

Foreword

The prospect of writing a new popular history of Christian music of all eras, all regions, and all varieties appeared very alluring when I was first invited to undertake this project. It seems no less attractive at the finish of the assignment; but I am now even more conscious of the huge gaps in my knowledge. Fortunately I have been able to call upon the expertise of a team of scholars and musicians worldwide who have been able to shed light on continents outside Europe and traditions outside the Western. I am most grateful to them: the old adage applies to them – if you want to get a job done professionally and rapidly, go to the busy person!

Nevertheless I am all too aware there remain omissions in this book. Within a relatively short account, it has been possible only to sketch in the extraordinary breadth of musical expressions of Christians of different centuries, classes, colours, and traditions. I have done all I can to avoid the text becoming a mere listing of names and compositions, but have on occasion had to summarize information in order to cover a particular topic adequately. I am also aware that, despite rigorous checking and recourse to a number of scholars, there remain

unintended and probably embarrassing errors and misstatements: I apologize for these and would hope to regularize them in future editions.

The reader will soon become aware of continuing themes in Christians' experience of music. Again and again believers have debated how to define "Christian music". Is it solely music used in Christian worship? Music by Christian composers? Music using Christian themes or Christian texts and lyrics? Or music which moves the listener and expresses spirituality? Are there, conversely, forms of music that are essentially unchristian and therefore to be shunned by believers? Is rock "of the devil"? Should Christians sing the blues? Within the area of Christian worship: should hymns and psalms be sung unaccompanied – or is organ/piano/band accompaniment permissible and/or scriptural? Such questions recur and are currently still debated.

My thanks to three commissioning editors at Lion Publishing: Morag Reeve, who originally commissioned this book; Stephanie Heald, who encouraged it on its way; and Kate Kirkpatrick, who finally took it from typescript to published book.

My first major task in publishing, more than thirty years ago, was to commission and edit the *Lion Handbook to the History of Christianity*, something I look back on with some pride but also with astonishment at the audacity of youth. Now, further on in my career, I have enjoyed writing another survey volume, and hope it may find wide acceptance.

Tim Dowley
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The mosaic-decorated domes of the Basilica of San Marco (St Mark's), Venice, Italy, where, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, distinguished and distinctive music was created.

