

**"The most divine of all Arts":  
Neoplatonism, Anglo-Catholicism and Music  
in the Published Writings of A E H Nickson**

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A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Music

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September 30<sup>th</sup> 2004.

## Statement of Sources

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No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of this thesis.

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Ian Kieran Crichton. September 30<sup>th</sup> 2004.

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines Neoplatonic and Anglo-Catholic influences in the writings of the influential Melbourne organist, music critic and teacher, Arthur E. H. Nickson (1876-1964). Nickson won the Clarke (Southern Provinces) Scholarship, founded to enable young Victorians to study at the Royal College of Music, where he studied organ under Sir Walter Parratt (1895-99), and came under the very strong influence of the Catholic revival in the Church of England at its height.

In 1901 Nickson returned to Melbourne where the aesthetic views he had begun to develop during his studies in England formed the basis for his activities as a church musician, which was centred on the parish of St Peter's Eastern Hill, a prominent Anglo-Catholic parish in Melbourne, recitalist and lecturer. These views were further developed as he began to write and publish essays expressing his aesthetic views that span a forty year period beginning in 1905.

Over the course of a 56-year career as a lecturer at the University of Melbourne Faculty of Music, Nickson had a strong influence due to the fact that every student passed through his lectures at some point in their course. In his lectures on the history, literature and aesthetics of music, Nickson presented a distinctive view that saw fine art as a sacrament. Nickson's presentation of these ideas will be explored through the notes of Bruce Steele, a student who attended his lectures in 1950, other student recollections, and Nickson's own lecture notes.

This thesis falls into two broad sections, seeking first to provide an adequate biography tracing Nickson's development, and secondly, to examine Nickson's presentation of his aesthetic views in his essays and lectures. The final chapter falls into two parts. In the first, Nickson's central claim, that art is a sacrament, will be examined. From this it will be seen that Nickson viewed artistic creation as a sort of sign making which could be understood in three ways, as symbol, metaphor and sacrament. It will be shown that Nickson's central claim, that art is a sacrament, and his view that the world emanates from God, expose tensions in his thought that appear to be inconsistent with these central claims. Nickson focussed his thinking on the artist in the creative process, rather than on the art object itself. The central requirement he placed on the artist was that they should cultivate a particular religious disposition of mind, based on the assertion that "the powers of the Artist reach their fullest extension only in the Christian Faith"; this requirement will be seen to have been based very firmly on Nickson's own mysticism.

In the second part, Nickson's application of his ideas will be examined through his teaching, making use of student recollections, and his own rereading of Karg-Elert's *Seven Pastels from the Lake of Constance* (Op. 96), presented in his program notes for a concert where this work was played. Challenges to Nickson's ideas included his own rejection of twentieth century developments in music, such as jazz and dodecaphony, and the work of non-Christian composers and performers, particularly given that some of these people held views very similar to his own. It is clear that Nickson did not respond to these challenges.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the life and thought of the influential Melbourne organist, teacher and music critic, Arthur Ernest Howard Nickson (1876-1964). Born in Melbourne, Nickson studied in England on the Clarke Scholarship at the Royal College of Music (1895-1899). During his studies in England, Nickson experienced the Catholic revival in the Church of England at its height. On his return to Australia in 1901 Nickson's activities as a church musician, and later, as a teacher provided the platform for him to articulate views that were formed as a result of these influences. Beginning in 1904, Nickson's 56-year career as a lecturer at the University Of Melbourne Conservatorium Of Music is important, as every student had to pass through his lectures at some point in their course. As music critic at the *Age* from 1927, Nickson played a decisive role in shaping public taste at the time of the establishment of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra under Bernard Heinze, who was also Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne (1926-57).

Nickson's essays form a distinct group of writings that are probably unique in Australia. The main published essays cover a forty-year period beginning in 1905, and show the development of Nickson's thinking about the moral basis and spiritual nature of music, his views on the nature of the Church, and his worldview, based on Neoplatonic philosophy, which shaped his thinking about the process of creation. While Nickson's view of the created order was shaped by Neoplatonic influences, his view of the

redemptive function of art was expressed in terms of sacramental theology, and was related very closely to his Anglo-Catholicism.

