

# *The Crucifixion:* Stainer's Invention of the Anglican Passion and Its Subsequent Influence on Descendent Works by Maunder, Somervell, Wood, and Thiman

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## *Abstract*

The Anglican Passion is a largely forgotten genre that flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modeled distinctly after the Lutheran Passion—particularly in its use of congregational hymns that punctuate and comment upon the drama—Anglican Passions also owe much to the rise of hymnody and small parish music-making in England during the latter part of the nineteenth century. John Stainer's *The Crucifixion* (1887) is a quintessential example of the genre and the Anglican Passion that is most often performed and recorded. This article traces the origins of the genre and explores lesser-known early twentieth-century Anglican Passions that are direct descendants of Stainer's work. Four works in particular will be reviewed within this historical context: John Henry Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary* (1904), Arthur Somervell's *The Passion of Christ* (1914), Charles Wood's *The Passion of Our Lord according to St Mark* (1920), and Eric Thiman's *The Last Supper* (1930). Examining these works in a sequential order reveals a distinct evolution and decline of the genre over the course of these decades, with Wood's masterpiece standing as the towering achievement of the Anglican Passion genre in the immediate aftermath of World War I. The article concludes with a call for reappraisal of these underperformed works and their potential use in modern liturgical worship.

## *A Brief History of the Passion Genre from the Medieval Era to the Eighteenth Century*

**T**he four Passion readings—from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—have been a part of Holy Week liturgy since the earliest of Christian times.<sup>1</sup> The earliest musical settings of the Passion were

sung in plainchant, and this practice continued through the late medieval and early Renaissance eras. Between 1450 and 1550, these monophonic chants were often augmented and sometimes replaced with polyphonic settings. After the 1517 Reformation, vernacular settings in German—and later, occasionally, English—began to emerge. An early example of the vernacular polyphonic Passion was composed by Johann

<sup>1</sup> All four Passion readings occupy two chapters of their respective Gospel. The specific locations of the Passion narratives are Matthew 26 and 27, Mark 14 and 15, Luke 22 and 23, and John 18 and 19. In modern lectionaries, the John Passion is usually read on Good Friday, while the remaining Passions are read in a three-year rotation on Palm Sunday.

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The  
**CHORAL SCHOLAR**  
*The Online Journal of the National Collegiate Choral Organization*

*Volume 9, Number 1*

*Spring 2020*

Walter (1496–1570) before or around 1530.<sup>2</sup> Antonio Scandello (1517–1580), an Italian, is first credited with introducing the Lutheran chorale into Passion settings in his *St John Passion of 1561*.<sup>3</sup>

Dramatic musical renderings of Passions were first established in the mid-seventeenth century and were usually based on the German translation of a Gospel from the Luther Bible. Although still unaccompanied, these works featured soloists representing specific characters with elements of operatic recitative and aria. The three Passions of Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672) were composed in this vein and represent this new chapter in the history of the Passion.<sup>4</sup> The “oratorio Passions” of the mid-to-late baroque era add accompaniment to the dramatic Passion, and—later—chorale tunes were also added. *Der Tod Jesu* (1755) by Carl Heinrich Graun (1704–1759) was an enduring Passion from this era. Although the two major settings by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) are the most well-known Passions from the baroque era, virtually all of the conventions of the genre were established before Bach wrote these monumental works.

Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*, BWV 244 (1727), and *St John Passion*, BWV 245 (1724), represent the mature culmination of the Lutheran Passion tradition. These works, both of substantial length and scope, were written for choir, orchestra, and soloists, utilizing maximum resources to dramatically depict the Passion story. Bach’s

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<sup>2</sup> Walter’s *St Matthew Passion* was composed in a *falsobordone* style with monophonic recitations for the Evangelist and other dramatis personae.

<sup>3</sup> Curiously, Scandello’s Passion is set for five voices: CCATB. The choice to have two “cantos” (trebles) on the soprano part in a four-voice chorale was probably made for practical reasons, i.e. balancing with adult men who were assigned to the lower parts.

<sup>4</sup> Schütz’s three Passions are based on the Gospels of Luke, John, and Matthew and were written in direct sequence, one after the other, during the years 1665 and 1666.

works enshrine the standard formula for the oratorio Passion in the German tradition, which specifically consists of several key elements. First, the two major characters were represented by a tenor (as the Evangelist/narrator) and a bass (depicting Jesus); minor characters (from the chorus) are represented by a variety of soloists. Second, congregational chorales (hymns) are stationed throughout the work, allowing for participation by the audience members/worshippers. Third, the chorus was used for *turbæ* (crowd) scenes, representing the angry crowd that crucified Jesus. Bach also introduced other novel techniques in his Passions, such as the sustained string writing that conjures a “halo” effect whenever Jesus “speaks” (sings) in the *St Matthew Passion*.

Although the legend is often exaggerated, Bach’s works did fall into relative obscurity after his death in 1750.<sup>5</sup> For the next seventy-nine years, no one in Europe would hear either of Bach’s Passions until March 11, 1828, when Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) famously conducted the *St Matthew Passion* at the Singakademie in Berlin.<sup>6</sup> The performance was met with rapturous applause, and the demand to program Bach’s music began increasing among the German public, a trend that soon extended to all of Europe. Thus John Stainer, born in 1840, belonged to the first generation of musicians who would never know a time when Bach was not regarded as one of the greatest composers in the pantheon. A reverence for the composer, combined with the flowering of Anglican

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<sup>5</sup> Exaggerated in the sense that Bach never fell into oblivion among learned musicians. Most famously, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) greatly admired Bach and studied the handwritten manuscripts of Bach’s motets during a trip to the Thomaskirche in Leipzig in 1789.

