

Douglas, J. D., Comfort, P. W., & Mitchell, D. (1997, c1992). *Who's Who in Christian History*.

SANKEY, IRA DAVID (1840–1908)

Evangelistic singer; composer of gospel hymns; hymnbook compiler

Sankey was born in Brooklyn, New York. He became famous as a music director during a series of revival meetings held in England from 1873 to 1875, in which he accompanied the evangelist Dwight L. Moody. He made “singing the gospel” popular. He would sing as he accompanied himself on a portable organ. Sankey’s tunes were very rousing and greatly complimented Moody’s preaching.

He performed the songs of William Bradbury, Philip Philip, and Philip Bliss, and he employed the musical effects of rubato and parlando. He also directed the congregations in singing. He became as effective a revivalist with song as Moody was in his sermons. He elevated music to an equal role with preaching, in evangelism. As a result, gospel music became one of the first forms of American music to be accepted in England. However, it should be noted that Sankey did not originate the gospel song during his first campaign to England, as is often stated. The English people had been using Bradbury’s and Root’s tunes and Sunday school songs before Sankey’s time.

Sankey compiled a twenty–four–page pamphlet, *Sacred Songs and Solos* (London, 1873), to meet the request of Christian congregations. This pamphlet was expanded to a volume containing about twelve hundred pieces, which sold more than 80 million copies and is still in print. When he returned to America, Sankey merged his works with Bliss’s *Gospel Songs* (1874) to produce *Gospel Hymns* and *Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs* (Cincinnati, 1875). This was followed by five more volumes; the whole was published as *Gospel Hymns* (volumes 1–6 complete). This series contains many of Sankey’s own songs for hymns such as “The Ninety and Nine” (1874), “I’m Praying for You” (1875), “Hiding in Thee” (1877), “A Shelter in the Time of Storm” (1885), and “Faith Is the Victory” (1891). The latter became the “bible” of gospel melody and helped to popularize the term “gospel song.” From 1895 to his death in 1908 Sankey was president of Biglow and Main, the publishing firm responsible for issuing many of his works.

See: Ira D. Sankey. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.

[Ira D. Sankey](#)