In his essays and lectures Nickson frequently worked with an abstracted concept of 'Art', rather than specific art objects. While reference was made to art objects, it is not clear how Nickson defined the term 'artist'. Nickson's attention in his discussions of 'Art' tended to focus on the artist, rather than the object. This was a result of his worldview, which saw art objects as an emanation from the personality of the artist; this necessitated the cultivation of a disposition of mind, which was enabled by the acquisition of mystical intuition. While his description of the fine arts as consisting of architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry and music was in line with older views of art, his views on the artist are difficult to discern, which raises the question of whether Nickson saw himself as an artist. Clearly his vocation was not as a composer, as the discussion of his mass settings in Chapter 3 will demonstrate, while as an organ teacher he was more interested in interpretation than in the mechanics of playing the instrument.

This thesis falls into two broad sections. The first three chapters seek to provide an adequate biography of Nickson, which has never previously been done. The fourth chapter examines Nickson's worldview and the implications this had for his thinking about music, and falls into two parts. The first part follows Nickson's worldview as it was expressed in his essays, and focuses attention on the concept of art as a process of sign making. The manner in which this sign making is understood is essential to its function, and in Nickson's writings three understandings emerge: symbol, metaphor and

sacrament. The second part of the discussion examines Nickson's articulation of his worldview in relation to music, which he considered to be the "most divine of the arts",<sup>1</sup> drawing on lecture notes, student reminiscences and Nickson's own.

Nickson's central claim was that art is a sacrament. This can be seen in relation to his faith, where the regular use of the Church's sacraments was central. This claim is challenged by statements Nickson made about the faith of composers such as Beethoven and Bach. This raises questions about sacramental efficacy when applied to art, and some limitations implicit in viewing art as a sacrament.

It will be argued that Nickson conceived of artistic creation as fundamentally a process of sign making. The sign may be regarded as a symbol, metaphor or sacrament, and the process of creating the sign reflects God's own creative activity in human creative acts. Nickson conceived of human creative action as having a redemptive character, bringing the artist into closer unity with the godhead. This union was the ultimate aim of art, being the act of redemption that paralleled the union brought about by such sacraments as the Eucharist. This term also points to some tensions in Nickson's worldview, where he expressed a view of the creation of the material world as being both a dynamic, continuing activity of emanation from God, and a single action of the will of God, such as the creation account of Genesis.

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<sup>1</sup> "Organ Recitals," *Ecclesia* January 1913.

## Sources & Literature Review

The principal source of primary material for Nickson is the Nickson Collection at the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne. This collection, amounting to 16 boxes of material, contains copies of Nickson's published and unpublished writings, consisting of essays, lecture notes, personal writings, and personal papers including family correspondences and documents, some books and music from Nickson's personal library and ephemera such as concert programs and newspaper clippings. Nickson was not in the habit of keeping copies of the letters he sent, and the absence of these letters is a major area in which the Nickson Collection is incomplete.

The Nickson Collection also contains drafts of some of Nickson's essays. Only a single manuscript survives of *Christ in Art* (published 1925), which appears to have been a fair copy, and *The Mind Beautiful*. The only essay for which a complete series of drafts have been preserved is *A Speculative Fall* (1934-5?). These drafts show refinements of expression, and annotations by Johannes Heyer, a close friend and advisor to Nickson; an undated letter to Beryl Nickson is attached to one draft that discusses the contents of the essay.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Nickson's other essays, *A Speculative Fall* was never printed, and was circulated only in annotated typescript. No manuscripts survive for Nickson's writings on church music.

Nickson's lectures show the pattern of his preparation. The vast bulk of the lecture notes were written after 1929, when Nickson began to teach the history, literature

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<sup>2</sup> A E H Nickson, *A Speculative Fall*, Typescript & MS essay, Nickson Collection, PVgm, Box 4; Nickson, Letter to "B", Correspondence attached to MS of *A Speculative Fall*, Nickson Collection, PVgm, Box 2, Melbourne.