<sup>6</sup> This “Passion gap” explains in part why there is not an example of the genre written in the Viennese classical style. With Mozart’s penchant for drama (as evidenced in his operatic masterpieces), Passions of his (for example) would have made for intriguing works.

hymnody that occurred during the latter half of the nineteenth century, provided an ideal milieu for Stainer to resurrect the Passion genre on English soil.

### *Anglican Hymnody in the Nineteenth Century*

The complex history of Anglican hymnody greatly exceeds the scope of this article. A few general comments, however, are helpful in understanding the origins of the nineteenth-century English hymn and, consequently, its influence on the Anglican Passion. First and foremost, it is important to remember that to the nineteenth-century parishioner the encouragement to sing congregational hymns was a recent development. In fact, it was technically illegal to do so until the famous “York Decision” of 1820. The following is a brief summary of the events leading up to that date.<sup>7</sup>

The Bohemian Brethren compiled the earliest recorded hymnbook in 1505. Shortly thereafter, the early Lutheran Church developed the practice of singing chorales in the German vernacular. These chorales had a significant influence on early Protestant hymnody. In an early draft of the Book of Common Prayer, Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) included twenty-six Latin hymns for use in the daily offices, but these were ultimately omitted when the all-English prayer book was published in 1549.

This absence of hymnody became a hallmark of the early Church of England, and for almost three hundred years hymn singing was neither practiced nor permitted in cathedrals. Nevertheless, by the eighteenth century, congregational hymn singing began occurring with regularity in smaller parishes, particularly those without the resources to provide choirs and organists (and sometimes organs). Without a choir or organist, there could be no “professional” musical offerings during services, which transferred the responsibility of music making to the congregation. Perhaps more significant, the influences of the Puritan and Reformation traditions encouraged congregational participation over the “popish” vestige of professional choirs and organists.<sup>8</sup>

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Isaac Watts (1674–1748) emerged as an important English hymn writer. His guiding principle was that the texts of hymns should reflect the thoughts and feelings of those singing the texts—specifically, the congregation. Watts’s most important collection was *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), which was the most comprehensive anthology of English hymnody ever produced at the time of its publication. Other English hymn writers emerged after Watts, the most important of whom were Charles Wesley (1707–1788) and John Mason Neale (1818–1866). By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the growing repertoire of Anglican hymns did much to proliferate the practice of hymn singing in England, particularly in small and rural parishes that were not a part of the cathedral tradition.

In 1820, the hymn writer and poet James Montgomery (1771–1854) was placed on trial for writing hymns intended for public worship. His case was dismissed by the Archbishop of York.

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the content of this section of the article was originally published in the author’s book *Welcome to Church Music & The Hymnal 1982* (New York: Morehouse, 2015). The reader is encouraged to consult that resource for a fuller account of the history and repertoire of Anglican hymnody.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–58.

The “York Decision” (as it came to be known) effectively established the legality of the use of hymns in the Anglican liturgy and resulted in an explosion of new Anglican hymns over the course of the next several decades. In 1861, the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was published. This volume became the most important English hymnal of the nineteenth century, undergoing many revisions and reissues over the course of the next fifty years until it was ultimately replaced by *The English Hymnal*, edited by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and published in 1906. Eventually, cathedrals began absorbing some of the parochial traditions, including (and especially) the singing of congregational hymns. As a result, the boundary between cathedrals and small parishes began to blur, establishing a more unified musical tradition.

### *John Stainer and the Invention of the Anglican Passion*

John Stainer (1840–1901) was born in Southwark, London, and spent his boyhood years as a chorister at St Paul’s Cathedral. At the age of sixteen, he was named organist at St Michael’s College, Tenbury, and three years later organist at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he earned his BA and MA degrees. Stainer became organist at St Paul’s in 1872, succeeding John Goss (1800–1880) as director of music. Although both men made extraordinary contributions to Anglican sacred music, Stainer’s legacy, at least at St Paul’s, rests in part on his reputation as a choral director. He is credited with radically reforming the choir upon his arrival at St Paul’s, establishing the cathedral’s long-held tradition of choral excellence.<sup>9</sup> In

<sup>9</sup> Barry Rose recounts that Stainer arrived at the cathedral in 1872 “to find the choir in a depleted and woeful state, both musically and vocally. The Quire screen had been removed from the cathedral in 1860, and Stainer, taking a look at the vast open spaces now created, from end to end of the building,

fact, it was Stainer who first programmed the *St Matthew Passion* at St Paul’s during Holy Week of 1873, inaugurating a tradition that continues through the present day. Stainer adored Bach, and there is no doubt that his love for the composer—and the Passions in particular—inspired him when writing *The Crucifixion*.

**Figure 1.** John Stainer



### *The Crucifixion (1887)*

Stainer’s contributions to church music, however, extended beyond the cathedral. Deeply invested in his teaching, he maintained relationships with former students and encouraged their work in smaller parishes in the London area and beyond. One such pupil, William Hodge (1861–1895), was the organist at St Marylebone Parish Church

immediately realized that he would need a much larger choir than his predecessor (John Goss) had left behind. So he persuaded the Dean and Chapter to proceed with plans for a residential choir school for up to 40 boys, while also increasing the number of adult singers (The Vicars Choral) to 18, and, at the same time introducing adequate amounts of rehearsal times for both the boys and the men.” “Not Another Crucifixion?,” *American Organist* 37 (April 2003): 38.



in London during the 1880s. Stainer wrote *The Crucifixion* with Hodge's choir in mind, and the oratorio was first performed at St Marylebone on February 24, 1887, the day after Ash Wednesday, as the first concert in a series of special Thursday-night Lenten services. The performance was so well received that it was sung three additional times that Lenten season: on March 10, March 24, and April 8, which was Good Friday. The Choir of St Marylebone still performs *The Crucifixion* every year, with 2019 marking the 133<sup>rd</sup> year of the annual tradition.

