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MUSIC IN THE NEW CATHEDRALS

THE RESULTS OF AN ENQUIRY

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THE enquiry on the results of which this Occasional Paper is based was addressed to the organists of the following nineteen "new" cathedrals:

Birmingham	Newcastle
Blackburn	Portsmouth
Bradford	St. Albans
Brecon	St. Edmundsbury
Chelmsford	Sheffield
Coventry	Southwark
Derby	Southwell
Guildford	Truro
Leicester	Wakefield
Liverpool	

The Committee of the Church-Music Society desires to thank these organists for their courteous response. The Society is particularly indebted to Dr. G. H. Heath Gracie of Derby Cathedral, who drew up the questionnaire and most kindly undertook the issue of it to his colleagues on behalf of the Church-Music Society.

FOREWORD

THE newly-constituted parish church cathedrals have now before them the task of gaining from the older English cathedrals that spirit which has made their own music unique in Christendom. Yet it is as undesirable, as it probably is impracticable, for them to pursue the identical musical standard of their older sisters. Rather would it appear to be the task of the new cathedrals to give to their dioceses something akin to, yet different from, the music of both the older cathedral and the parish church. This paper sets out to give some guidance as to how the parish church cathedrals may attempt the task of making their own distinctive contribution to English Church music, and it deals in a practical and understanding manner with both the difficulties and the opportunities. It will be welcomed by Provosts and Chapters, by their organists and by many others who realise the importance of the new cathedrals in the life of the Church to-day.

NOEL HOPKINS,

*Provost of Wakefield and Member of the
Church-Music Society Executive Committee.*

MUSIC IN THE NEW CATHEDRALS

ABOUT fifty years ago a new policy of Church Extension was begun by founding the See of Truro, and building its beautiful Cathedral in the centre of the city. Since then eighteen other new dioceses have been carved out of the old. Some of them, like St. Albans, Coventry and Brecon, have been fortunate in the possession of a noble mediæval church, monastic in origin, which could become the cathedral of the new diocese. Others, less fortunate, have had to make shift with a building originally intended solely for parochial worship and having few of the attributes of size and dignified architectural design that the ordinary English man and woman associate with the word Cathedral. In a few cases these have been accepted temporarily, with the hope of some day building a cathedral worthy of the name, but generally this hope is a vague one. Liverpool is exceptional in having been able to put in hand a vast building scheme which has appealed to the imagination, and therefore to the purses, of all and sundry.

Of whatever type the building may be, newly built or newly adapted, we have in our nineteen new dioceses nineteen "new" cathedrals, and it is into the state of the music in these that an enquiry has recently been made, the results of which are here to be described and discussed.

Technically, a cathedral is nothing more nor less than the church in which the Bishop places his seat. Actually, in the life of the Church and in the imagination of the people it stands for very much more. It cannot rest complacently on its deed of consecration; a new life has to be created within its walls which will make the cathedral actually the "mother-church" of the diocese, a place of pilgrimage, a visible and audible symbol of the beauty of holiness.

Where the diocese has inherited a building in itself capable of ministering to this conception, it is incumbent

on those who have the charge of it to see that the conduct of the services, the ornaments and the music, fulfil it. Where the building itself is uninspiring, the greater is the need that the conduct of the services should raise the cathedral worship above the standard of an average parochialism. In such cases the music is the natural starting-point, for whatever the building is like the music of the cathedral can become an example¹ to the whole diocese, and for good or for evil it will be so taken in innumerable parishes.

In answering the questions put to all the new cathedral organists, one writes:

"We have much to do to create and keep alive what we all feel to be the true cathedral atmosphere, but we are trying for the best."

Another:

"This place is run like a settled down, happy and unenterprising parish church with no future to worry about."

And a third, after detailing obviously needed improvements:

"What is needed everywhere is *money* to do these necessary jobs."

These three quotations together fairly state the problem of the new cathedrals' music. There is the ideal to be created, kept alive and worked for; the tendency to settle down to be resisted; the funds to provide the material necessities to be found despite the pressure of competing interests, some of which it will certainly be claimed ought to be satisfied first.

It is not for us to decide what should come first, but there are nearly 400 years of English history to prove that

¹ The cathedral service can be an example without becoming the model for parochial services. There has been in the past too much tendency to model parochial singing on the Cathedral type. If the cathedral is a true *Schola Cantorum* it will teach its parishes to use their own resources to the full without slavish imitation of its style.

the expression "Cathedral worship" includes music of a kind distinguished from any other, and that where a new cathedral is beginning to create its tradition of worship it must look to its music to help it to do so.

