, empirical research teaches us that a transparent strategy is required to use each component effectively.

(b) Communication Strategy

Developing systems of communication should include consideration of communication challenges within music departments and worship organisations. Specifically, participants would like to see the following:

1. More communication with chorister parents using online platforms such as WhatsApp.
2. More in-person extra-curricular activities and networking which include parents, such as chorister meetings or social events, to engage choristers from non-church schools.
3. Strategic relationship building with schools to navigate the increased demands of the schooling timetable, and a willingness from sacred organisations to recognise the increased demands upon young people and their education and to respond accordingly.
4. Centralising communications in strategic planning because good communication is a facet of every role in worship planning and implementation, including music-making.
5. The strategies of music and communications to align more closely. This might require additional staff roles which can take on the communication, blue-sky thinking, and administrative aspects of outreach-focused music work.

Fig. 15.3 Communication strategy. Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

Participants sought to systematise how churches and musicians communicate with each other and with external secular organisations; to enhance internal communication systems; and to foster a culture which treats communications as a central aspect of all church roles. Asynchronous technology could be useful here for collaborations across remote spheres, increasing access to information, enabling flexible timetabling, and broadening social groups.

(c) Rhetorical Strategy

Tensions regarding the style and quantity of music in worship were cited as issues following the pandemic. Several participants spoke about their experience of rhetorical change concerning specifically the place of worship in the Diocese of Chelmsford, citing rhetorical consistency as an issue. A strategy for development might consider the following:

1. Leaders need to actively encourage an openness to compromise on taste.
2. Strategic use of esoteric music along with music that is more accessible. Whilst accommodating traditional music values are integral to the musical life of a sacred organisation, consideration of the non-commercial viability of sacred music on online platforms, including the use of music from other traditions, aligned with a strategy which retains the integrity of the foundation and protects musicians, including their ideological and financial interests, requires greater attention.
3. Recognition that successful implementation of musical rhetoric ties in directly with communication and administration strategies, which in coming together to offer a transparent and systematised programme, enables people to take their worship taste and consequent practice into their own hands.

Fig. 15.4 Rhetorical strategy. Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

(d) Chorister Recruitment Strategy

The last observation from participant narratives pertains directly to the resources available to implement music in worship: church choirs and choristers. Participants stressed that the pandemic calls for a revised recruitment and retainment strategy, including:

1. A chorister timetable that accounts for increasing pressures on young people in education and reflects increasingly demanding lifestyles. This might include, as one participant suggested, devising a more flexible and reduced timetable with no/fewer morning rehearsals.
2. A recruitment strategy directly integrated with local schools.
3. A strategy for retaining choristers which includes actively engaging parents in the musical and worshipping life of the church.
4. Continuing to examine the impact the pandemic has had on the behaviour and executive functioning of younger choristers, and to use peer modelling as a method to improve such aspects.

Fig. 15.5 Chorister Strategy. Created by author (2024), CC BY-NC 4.0

Conclusion

The data generated from this small focus group located in the worshipping community of the Diocese of Chelmsford demonstrates that qualitative research methodology may offer important insights into the lived experiences of worshippers engaged in contemporary mixed ecology worship. The flexibility and inductive data-driven approach of RTA places lived realities at the forefront of conclusions. Examining these lived realities and experiences highlighted participants' passion for the church and their roles within it. Acknowledging the inevitable shifts in praxis following the COVID-19 pandemic, participants

recognised that the musical and spiritual realities of their worshipping life, including access to worship online, were worth sustaining and developing. Furthermore, it is essential in future ecclesial music-making to strategise music in online worship as a theological and cultural imperative. Listening to worshippers' experiences indicates that churches have work to do to ensure the continued viability of traditional choral music-making in the post-pandemic praxis. On the basis of the data taken from interviews using RTA, I have thus suggested, in this chapter, four areas to consider in implementing mixed ecology worship following the pandemic.