*The Crucifixion* is subtitled "A Meditation on the Sacred Passion of the Holy Redeemer." The word "meditation" is deliberate and significant, as the work was intended by Stainer to be an "emotional reflection on the theology of the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion and not a dramatic oratorio or cantata."<sup>10</sup> The librettist with whom Stainer collaborated was W. J. Sparrow-Simpson (1859–1952), a priest and theologian who was the son of William Sparrow-Simpson (1828–1897), a minor canon at St Paul's. In his libretto, the younger Sparrow-Simpson "intended to explore Christ the man in all his vulnerability and desolation rather than as a theatrical protagonist, a fact extenuated by the lack of violence, weeping or the thunder of God's wrath."<sup>11</sup>

Keeping the smaller forces of the parish church music program in mind, Stainer consciously scored the work for organ accompaniment and predominantly four-part choral writing. Jeremy Dibble (b. 1958) writes the following:

In an age where the battle had been won to incorporate larger choral works, such as oratorios and passions, into the

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Dibble, *John Stainer: A Life in Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 241.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Anglican liturgy—one which had been spearheaded by Stainer himself—*The Crucifixion* revealed Stainer's 'democratic' aspirations for parish church choirs to enjoy the same form of experience and occasion, yet without the expense of an orchestra or the challenging technical difficulties of, for example, Bach's choral writing or the highly demanding task of performing Bach's orchestral accompaniments in reduction for organ.<sup>12</sup>

Dibble also notes that Stainer was fully aware of the fact that he was deliberately imitating Bach's Passions, albeit on a smaller scale:

Stainer was, of course, conscious of the link between his work and the Lutheran Passion in the way he wished to follow the traditional pattern of biblical prose narrative (conveyed in the solo and choral recitatives) and poetry which meditates on each aspect of the passion story. Moreover, the entire narrative itself is punctuated by a series of Anglican hymns—an entirely 'national' substitute for the chorale—for congregational participation which, in their turn, attempt to explore and distil those quintessential tenets of Anglican (and particularly Anglo-Catholic) theology.<sup>13</sup>

Like Bach's Passions, major soloists include a tenor as the Evangelist and a bass as Jesus, and these roles are preferably sung by professional soloists. Minor soloists (from the choir) include two basses. There are twenty movements in total, including five congregational hymns, all composed by Stainer: CROSS OF JESUS, PLEAD FOR ME, ETIAM PRO NOBIS, ADORATION, and

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

ALL FOR JESUS. The total performance time is approximately sixty minutes. The centerpiece of *The Crucifixion* is also the most well-known excerpt from the oratorio, the choral anthem “God so Loved the World,” which has become

a staple for church choirs across the world, most of which will never sing the full-length work. The anthem is a setting of a Bible verse (John 3:16) and the only textual passage in all of *The Crucifixion* that is not by Sparrow-Simpson.

**Table 1. *The Crucifixion* (1887)**

Composer:	John Stainer (1840–1901)	
Librettist:	William J. Sparrow-Simpson (1859–1952)	
Accompaniment:	organ orchestration by Barry Rose (2001)	
Soloists:	tenor (Evangelist) bass (Jesus, sometimes assuming narration) additional bass solos from the choir	
Length:	65 minutes	
Overall Form:	20 short numbers, including 5 congregational hymns	
Hymns:	CROSS OF JESUS	“Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow”
	PLEAD FOR ME	“Holy Jesu, by Thy Passion”
	ETIAM PRO NOBIS	“Jesus, the Crucified, pleads for me”
	ADORATION	“I adore Thee”
	ALL FOR JESUS	“All for Jesus”
	All hymn tunes and harmonizations are by the composer. All hymn texts are by William J. Sparrow-Simpson	

By far the most famous example of the Anglican Passion, *The Crucifixion* has been recorded many times, most famously in 1929 on RCA Victrola with tenor Richard Crooks (1900–1972) and baritone Lawrence Tibbett (1896–1960) as the soloists. Other significant recordings include those by George Guest (1924–2002) and the Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge in 1962 and Barry Rose (b. 1935) and the Guilford Cathedral Choir in 1969. Thirty-two years later,

Rose orchestrated *The Crucifixion* and recorded it once again with the Guilford Camerata and Philharmonic Orchestra; this orchestrated version of *The Crucifixion* was released on the Lammas label in 2003. A 1987 recording on EMI conducted by Richard Hickox (1948–2008) is also noteworthy; its personnel includes John Scott (1956–2015) on the organ with Robert Tear (1939–2011) and Benjamin Luxon (b. 1937) as the tenor and baritone soloists, respectively.

## *Conventions of the Anglican Passion*

With *The Crucifixion*, Stainer single-handedly invented a new Anglican model for the Passion, establishing its conventions for the two generations of composers that would follow in his footsteps. As mentioned previously, the Anglican Passion is derivative of the Lutheran passion, most famously represented by Bach's two major settings. However, unlike Bach's Passions, which are clearly written for elite choirs and instrumentalists, the Anglican Passion is deliberately written for smaller parishes with largely volunteer forces, making these works more accessible to the amateur choir.<sup>14</sup> The Anglican Passion retains the two-soloist/two-character model established by Bach, with a tenor singing the part of the Evangelist and a bass (or baritone) assuming the role of Jesus. Perhaps most important, these works are usually composed for liturgical use, with a congregation invited to sing hymns that comment on the dramatic content of the work. In this sense, hymns are used in the same way as Bach's chorales.

### *The Anglican Passion in the Twentieth Century*

Like most music written during the Victorian era, Stainer's Passion had its critics.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, by

<sup>14</sup> Stainer's harmonic language is also unapologetically Victorian in style, and this populist simplicity makes his Passion accessible to amateur choirs and audiences on this level as well.