and aesthetics of music regularly, following changes in the distribution of teaching at the Conservatorium. A number of lectures are simply lists of topics to be covered, as is the case with "Pre-Xtian BC".<sup>3</sup> Others are completely written out, such as the two versions of "The heart is the first of physical organs..."<sup>4</sup> Nickson's surviving through-composed lectures are generally focussed on aesthetics, rather than history. The lectures that survive discuss the lives of composers primarily in the context of a wider appraisal of the aesthetic values of their music, rather than being purely fact-based accounts of their lives and times. Nickson's lecture notes were generally written on scraps of paper, or on the backs of cut-down AMEB stationery. The size is quite economical, and would have sat easily in the hand without the need to make use of a reading desk in the lecture theatre. Nickson's handwriting was idiosyncratic, and is often difficult to decipher, particularly when he had worked over a lecture in different inks and pencil. The notes were generally written out first in black ink, followed by alterations either in the same or blue ink. Another layer of Nickson's work on these notes can be seen in grey and blue pencil markings. Where two versions of the one lecture survive they generally duplicate one another word-for-word, with very minor differences being in expression rather than substance.

Fabrikant's edition of the Karg-Elert letters in the Nickson Collection presents the record of the interesting exchange between the Australian organist and the German composer. Commencing in 1913 and ending at Karg-Elert's death in 1933. Nickson and Karg-Elert had a correspondence of which only the letters to Nickson have survived.

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<sup>3</sup> A E H Nickson, *Pre Xtian BC - 2nd Lecture*, MS lecture notes, Nickson Collection, Pvgm, Box 2.

<sup>4</sup> A E H Nickson, "the Heart Is the First of Physical Organs..." Ink & pencil MS lecture notes, Nickson Collection, PVgm, Box 2; Nickson, "Heart Beat:..." MS lecture notes, Nickson Collection, PVgm, Box 2.

Nickson did not speak or read German, and Karg-Elert clearly had limited English, so the correspondence took place through interpreters in Australia. This book reproduces all of the contemporary translations, but not the German originals, and includes a small amount of newly-translated material that was not translated at the time.<sup>5</sup>

An extremely useful source related to Nickson's lecture notes is the notebook of Bruce Steele, a Melbourne organist and church musician who attended Nickson's lectures as a first year arts student at the University of Melbourne in 1950. His notes provide a fascinating glimpse into how a student heard Nickson's lectures, and show some of Nickson's teaching patterns. Steele's notes frequently reproduce the exact text of Nickson's lecture notes, where they survive, and also provide notes where gaps exist in the lectures held in the Nickson Collection. They demonstrate that Nickson was very clear in his presentation of his subject matter in the early part of the year. However, Steele's notes began to trail off in the third term, possibly because the direction of the lectures had become difficult to follow as Nickson moved towards more abstract metaphysical discussions of his aesthetics. Steele's notes contain three extensive quotations from Stephen MacKenna's translation of Plotinus's *Enneads*, one in roneo copied typescript on a slip of paper that Nickson distributed at lectures, and two that were presumably dictated or written on the blackboard that Steele copied directly into his lecture notes. Steele's notes indicate that Nickson used overtly religious language in the lecture theatre.

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Fabrikant, ed., *The Harmonies of the Soul* (Adelaide: Academy Music, 1996) p 18.

Another useful source is the University of Melbourne Faculty of Music archive, which contains the minute books of the Conservatorium Committee (1903-25), the Board of the Faculty of Music (1926- ) and prospectuses. This material shows the development of Nickson's teaching activities, and very occasional references to remuneration.

Resources for examining Nickson's philosophy, theology and interests in mysticism constitute a vast literature. Nickson's theology was deeply influenced by the theology of Charles Gore's *Lux Mundi: the Theology of the Incarnation* (1889), which was an important step in the development of Anglo-Catholic theology in the second generation of the Catholic Revival.<sup>6</sup> Another theologian whose work was an important influence on Nickson was W. R. Inge. Inge's 1899 Bampton Lectures, delivered at Oxford under the title *Christian Mysticism*, presented Christian mysticism as the Neoplatonic tradition in Christianity.<sup>7</sup> This was a book Nickson possessed and valued.<sup>8</sup> Nickson's interest in mystical literature covered a wide range of authors. He had a particular interest in Teresa d'Avila, and he introduced his students to her spiritual manual *The Interior Castle*.<sup>9</sup> This book is of particular interest, as Teresa presents the process of reaching union with God as a series of clear stages of developing mystical intuition.

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Gore, ed., *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, 12 ed. (London: John Murray, 1902).

<sup>7</sup> William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism: Considered in Eight Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford*, 7th ed. (London: Methuen, 1932).