Our enquiry was planned to include a number of questions grouped under three main headings:

- A. Plant.
- B. Finance.
- C. Organisation and Administration.

Every one of the nineteen organists to whom the enquiry was sent as the chief musician of his cathedral answered the questions with the utmost frankness and goodwill. A few asked that their information should be regarded as confidential; one, on the contrary, wished it to be published; and one suggested (quite wrongly, as it is hoped this paper will prove) that the desire for it was merely "idle curiosity."

The answers themselves, as was to be expected, were as various as the conditions of the nineteen cathedrals. Only those under the first heading can be reduced to a precise classification. To do so has been instructive, and the result should be so to members of the congregations, "friends" of the cathedrals and others, who would like to lend a hand but do not know quite where to begin.

(A). "Plant" means the instruments, furniture and paraphernalia necessary for the making of good cathedral music. There are four main requisites: a good organ, serviceable choir stalls, a library of suitable music which must be renewed from time to time, and a song school—that is, a room devoted to choir practices containing desks similar to those used at service-time and an adequate piano for accompaniment. The song school will probably contain the library.

Everyone can appreciate the necessity for a good organ, and when people want to be generous towards the music of their cathedral or parish church their first thought is generally the organ. They are less quick to realise the other three which are the "plant" needed for the equipment and training of the choir. By "serviceable choir

stalls" is not meant carved oak. Choir stalls which look exceedingly handsome may be anything but serviceable.¹ The stalls should be of a convenient height and the book-rests of sufficient amplitude to hold all the music required for a service. Some organists complain that their desks are not high enough to enable men and boys to sing standing with their books on the desks. There is, however, a considerable body of opinion in favour of holding music in the hands during singing. A double book-rest, or a shelf beneath the book-rest, is needed. The stalls must be sufficiently wide to allow men and boys to kneel comfortably. Above all, they must be well lighted. Not only the efficient singing, but the decent behaviour of the choir depends on such considerations as these. It is scarcely surprising if boys sing responses out of tune and fidget when they ought to be silent if they are kneeling in a strained position in semi-darkness.

The necessity for a library of music suitable to cathedral usage, making it possible to scrap the accumulations from a parochial past, is too obvious to need emphasis. The importance of a well-fitted song school, on the other hand, is likely only to be appreciated by those who know something of the technical business of training a choir. A choir vestry of sufficient size may be a suitable song school, but in that case it must be reserved strictly for the use of the choir and not be cluttered with other furniture. The song school is the choir's workshop. Much of the quality of the work will depend on its equipment.

The questions on plant were carefully framed to bring out these points, and also to discover how far improvement in existing conditions is contemplated in connection with cathedral extension schemes.

Four happy organists were able to report a completely clean bill of health in regard to these matters. They were those of Liverpool, Newcastle, Southwark and Southwell.

¹ When a parish church becomes a cathedral it will generally be necessary to replan the furniture of the chancel so as to accommodate a Bishop's throne and Canons' stalls with choir stalls. Ceremonial and musical needs should be considered as one problem, and the available space be used to the best advantage, so that the one may not hamper the other.

Four more could do so of everything but the song school. Their practices have to be held in the chancel of the cathedral, an arrangement only desirable for certain full rehearsals. There were likewise four who, in describing various adverse conditions, declared that there is definite prospect of relief under an extension scheme.

The full result of the plant section may be tabulated as follows (S stands for satisfactory, N for the reverse):

Organ	..	..	..	..	S 14.	N 5.
Choir stalls	..	..	..	..	S 11.	N 8.
Library	..	..	..	..	S 16.	N 3.
Song school	..	..	..	..	S 7.	N 12.

The most hopeful sign here is the large number of organists who express satisfaction with their organ as it is. Organs are the most expensive part of the plant. It is only natural that an organist should want a good instrument to play on, and it has been already suggested that this requirement, an instrument suitable for recital-giving, gains the most ready sympathy from members of the congregation. But here too the special requirements for a cathedral have to be borne in mind. An instrument is needed which will effectively accompany every type of service, from the Choir Office sung by a few voices only to a crowded nave service with congregational singing. Assuming that these considerations have been taken into account in the favourable answers given, we can say that fourteen of the new cathedrals are well found in organs. Three-quarters of their number, therefore, are free to tackle other necessities of the plant, less conspicuous, less expensive, but no less essential to efficiency.