<sup>15</sup> Victorian music has long suffered the derision of musicologists. Composed during the same era as Richard Wagner (1813–1883) was writing his music dramas, nineteenth-century English music was regarded by the intellectual elites as effeminate and sentimental, and this reputation persisted through the twentieth century. Perhaps the most scathing criticism ever published was by Kenneth R. Long, who wrote that "Sparrow-Simpson's appalling doggerel set to Stainer's squalid music is a monument to the inane." *The Music of the English Church* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1971), 365.

the turn of the twentieth century *The Crucifixion* had established itself as a staple of the repertoire in churches across England and beyond.<sup>16</sup> Due to its popularity, it is therefore not surprising that younger British composers tried their hand at the genre, if for no other reason than to have an alternative Passion setting to program during Lent or Holy Week. Stainer's shadow, however, loomed large. The following pages will examine four Anglican Passions that were written over the course of the first three decades of the twentieth century, all of which were influenced by *The Crucifixion* and the conventions of the genre that Stainer established.

#### *Olivet to Calvary (1904)*

John Maunder (1858–1920) was born in Chelsea. The earliest recorded position Maunder held was organist at St Matthew's in Sydenham beginning in 1876, a post he landed when he was eighteen years old. He soon took a position at St Paul's in Forest Hill, where he stayed until 1879. Over the course of the next two decades, he served as an organist in Blackheath and Sutton, accompanied concerts in the Royal Albert Hall, and—beginning in 1881—conducted concerts at the Civil Service Vocal Union. Beyond these facts, not much is known about Maunder's life, although it is safe to say that he was not a man who was born into privilege and had few, if any, connections to musical circles within the cathedral tradition, which surely hampered his career as a church musician.<sup>17</sup> His employment in small parishes had an enormous influence on

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Dibble writes the following: "After the 'performances' at St Marylebone, *The Crucifixion* was an immediate triumph as well as a major commercial success for Novello. It was performed throughout the Anglican communion around the world and Stainer took much delight from hearing of performances by small choirs in remote parts of Australia and the West Indies." *John Stainer: A Life in Music*, 242.

<sup>17</sup> Also, unlike the other composers featured in this article, no known photo of Maunder exists.

his compositional style. They are practical works, and the entirety of Maunder’s oeuvre is accessible to the average church choir.

Details surrounding the premiere of *Olivet to Calvary* are unknown, but the work was published by Novello in 1904.<sup>18</sup> Shapcott Wensley (1854–1917)—a pseudonym for the English author and poet Henry Shapcott Bunce—is the librettist. Major soloists include a tenor (Evangelist) and bass (Jesus). A minor solo (from the chorus)

<sup>18</sup> Assuming the date of composition is close to the date of publication, this date technically categorizes *Olivet to Calvary* as an Edwardian work. In style, however, its harmonies and gestures echo Stainer’s Victorianisms.

features a second bass (Pilate). *Olivet to Calvary* is organized into two large parts, each with multiple subsections. Part I recounts the events from the procession into Jerusalem through the Mount of Olives, and Part II tells the story of the Passion. Because the first half of the cantata (as Maunder labeled it) depicts events that occur before the Passion begins, *Olivet to Calvary* is the Anglican Passion with the most expansive narrative content. The work is sixty minutes in length and originally scored for organ accompaniment, although Novello published an orchestration the following year<sup>19</sup>. Maunder wrote three original

<sup>19</sup> *Olivet to Calvary* was orchestrated by Henry Marcellus Higgs (1855–1929) in 1905.

**Table 2. *Olivet to Calvary* (1904)**

<b>Composer:</b>	John Henry Maunder (1858–1920)	
<b>Librettist:</b>	Shapcott Wensley (1854–1917)	
<b>Accompaniment:</b>	organ orchestration by Henry Marcellus Higgs (1905)	
<b>Soloists:</b>	tenor (Evangelist) baritone (Jesus) additional soprano and bass solos from the choir	
<b>Length:</b>	65 minutes	
<b>Overall Form:</b>	2 parts with 10 subsections (4 + 6) 21 short numbers, including 3 congregational hymns	
<b>Hymns:</b>	MAUNDER	“Just as I am, without one plea” <sup>a</sup>
	THY WILL BE DONE	“‘Thy will be done,’ the Saviour said” <sup>b</sup>
	ROCK OF AGES	“Rock of Ages, cleft for me” <sup>c</sup>
	All tunes and harmonizations are by the composer.	
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	<sup>a</sup> The words of MAUNDER are by Charlotte Elliott (1789–1871).	
	<sup>b</sup> The words of THY WILL BE DONE are by Shapcott Wensley (1854–1917).	
	<sup>c</sup> The words of ROCK OF AGES is by Augustus Toplady (1740–1778).	

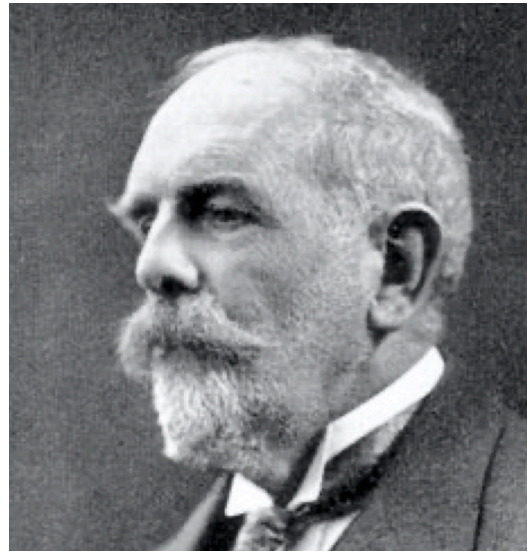


hymn tunes for the congregational moments in the work: MAUNDER, THY WILL BE DONE, and ROCK OF AGES.<sup>20</sup> After *The Crucifixion, Olivet to Calvary* is probably the second-most frequently programmed Anglican Passion, although its popularity has waned in recent decades. The 1965 recording with Barry Rose and the Guilford Cathedral Choir is credited with rescuing the work from the dustbin of obscurity.