<sup>8</sup> Howard Hollis, *For the Anglican Historical Society, Chapter House, St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, 21st April 1993: Dr A. E. H. Nickson - the Man + Melbourne's Music*, Unpublished MS lecture notes, Melbourne, p 7.

<sup>9</sup> St Teresa d'Avila, *The Interior Castle, or, the Mansions*, trans. The Benedictines of Stanbrook, Joan Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections A. E. H. N.* (Melbourne: Private printing, 1996) p 9.

Other material related to Nickson's philosophy includes the writings of two nineteenth century English idealists, John Ruskin and Walter Pater. In his lectures Nickson quoted from Pater's *The Renaissance* and Ruskin's *The Two Paths*.<sup>10</sup> These two authors were very important to Nickson, as they presented a view of art that accorded with the position he articulated in a 1905 article titled "The Moral Basis of Music" that it should glorify God, edify the audience and further the study of beauty, which was one of the attributes of God. Nickson's former students recalled being pressed with the loan of books by Ruskin, and while no titles are mentioned, it is more than likely that *The Two Paths*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice* were among the books that Nickson kept in his briefcase for the purpose of lending to students. Those who visited the Nickson home recall him drawing books down from the shelves and reading selected passages.<sup>11</sup> A critical influence on Nickson's development was Plotinus, and the translation he read was that of Stephen MacKenna, which was published in sections from 1918.<sup>12</sup> This was the translation that Nickson quoted from in lectures.

Howard Hollis (1916- ), an organ student of Nickson in the 1930s who subsequently became an Anglican priest, has been a central figure in the transmission of Nickson's ideas. He has written several items on Nickson, and has been working on a biography that is still in progress at the time of this research. Hollis was Nickson's assistant organist at St Peter's in the 1930s, but they also had a close personal relationship and maintained regular contact: he married one of Nickson's goddaughters and, as a

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce Steele, *Lecture Notes*, Exercise book containing notes from lectures given by Nickson in 1950., Unpublished MS, Melbourne, p 20. Steele noted the authors and titles of the books, but no reference to the place in the books where the quotation was drawn from.

<sup>11</sup> Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections* pp 12-13, 19, 21, 31, 33-4.

<sup>12</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952).

priest, was closely involved with his former teacher in the closing stages of his life.<sup>13</sup>

Another former pupil, Leonard Fullard, wrote of Hollis's address at Nickson's funeral that "we almost felt we were listening to our old master, so steeped is he in Dr Nickson's mysticism."<sup>14</sup>

Hollis holds many materials, including books, personal papers and letters, which came to him from Nickson prior to 1964,<sup>15</sup> and has written two biographical articles, published in *Harmonies of the Soul* and the *Oxford Companion to Australian Music*.<sup>16</sup> A more extended discussion of his views on Nickson is contained in a paper Hollis gave at the Diocese of Melbourne Historical Society in 1993, the manuscript of which was kindly made available for this research.<sup>17</sup> Hollis discussed Nickson's organ teaching in both *Harmonies of the Soul* and in his biography of Sir William McKie (another Nickson organ student), *The Best of Both Worlds*,<sup>18</sup> although nothing explicit about how his own playing was guided by Nickson. He did not hear any of Nickson's recitals, which ceased when Hollis was only a child, and appears to have heard him play in the liturgy only once.<sup>19</sup> However, as an organ student, he had the opportunity to hear Nickson play often,

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Hollis, *Address for the Funeral of Dr. A.E.H. Nickson (1876-1964) at St. Peter's, Melbourne. 10 Am 18 February, 1964. By the Reverend Howard Hollis, Chaplain of Geelong Church of England Grammar School.*, Nickson Collection, PVgm, Box 5.

<sup>14</sup> Leonard Fullard, "Dr A. E. H. Nickson," *The Anglican* 27 February 1964.

<sup>15</sup> H Hollis, Letter to Kieran Crichton, 27/10/2003.

<sup>16</sup> Fabrikant, ed., *Harmony of the Soul* pp 12-15, H Hollis, "Nickson, A. E. H.," *Oxford Companion to Australian Music*, ed. W Bebbington (Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Hollis, *Dr A. E. H. Nickson - the Man + Melbourne's Music*.