Of the five who reported adversely on their organs, one named no fault in the instrument itself, but complained of its position in the west gallery with the choir in the chancel. Another said that a considerable start had been made with an organ fund; the other three complained chiefly of faulty "action," but saw hope of rebuilding. This all suggests that within a very little time the organ may be written off altogether as an item of the new cathedrals'.

expenditure. How important this is is shown by such a remark as the following:

"Future developments depend on funds available. £1,500 has recently been raised for urgent works on the tower and bells; some time must pass before any other appeal can be made, especially since £8,000 was raised for the organ and paid off two or three years ago."

It will next be noticed that there are only three who are dissatisfied with the condition of their libraries. Many of the answers to the question, "Are you cumbered by a stock of old music considered by you unsuitable to present-day needs?" showed that the cleansing fire has done its work. "Burnt it" was a fairly frequent reply.

Still, the library is the part of the plant which should be constantly growing. It may be pointed out to well-wishers that here is an opportunity for making a distinctive and not excessively expensive gift to their cathedral. Besides, the music used daily or weekly to sing from a cathedral library should contain for reference the more important collections of church music such as Boyce, the Purcell Society and the Tudor Church Music volumes. There may be something to be done in substituting the newer and more scholarly editions of works already in the repertory for those at present in use. In some of these cathedrals the allowance for new music is very small, and a gift of a set of copies of one desired work which would only cost the giver a few shillings would be greatly valued.

By far the least satisfactory of the figures shown in the above table are those referring to the song school. The majority have not tackled the matter at all. Their choirs rehearse anywhere: in the choir stalls of the cathedral itself, in a vestry or a crypt. So used are some of the organists to these haphazard methods that they themselves do not always appear to realise the benefit to the discipline and efficiency of a choir of a well-appointed song school. One who does realise the need writes:

"A song school should be like a bath-room or a kitchen, a place not used for any but its own purpose.

There is a real danger that a new song school might be a part-time Sunday school, Guides' or Scouts' drill hall, or even parish soup kitchen, thanks to the surviving parochial responsibilities."

Those whose organs are bought and paid for and whose libraries are in good working order should concentrate next on acquiring this invaluable adjunct to their plant, remembering that its value depends largely on its exclusive allocation to its purpose.

If the choir stalls in the cathedral are unsatisfactory perhaps the "friends" of the cathedral may presently be moved to replace them with something better, but the song school, which is no part of the cathedral itself, is out of sight and therefore out of mind of the congregation; it will have to be fought for, and the initiative in the campaign will most probably have to be taken by the organist himself.

(B). The finances of a cathedral's music cannot be considered as a self-contained unit. They are merely a part, sometimes a relatively small part, of the annual income, generally insufficient for all needs and derived from various sources. In some cases the music is not treated as a separate fund, but the musical expenses are paid out of a general fund for upkeep of the cathedral services. Only a few of the organists were able to produce a succinct account of expenditure on the music. These ranged from cases in which the organist's salary, small payments to the boys, an annual dinner to the voluntary men and a trifle for new music make a total of from £200 to £300 per annum, to one case where the payments amount to close on £1,600.

It may be mentioned here as a sign of the public-spirited fashion in which our organists approach their work that no one of them made the enquiry an occasion to suggest that he was underpaid. Their pleas for more money, where such were made, were all on behalf of others, the members of their choirs and in the interests of the cathedral itself, the improvement of its services and of its "plant" in one or other of the directions discussed above.

The main financial problem is how to replace the parochial voluntary choir with an adequately paid one. That may mean an additional £1,000 per annum in the musical expenditure, a figure which seems quite prohibitive in the cases of those cathedrals which have no special endowments for music. Moreover there is still a good deal of sentiment in favour of the voluntary plan. It is even suggested in some quarters that there is something objectionable about the payment of singers in church, a suggestion not applied either to the clergy or the organist. The singers are, or should be, as worthy of their hire as other labourers in the vineyard. But even where this is conceded the financial difficulty forbids.

The important thing is to face the need and to begin to work for the accomplishment of it in the future. This is what several of the poorer cathedrals are doing. One organist writes:

"I hope as time goes on to plead for more pay for the gentlemen of the choir and also more remuneration for the boys. A good idea would be to award scholarships to the boys for their education at the Grammar School, which is quite near the Cathedral."

In the case of the boys the scholarship scheme is one to be strongly recommended. It has already been partially applied in this and several other cases.

That of Coventry may be named because the scheme for the boys' scholarships was fully described by the Precentor in *English Church Music*.¹ It is hoped that by 1940 the scheme will have so far developed that fourteen boys will be provided with education at one of the best secondary schools in the city. This will have the advantage that the boys will then be available for daily rehearsal at a stated hour. The Coventry scheme should be examined by others with a view to seeing how far it is adaptable to their needs.