*The Passion of Christ (1914)*

Arthur Somervell (1863–1957) was born in Windermere and educated at Uppingham and King’s College, where he studied composition under Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924). After additional study with Hubert Parry (1848–1918) at the Royal College of Music, he joined the faculty of that institution in 1894, remaining there until his retirement in 1928 at the age of sixty-five. He also achieved success and renown as an administrator, succeeding Stainer as inspector of music to the Board of Education and eventually ascending to the position of chief inspector in 1920. He was knighted in 1929 for his services to music education. In contrast to the other composers discussed in this article, Somervell was not a religious man and never held a church position. As a composer, he was primarily known for his song cycles, most notably *Maud* (1898) and *A Shropshire Lad* (1904).

**Figure 2. Arthur Somervell**



Although subtitled “An Oratorio for Church Use,” the programming of *The Passion of Christ* as part of the liturgy seems questionable. It is seventy-five minutes in length and is the only one of the five Anglican Passions that was originally scored for orchestra instead of organ. The implication that *The Passion of Christ* was conceived for concert performance also squares with Somervell’s profession and disposition. The tenor and bass assume their standard roles as the Evangelist and Jesus, but Somervell’s score also calls for three additional soloists—a soprano, contralto, and baritone—who sing self-contained arias as opposed to stepping into minor character roles. In addition, Somervell employs the string “halo” effect mentioned above to highlight Jesus’s words. In these respects, *The Passion of Christ* shows more allegiance to Bach’s Passions than any of the other works discussed in this article.

The overall form of Somervell’s oratorio is an introduction followed by seven parts, each of which is divided into subsections. Part VII consists of a “Seven Last Words” structure: seven choral meditations that are introduced by tenor

<sup>20</sup> For a thorough discussion of these hymns, please refer the author’s article “Three Hymn Tunes by John Henry Maunder and Their Congregational Use in His 1904 Cantata *Olivet to Calvary*,” *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 70, no. 1 (Winter 2019): 19–23.

recitatives and bass solos; the bass solos—sung by Jesus, of course—are the “Words.” It is unclear who compiled the libretto, but the only plausible explanation is that it was Somervell himself.<sup>21</sup> With seven hymns, there is more congregational singing in *The Passion of Christ* than any other Anglican

Passion.<sup>22</sup> Somervell concludes the work with an original hymn, CHORUS ANGELORUM, which is also perhaps his most famous. The other six selected—CASSEL, DUNDEE, EISENACH, WINCHESTER NEW, ROCKINGHAM, and ST MARY—would have been well known to congregations in 1914, the year *The Passion of Christ* was written.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Potts, “Arthur Somervell’s *The Passion of Christ* (1914),” *The Organ* 368 (Summer 2014): 47.

<sup>22</sup> One of the hymns, EISENACH, is sung twice, providing eight congregational moments in *The Passion of Christ*.

**Table 3. *The Passion of Christ* (1914)**

<b>Composer:</b>	Arthur Somervell (1863–1937)	
<b>Librettist:</b>	biblical texts adapted by the composer	
<b>Accompaniment:</b>	orchestra	
<b>Soloists:</b>	soprano contralto tenor (Evangelist) baritone bass (Jesus)	
<b>Length:</b>	75 minutes	
<b>Overall Form:</b>	7 parts with 36 short numbers, including 7 congregational hymns	
<b>Hymns:</b>	CASSEL <sup>a</sup> DUNDEE <sup>c</sup> EISENACH <sup>e</sup> WINCHESTER NEW <sup>g</sup> ROCKINGHAM <sup>i</sup> ST MARY <sup>k</sup> CHORUS ANGELORUM <sup>m</sup>	“Bread of Heav’n, on Thee we feed” <sup>b</sup> “Thy daily work on earth, O Lord” <sup>d</sup> “O think not scorn of those poor men” <sup>f</sup> “Take up thy cross, the Saviour said” <sup>h</sup> “When I survey the wond’rous Cross” <sup>j</sup> “The worst of terrors we can feel” <sup>l</sup> “Praise to the Holiest in the height” <sup>n</sup>
<b>All harmonizations are by the composer.</b>		
<p><sup>a</sup> CASSEL is composed by Johannes Thommen (1711–1783).  <sup>b</sup> The words of CASSEL are by Josiah Conder (1789–1855).  <sup>c</sup> DUNDEE is from <i>The CL Psalms of David</i> (1615).  <sup>d</sup> The words of DUNDEE are by the composer.  <sup>e</sup> EISENACH is composed by Johann Hermann Schein (1586–1630).  <sup>f</sup> The words of EISENACH are by the composer.  <sup>g</sup> WINCHESTER NEW is composed by Bartholomäus Crassellius (1667–1724).  <sup>h</sup> The words of WINCHESTER NEW are by Charles W. Everest (1814–1877).  <sup>i</sup> ROCKINGHAM is from <i>Second Supplement to Psalmody in Miniature</i> (ca. 1780).  <sup>j</sup> The words of ROCKINGHAM are by Isaac Watts (1674–1748).  <sup>k</sup> ST MARY is from <i>Llyfr y Psalmau</i> (1621) by Edmund Prys (ca. 1542–1623).  <sup>l</sup> The words of ST MARY are by the composer.  <sup>m</sup> CHORUS ANGELORUM is by the composer.  <sup>n</sup> The words of CHORUS ANGELORUM are by John Henry Newman (1801–1890).</p>		

Of all the extant Anglican Passions, *The Passion of Christ* suffers from neglect the most. There are no recordings of the work, and archival searches uncover few performances in recent decades. On Palm Sunday in 2014, however, conductor Simon Lindley (b. 1948) mounted a performance at Leeds Minster in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of Somervell's work. A critic who attended the performance wrote that "Somervell's music is throughout reflective and beautiful and at times exquisite."<sup>23</sup> Lindley himself writes, "It is, truly, a forgotten masterpiece."<sup>24</sup> *The Passion of Christ* is an oratorio that seems to deserve a long-overdue reappraisal.