<sup>18</sup> H Hollis, *The Best of Both Worlds: A Life of Sir William Mc Kie* (Burwood: Sir William McKie Memorial Trust, 1991) pp 10-11, Fabrikant, ed., *Harmony of the Soul* pp 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Personal conversation with Howard Hollis, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2003.

and has commented that, even late in life, he was able to demonstrate the pieces his students were learning with “enviable competence.”<sup>20</sup>

Hollis is one of the many students to write recollections of Nickson’s teaching at the University, although his description differs markedly from others:

in a secular University like Melbourne ~~was so explicitly no~~ no [religious] terms could be used in the interpretation of the art of music. But he managed more the less [sic] in non-Christian terms to convey such meaning by using ~~some terms of~~ philosophy and idealism as his references. Some of the most worldly of his students were bewildered, but none could escape being influenced by the elevation of his thought + ~~of~~ the concept of the ideal he held before them; or fail to consider values and quality as in ultimate terms. \*~~In~~ of this I can... speak from first-hand experience.<sup>21</sup>

The notes of another former student, Bruce Steele, along with comments in a collection of student’s reminiscences,<sup>22</sup> indicate that Nickson’s students were deeply aware of his religious convictions, and in some cases, he often took an active interest in the spiritual lives of his students. The difference of opinion on what constitutes “religious terms” is no doubt attributable largely to the spiritual beliefs which led Hollis, but few others amongst the Conservatorium students, to theological training.

Hollis’s long and close relationship to Nickson has some advantages; for instance, anecdotal information about his life dating from before the time they met reflects the way Nickson himself recounted his own history, and Hollis has a deep understanding of Nickson’s ideas and perspective on matters spiritual, aesthetic and musical. Much of

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<sup>20</sup> Fabrikant, ed., *Harmony of the Soul* p 15.

<sup>21</sup> Hollis, *Dr A. E. H. Nickson - the Man + Melbourne's Music*, p 15. The University of Melbourne has always been secular, and has no theology faculty, a legacy of the sectarian arguments of the 1850s, when the University was founded.

<sup>22</sup> Steele; Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections*.

Hollis's biography of McKie is written from direct personal experience "to provide an authentic account,"<sup>23</sup> and quotes from correspondence between Nickson and McKie not held at the Grainger Museum, therefore presumably in Hollis's private collection.

Despite the existence of documentary evidence, Hollis is not always reliable on biographical details. For example, he stated in one essay that "[a]fter qualifying, A.E.H.N. spent several years in charge of the music at Farnham Parish Church."<sup>24</sup> However, a letter to Nickson from the Vicar and Churchwardens of St Andrew's, Farnham, formally offered him the post in September 1896,<sup>25</sup> during the second year of his studies at the Royal College of Music, and other evidence shows that he accepted the position immediately.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Hollis has not always revealed—or been able to reveal, it is unclear which—his sources of information. *Best of Both Worlds* was published by the Sir William McKie Memorial Trust, and contains no bibliography, only a brief list of primary and secondary sources. Quotations from published material are fully cited, but no details are given for his extensive quotations from primary sources.

Joseph Rich's article on Nickson for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* was the first biographical article not written by a former student, and made use of the Nickson Collection and Peter Tregear's 1996 book on the history of the University of Melbourne Conservatorium.<sup>27</sup> Rich's article, while necessarily short, is a fair assessment of him in

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<sup>23</sup> Hollis, *Best of Both Worlds* p x.

<sup>24</sup> *Harmony of the Soul*, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> Nickson Collection, Box 5

<sup>26</sup> St Andrew's Church Farnham, *Church Wardens Accounts*, Surrey History Centre, Woking, 2nd Nov. 1896.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Tregear, *The Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne: An Historical Essay to Mark Its Centenary 1895-1995* (Parkville: Centre for Studies in Australian Music, 1997).

light of student recollections and the sources extant in the Nickson Collection. However, Hollis has expressed reservations about this article, mostly on the basis of its analysis of Nickson's views.<sup>28</sup>

Another of Nickson's former students, Joan Bazeley, has played an important role in the development of the small amount of literature on Nickson, through her compilation of the recollections of 105 other students who attended Nickson's lectures from the 1930s-50s. *Reminiscences A.E.H.N.* is a fascinating body of anecdotal material that illustrates the formative influence Nickson had on his students, which extended well beyond simply teaching music in many cases. The book was published privately in 1996, more than thirty years after Nickson's death, although Bazeley stated that she had asked "[s]everal years ago" through her personal networks and an advertisement in the *Age* for former students of Nickson to send her "any anecdotes, impressions, reactions, etc. regarding this highly respected teacher."<sup>29</sup> *Reminiscences* demonstrates very powerfully that Nickson's immediate influence lingered until the late 1980s; many of the former students whose reminiscences were compiled by Bazeley were themselves quite advanced in age by the time of the book's publication.