¹ *English Church Music*, a quarterly record of the art, published by the School of English Church Music, S.P.C.K. House, Northumberland Avenue, W.C. 2. The article in question, "A Scholarship Scheme for the Midlands," appeared in Vol. VI., No. 3.

The choirboy is father to the choirman. In a cathedral city where boys have been consistently trained in the principles of ensemble singing, reading at sight, and knowledge of the cathedral repertory, where they have formed habits of church-going and become keen on their work, there will certainly be some who, as men, will be anxious to continue their cathedral work. This will not, however, necessarily mean that they can be relied on as volunteers. Some voluntary help will no doubt be obtainable from among them, but for cathedral work a nucleus of regular attendants (altos, tenors and basses), whose services can be claimed not only for Sundays but for certain weekday services as well, is essential. Six "lay clerks" or "song men" would seem to be the minimum. The prospect of earning from £30 to £50 per annum by cathedral singing in addition to the remuneration of his daily employment may be an inducement to a young man who has already had training in such work to forgo his leisure and rejoin his cathedral choir. The fact that he requires such inducement does not mean that his work is any the less a labour of love when he comes to it.

While the establishment of a daily sung service may not be possible for some time to come, that must be the goal to be aimed at. A cathedral choir is distinguished from a parish church choir by its repertory and by a standard of performance attained through daily singing. Moreover, if the cathedral choir is to be an example to the parishes of the Diocese it must function on weekdays, since parochial singers and choirmasters having their own job to do cannot attend the cathedral on Sundays. It is also essential, if the cathedral is to be the centre of diocesan life, that its choir should be available for important diocesan functions.

The policy of scholarships for choristers followed up by lay clerkships for mature voices is clearly the road to march on. When the policy is declared benefactors may hasten the march towards the goal of a fully provided choir by founding a scholarship or lay clerkship, or by supporting one for a term of years.

(C). Organisation and administration are internal matters

which the authorities, clerical and lay, have to settle by agreement. The answers to the several questions under this head seem to show that there is little difficulty about it. In most of the new cathedrals the organist is also the choir director and recognized as the chief musician to whose judgment purely artistic matters, such as the choice of music, may best be left. This is as it should be, but it need not rule out the office of Precentor. A musically minded priest working in close and sympathetic contact with the organist may do much to help matters forward. He may bring liturgical knowledge to bear on the choice of music, and by forming a link between the clerical and musical staffs he may facilitate progress, and also help to allay the suspicions of the old-fashioned members of the congregation who "like what they know." A Precentor may also exercise a salutary influence on his brother clergy, persuading those who intone the services to attend rehearsals and submit to the criticism of their vocal performance by the choir director. The cathedral service is like any other consort of solo and choral voices, a thing in which the beauty of the whole depends on the blending of solo singers with the choral body. Unfortunately it too often happens that the clergy who sing the solo parts in Mattins or Evensong are the least well-equipped participants. Curates and minor canons could often improve their singing by seeking a little technical advice from the organist.

A question was asked as to whether regular staff meetings are held to discuss the evolution of the cathedral music generally. This was very variously received. One organist replied, "No—thank heaven"; and he was not the only one who seemed to regard such meetings with apprehension. They may not be everywhere advisable, but other answers show that in some cathedrals they prove helpful as a means of keeping musical interests to the fore, perhaps of interesting some of the clergy who begin with very little knowledge of or care for the subject, and of promoting the sense of fellowship in the cause between clerical and lay members of the staff. Indeed, since organists are not members of

Cathedral Chapters or Councils, it is difficult to see how musical work can be kept in line with other parts of the cathedral policy without regular staff meetings to which they can make their distinctive contribution.

Choir rules was the subject of another question which brought varied answers, but there seemed a general consensus of opinion that rules should be few and simple and such as can be enforced. One organist wrote: "We have no written rules at all and everything works smoothly."

The general tendency of the answers to such questions as these was to reaffirm what we all know to be true of any concern, whether a business, a school or a choir, that smooth working depends on the character of the responsible head.

In conclusion, it may be said that the new cathedrals have good musical prospects, because however much they may be cramped for lack of money, and however deficient their initial "plant," they have secured as organists a body of excellent musicians, all keen on their work, self-sacrificing in their attitude towards it, and ready to co-operate with the clergy in developing the life of their cathedral.

Their work deserves the encouragement of the clergy and the support of the laity, and the object of this paper has been to point out some practical ways in which the latter may be given. It is specially hoped that the "friends" of the new cathedrals will include the advancement of the music in their beneficent efforts, remembering that, as the Archbishop of Canterbury recently said, while architecture and the attendant arts of ornament provide the setting for worship, it is music which lends wings to the worship itself.