*The Passion of Our Lord according  
to Saint Mark (1920)*

Charles Wood (1866–1926) is perhaps best known as the "link" between two mighty generations of Anglican composers: he was a student of Stanford and Parry and the teacher of Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells (1892–1983). Born in Armagh, Ireland, Wood was educated at the Royal College of Music. In 1889, he joined the faculty of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he soon became the college's first organist and director of music. Although Wood composed prolifically, he was best known during his lifetime as a teacher and academic.

*The St Mark Passion* (as it is commonly called to avoid the lengthy title) was written at the request of Eric Milner-White (1884–1963), the Dean of King's College, Cambridge, from 1918 to 1941.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Potts, "Arthur Somervell's *The Passion of Christ* (1914): 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Milner-White's letter to Wood is reprinted in its entirety in Ian Copley, *The Music of Charles Wood* (London: Thames Publishing, 1978): 178–79. At the time of this article's publication, Copley's book is the only full-length monograph devoted to Wood and his music.

Milner-White desired an alternative to Stainer's *The Crucifixion* to program during Holy Week. Honoring the request, Wood wrote the *St Mark Passion* during the first nine days of August in 1920. It was premiered in King's Chapel on Good Friday the following year: March 25, 1921.

**Figure 3. Charles Wood**



Although similar in length to *The Crucifixion* and *Olivet to Calvary* and observant of the conventions established by Stainer, Wood's *Passion* stands in stark contrast to the major settings of the Anglican *Passion* that preceded it. Like these antecedent works, Wood casts a tenor soloist as the Evangelist and a bass as Jesus and inserts congregational hymns to comment upon the narrative. Beyond these basic rubrics, however, Wood ventures into new territory in several key respects. First, the *St Mark Passion* is the only major setting of an Anglican *Passion* that is based on a particular Gospel; Wood drew his libretto directly from Chapters 14 and 15 of the King James Version of the Gospel of Mark.<sup>26</sup> There are also far more minor roles in Wood's *Passion*, which calls for five additional basses and

<sup>26</sup> The narrative of Wood's *Passion* begins at Mark 14:12 and ends at Mark 15:37. In this sense, Wood follows the Bachian tradition of basing his *Passion* on a specific Gospel.



two treble voices.<sup>27</sup> But even more important is the style in which Wood composed his Passion, which evokes antiquity and represents a harmony and counterpoint that has more in common with the music of William Byrd (ca. 1540–1623) and Thomas Tallis (ca. 1505–1585) than that of Stanford and Parry, Wood’s composition teachers at the Royal College of Music.

<sup>27</sup> Basses from the choir assume the roles of Judas, Peter, Pilate, the high priest, and a man at the cross. Two trebles are cast as the villagers who confront Peter during the tableau in which he denies knowing Jesus.

Perhaps most significant, however, is Wood’s use of the four congregational hymns that serve as structural pillars in the five parts of the *St Mark Passion*, delineating one section from another and commenting upon the drama: PANGE LINGUA (MODE III), VERBUM SUPERNUM (MODE VIII), CHESHIRE, AND FIRST MODE MELODY. These choices represent a major break in tradition; Stainer and Maunder composed their own tunes for their respective Passions, and Somervell offered his own tune (CHORUS ANGELORUM) alongside Anglican hymns and German chorales.

**Table 4. *The Passion of Our Lord according to Saint Mark (1920)***

<b>Composer:</b>	Charles Wood (1866–1926)	
<b>Librettist:</b>	Eric Milner-White (1884–1963)	
<b>Accompaniment:</b>	organ (Part V unaccompanied)	
<b>Soloists:</b>	tenor (Evangelist) bass (Jesus) additional treble and bass solos from the choir	
<b>Length:</b>	60 minutes	
<b>Overall Form:</b>	opening hymn followed by 5 through-composed parts 5 distinct hymns occur 7 times; congregation joins occasionally	
<b>Hymns:</b>	PANGE LINGUA (MODE III) <sup>a</sup>	“Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle” <sup>b</sup>
	VERBUM SUPERNUM (MODE VIII) <sup>c</sup>	“The Heav’nly Word proceeding forth” <sup>d</sup>
	CHESHIRE <sup>e</sup>	“Lord, when we bow before Thy Throne” <sup>f</sup>
	FIRST MODE MELODY <sup>g</sup>	“My God I love Thee, not because” <sup>h</sup>
All harmonizations are by the composer.		
<hr/>		
<sup>a</sup> PANGE LINGUA (MODE III) is a Sarum plainsong melody.		
<sup>b</sup> The words of PANGE LINGUA (MODE III) are translated from the Latin of Fortunatus (530–609) by John Mason Neale (1818–1866).		
<sup>c</sup> VERBUM SUPERNUM (MODE VIII) is a Mechlin plainsong melody.		
<sup>d</sup> The words of VERBUM SUPERNUM (MODE VIII) are translated from the Latin of St Francis Xavier (1506–1552) by Edward Caswall (1814–1878).		
<sup>e</sup> CHESHIRE is from <i>The Whole Booke of Psalmes</i> (1592) by Thomas East (ca. 1540–1609).		
<sup>f</sup> The words of CHESHIRE are by Joseph D. Carlyse (1759–1804).		
<sup>g</sup> FIRST MODE MELODY is composed by Thomas Tallis (ca. 1505–1585).		
<sup>h</sup> The words of FIRST MODE MELODY are translated from the Latin of St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) by John Mason Neale (1818–1866).		