One of the themes that emerge from *Reminiscences* is that Nickson's influence shaped people's lives in a decisive way, and this provides a useful way to understand the motivation behind the compilation of this book. Bazeley stated her belief that Nickson had been "an enlightened thinker who revealed to many of us, not only the deeper

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<sup>28</sup> Personal Conversation, August 27<sup>th</sup> 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections* p iii.

significance of music, but also of life itself, imparting to time the glory of eternity.”<sup>30</sup> As a follower of Christian Science, Bazeley was interested in the collection of testimony of life-changing experiences and people who acted as a catalyst in these events; Nickson was clearly qualified in her mind for this classification. It is important to note that Bazeley included a wide range of student responses, ranging from people who clearly found Nickson’s influence a positive experience to a few who found his influence to be profoundly negative. An example of this is Jean Starling’s comment that

When I contemplate the number of musicians whom I respect and who obviously hold Mr Nickson in deep respect and love, then it should be obvious that...I missed out...But I don’t feel like that at all, neither then nor now...The trouble was, he didn’t take the trouble to dig, and, in my book, that’s the true teacher’s responsibility.<sup>31</sup>

While this collection is not a biography, Bazeley’s use of biblical quotation sets out a view of Nickson that she was seeking to promote. On the first page there is a quote that also appeared on Nickson’s confirmation card from 1891: “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12.3).<sup>32</sup> Very short quotations from Nickson’s essays also appear through the book, but these are seldom more than one sentence. All of the quotations are drawn from parts of the essays where Nickson was dwelling on the concept of revelation, either through art, the Church, church music or philosophy.

In the course of this research recorded personal interviews were conducted with Mrs Beryl Newland, the granddaughter of one of Nickson’s translators for the Karg-Elert

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<sup>30</sup> Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections* p iii.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections* p 29.

<sup>32</sup> Bazeley, ed., *Retrospections* p ii, Jemima Hunter Nickson, *Bible (1)*, MS notes in flyleaves, Nickson Papers, PVgm, Box 14, card inserted.

correspondence,<sup>33</sup> Mr John Mallinson, a former organ student,<sup>34</sup> and Emeritus Professor Noël Nickson, Nickson's youngest son.<sup>35</sup> Newland had a very particular relationship to the Nickson household, as Beryl Nickson, Nickson's wife, was her godmother. Her admiration for Nickson remains absolute, based partly on his assistance to her grandmother, Greta Belmont, and her father, Rudolf Wendriner, whose passage to Australia was arranged by Nickson in 1912. In the course of his studies at the Conservatorium in the 1950s Mallinson studied the organ under Nickson, in addition to attending his lectures. Mallinson recalls that Nickson was a decisive influence in shaping his spiritual life, resulting in his confirmation as an Anglican after growing up in a predominantly Presbyterian home and attending Scotch College, a Presbyterian secondary school. Noël Nickson provides a distinctive view of his father. As a student at the Conservatorium in the late 1930s he attended Nickson's lectures, and it is intriguing to note that he claims to have understood very little of his father's philosophy.

Some other views of Nickson have been developed in the histories of the two institutions with which he was associated. Colin Holden's history of St Peter's Eastern Hill, where Nickson was organist and choir director 1901/3-16 and c1929-48, contains a fair assessment of Nickson's influence on the development of music in the liturgy in that church, and some discussion of the recitals he gave there between 1912 and 1933.<sup>36</sup> Holden's other work on the development of Australian Anglo-Catholicism is very important in showing the gradual acceptance of this worship style over Nickson's

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<sup>33</sup> Personal recorded interview with Beryl Newland, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Personal recorded interview with John Mallinson, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Personal recorded interview with Noël Nickson, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Colin Holden, *From Tories at Prayer to Socialists at Mass: A History of St Peter's, Eastern Hill* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996) pp 101-3, 49-51, 256.

lifetime, and has been very useful in this research.<sup>37</sup> Peter Tregear's historical essay on the University of Melbourne Faculty of Music contains a brief discussion of Nickson's activities at the Conservatorium.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the Faculty of Music archives, Tregear made use of a wide range of archival sources and personal interviews with past staff and students.

Among general sources for the philosophical and theological aspects of this study, the first volume of Frederick Coplestone's *A History of Philosophy*, which provides a thoroughgoing survey of the development of Neoplatonism, and an older essay, B. F. Westcott's "Origen and the Birth of Christian Philosophy", which gives a further view from the nineteenth century of the influence of Neoplatonism in Christian philosophy, are both good starting points in examining the vast literature on Neoplatonism and Christianity.<sup>39</sup> The *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* is a valuable overview of Plotinus's thought, particularly the articles on Plotinus's metaphysics and the assimilation of his thought into Christian philosophy.<sup>40</sup> The questions posed about Plotinus as a Platonist and as an instigator of Neoplatonism in the Introduction and opening essay of the *Cambridge Companion* have helped to give shape to the discussion of Nickson's Neoplatonism in Chapter 4. In examining mysticism, Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* is a standard work that presents mysticism from a more empirical perspective, while Rowan

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<sup>37</sup> Colin Holden, *'Awful Happenings on the Hill': E S Hughes and Melbourne Anglo-Catholicism before the War* (Melbourne: St Peter's Church, 1992); Holden, *Ritualist on a Tricycle: Frederick Goldsmith, Church, Nationalism and Society in Western Australia 1880 - 1920* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Tregear, *Conservatorium of Music* 81-3.

<sup>39</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, "Origen and the Birth of Christian Philosophy," *Essays in the History of Religious Thought in the West* (London: Macmillan And Co., 1891).

<sup>40</sup> John Rist, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Williams's *Teresa of Avila* is essential reading for an introduction to her thought.<sup>41</sup> In examining the conflicts over styles of churchmanship in the nineteenth century, Owen Chadwick's *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, *The Victorian Church* and *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* are all standard texts.<sup>42</sup> Elisabeth Jay's *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* is an informative anthology of writings from the leaders of both parties in the development of the churchmanship debates of the nineteenth century, and her opening essay provided a useful framework for discussing the contrasting emphases of the Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics in Chapter 1.<sup>43</sup>

This thesis is the first substantial study of Nickson's life and writings. It is important to reach a fuller understanding of Nickson's ideas as he expressed them in his essays and lectures because of the critical role he played as an influence on several generations of musicians through his teaching of the organ and academic subjects. Unfortunately it has not been possible to examine Nickson's writings for the *Age* or his work for the AMEB, which remains as a project for future scholarship. Nickson's criticism for the *Age* is very important because the newspaper was the medium that enabled his influence to be dispersed well beyond the confines of his academic teaching and work as a church musician. This is yet more important when it is observed that Nickson's time at the *Age* coincided with the establishment of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the development of public broadcasting through the ABC. Without

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<sup>41</sup> Rowan Williams, *Teresa of Avila* (London: Continuum, 1991).

<sup>42</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960); Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966); Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1970); Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>43</sup> Elisabeth Jay, *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

reducing the significance of Nickson's *Age* critiques, the writings discussed in this thesis follow such a particular set of themes that it would not have been possible to do justice to Nickson's critical work. The essays and lectures must be considered as a distinct group of writings where Nickson worked out his philosophy and articulated his very distinctive worldview, and this in turn shaped his work in other spheres, such as the *Age* critiques. The *Age* critiques can therefore be seen as another distinct group of Nickson's writings, given that the main body of Nickson's *Age* critiques were frequently focussed on his interpretations of the works performed than the performances he attended. For this reason Nickson's writings for the *Age* have been omitted from this study. This thesis will be of assistance to any future research focussed on Nickson's critical writing, for it explores Nickson's worldview in the context of his thinking on questions of musical aesthetics.

As a Neoplatonist, Nickson was not unique in Australia. However, his articulation of a scheme of creation, based on this philosophy, and redemption, based on Anglo-Catholic theology, represented a distinctive synthesis of ideas.