Wood's deliberate decision to include none of his own tunes and instead incorporate medieval plainchant and Renaissance modality—as well as texts from antiquity by Fortunatus (530–609), St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and St Francis Xavier (1506–1552)—distinguishes the *St Mark Passion* as one of the most interesting and evocative choral works composed during Interwar Britain.<sup>28</sup>

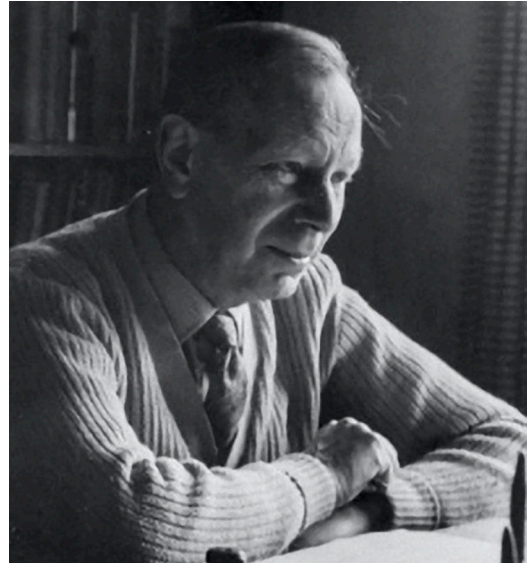
The *St Mark Passion* stands out within Wood's oeuvre as not only one of his most unique contributions to sacred music, but also one of his most significant. Ian Copley (1926–1988) remarks that “the *St Mark Passion* is perhaps Wood's crowning achievement in the field of church music.”<sup>29</sup> And Kenneth R. Long (b. 1925)—who wrote vitriolically about the music of Stainer and Maunder—also praised Wood's *Passion*, saying that “in religious feeling, sense of drama, and high level of musical inspiration it is unquestionably one of the best pieces of its type.”<sup>30</sup>

#### *The Last Supper (1930)*

The son of a congregational minister, Eric Thiman (1900–1975) was born in Ashford, Kent. He was educated at the Guildhall School of Music and earned his doctorate at the University of London in 1927. Thiman was professor of harmony and composition at the Royal Academy of Music from 1931 to 1956 and dean of the faculty of music at London University from 1956 until his retirement in 1962. Although his primary career was that

of an academic and administrator, Thiman held organist posts at churches throughout his entire career, most notably at the City Temple, London (1957–1975) and Park Chapel, Crouch End (1927–1957), a position he held for thirty years. The *Last Supper* likely was composed for this parish.

**Figure 4. Eric Thiman**



Following convention, Thiman casts a baritone in the role of Jesus. However, the role of the narrator in *The Last Supper* is given to a soprano. Thiman's rationale for this decision is unclear, but it maximizes contrast between the two soloists, who sing a substantial portion of the work. The composer assembles the libretto from a variety of sources with texts by St Thomas Aquinas, Philip Doddridge (1702–1751), George Ernest Darlaston (1876–1931), and William Howard Doane (1832–1915) supplementing passages from the Gospels of Matthew and John. For the congregational hymns, Thiman chose three Lutheran chorales: GOTT DES HIMMELS UND DER ERDEN, ACH GOTT UND HERR, and SCHMÜCKE DICH. These hymns are stationed at the end of Parts III, IV, and V of the cantata, offering serene commentary on the words of Christ within an atmosphere of quietude.

<sup>28</sup> For a thorough discussion of these hymns and their role and function within the *St Mark Passion*, please refer to the author's article “Charles Wood's Fascination with Antiquity: The Significance of Four Hymn Tune Selections in *The Passion of Our Lord according to St Mark*.” *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 71, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 14–22.

<sup>29</sup> Copley, *The Music of Charles Wood*, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Long, *The Music of the English Church*, 381.

**Table 5. *The Last Supper* (1930)**

Composer:	Eric Thiman (1900–1975)	
Librettist:	various sources selected by the composer	
Accompaniment:	organ orchestration by the composer (1930)	
Soloists:	soprano (narrator) baritone (Jesus, sometimes assuming narration) additional tenor solos from the choir	
Length:	25 minutes	
Overall Form:	5 through-composed parts, including 3 congregational hymns	
Hymns:	GOTT DES HIMMELS UND DER ERDEN <sup>a</sup> ACH GOTT UND HERR <sup>c</sup> SCHMÜCKE DICH <sup>e</sup>	“Word made Flesh true bread He maketh” <sup>b</sup> “Oh Thou Who camest from above” <sup>d</sup> “Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness” <sup>f</sup>
	The harmonization of SCHMÜCKE DICH is by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). All other harmonizations are by the composer.	
<hr/> <p><sup>a</sup> GOTT DES HIMMELS UND DER ERDEN is composed by Heinrich Albert (1604–1651).  <sup>b</sup> The words of GOTT DES HIMMELS UND DER ERDEN are translated from the Latin of St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) by Edward Caswall (1814–1878).  <sup>c</sup> ACH GOTT UND HERR is composed by Christoph Peter (1626–1669).  <sup>d</sup> The words of ACH GOTT UND HERR are by Charles Wesley (1707–1788).  <sup>e</sup> SCHMÜCKE DICH is composed by Johann Crüger (1598–1662).  <sup>f</sup> The words of SCHMÜCKE DICH are translated from the German of Johann Franck (1618–1677) by Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878).</p>		

Thiman called his contribution to the Anglican Passion genre “a short cantata.” This label is appropriate, because *The Last Supper* is only twenty-five minutes in length. As the main title reveals, this also is not a complete telling of the Passion story—the narrative only tells the story of Jesus and his disciples having their last meal together before the arrest and Crucifixion.<sup>31</sup> With the lone exception of Jesus announcing that one of the disciples will betray him (and thus provoking the “Is it I?” choral response), this “eve of the Passion” cantata lacks the intense dramatic moments encountered in the Passion proper, such as the arrest and *turbae* scenes.

<sup>31</sup> Last Supper is recounted in all four Gospels. In the synoptic Gospels, this portion of the narrative (Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; and Luke 22:7–39) is told succinctly before the events in Gethsemane that immediately follow in the same chapter. John, however, tells the story expansively over five complete chapters (John 13:1–17:26) that offer some of the richest theology associated with Jesus’s words.

Thiman’s harmonic language is also of interest. A lifelong congregationalist, he is the only one of the five composers whose works are discussed here who did not grow up steeped in the Anglican sacred music tradition. Born in the year 1900, Thiman’s music is decidedly post-Victorian and less chromatic in nature. Perhaps most interesting are his three hymn choices—GOTT DES HIMMELS UND DER ERDEN, ACH GOTT UND HERR, and SCHMÜCKE DICH—all of which are Lutheran chorale tunes. *The Last Supper* is the only Anglican Passion that entirely avoids the English hymn.

However, although Thiman’s narrative and harmonic language differs from those of his predecessors, *The Last Supper* is still a direct descendent of the works previously discussed and

arguably the one that is most influenced by *The Crucifixion* precisely because of its reflective and meditative nature. When considering these five works in sequence, Thiman's cantata seems like a sublime afterthought to the Anglican Passion era.

### *The Passion Genre after Thiman*

As a musical genre, the Passion has not received much attention from composers in the years following Thiman's *The Last Supper*. However, there are a few settings that are notable and worthy of mention. The *Choralpassion*, Op. 7 (1933), by Hugo Distler (1908–1942) and the *Passionsbericht des Matthäus* (1960) by Ernst Pepping (1901–1981), both of which are written for unaccompanied choir, recast the pre-Bachian model for the German Passion in twentieth-century harmonic language. In 1966, Krzysztof Penderecki (1933–2020) wrote *The Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke*. A monumental work, the *St Luke Passion* (as it is more commonly known) is a two-hour oratorio scored for narrator, three soloists, three choirs, children's choir, and orchestra. Almost completely atonal in its harmonic language, Penderecki bases the work on two twelve-tone rows that serve as structural cantus firmi.<sup>32</sup> The BACH motif (B♭–A–C–B♯) also recurs throughout the work, paying homage to Bach's Passions.<sup>33</sup> More recent settings that have garnered some attention are the *Water Passion after Saint Matthew* (2000) by Tan Dun (b. 1957) and *La Pasión según San Marcos* (2000) by Osvaldo Golijov (b. 1960).

<sup>32</sup> Penderecki labels these twelve-tone rows as "Cantus Firmus I" (C♯–D–F–E–E♭–F♯–G–G♯–B–B♭–A–C) and "Cantus Firmus II" (E–E♭–F–F♯–D–C♯–G–A♭–B♭–A–C–B).

<sup>33</sup> The *St Luke Passion* also acknowledges Bach's Passions as its ancestors in other ways as well, such as casting the baritone in the role of Jesus and employing a children's chorus, which is a clear reference to the *St Matthew Passion*.

Both were commissioned by Helmuth Rilling (b. 1933) and the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart in honor of the 250th anniversary of Bach's death.

Boston composer Daniel Pinkham (1923–2006) was particularly devoted to the Passion genre, returning to the theme many times over the course of his career, beginning in 1965 with his *St Mark Passion*, a full-length oratorio for soloists, choir, and orchestra. In 1976, he wrote *The Passion of Judas* to his own libretto. This unique thirty-minute cantata is scored for narrator, five soloists, and SATB choir. Three psalm settings—1, 15, and 51—offer reflections on the text similar to chorales and hymns in antecedent works. In 1995, Ithaca College commissioned *Passion Music*, four Latin motets for mixed chorus.<sup>34</sup> Finally, Pinkham's *The Small Passion* (1989) is a work that has a strong affinity to the style and values of the Anglican Passion. Scored for SATB choir and organ, it is accessible to amateur church choirs and offers a quiet and meditative reflection on the themes of the triduum.

### *Final Thoughts: Anglican Passions in the Twenty-First Century*

Considering the genre in its entirety, the Anglican Passion, both in liturgical function and through its use of hymnody to involve the congregation in the worship experience, emerges as the Lutheran Passion's closest cousin. One of the primary reasons as to why *The Crucifixion* persevered for so many decades after its composition is also the most obvious: its accessibility to amateur choirs serving under choirmasters who were looking for meaningful

<sup>34</sup> *Passion Music* can be performed unaccompanied or with organ and/or string accompaniment. The four Passion motets are *In monte Oliveti*, *Trisis est anima mea*, *O vos omnes*, and *Vinea mea electa*.

music to program during Lent and Holy Week. Even in the present day, it should not be forgotten that there are far more small parish choirs in existence than large cathedral choirs, and the Anglican Passions reexamined in this article can be fulfilling pieces for these ensembles to sing. As a part-time choirmaster with a choir primarily comprising volunteer singers, I can attest to the satisfaction that my choristers have expressed when I have programmed these works in my parishes. Although the strains of Stainer

and Maunder still evoke Victorian pretension for some listeners, Wood's *St Mark Passion* seems to garner universal admiration from all that are fortunate enough to experience it. Somervell's and Thiman's respective works likewise have much to offer and yearn to be rediscovered. It is my hope that this article inspires a reappraisal of these works, a contextual understanding of their place in the history of the Passion genre, and a desire to consider their potential in contemporary liturgical worship.

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