

## Chapter 5

### The case of reformed Europe

The nexus of issues surrounding the relationship of the church in England with the reformed churches of continental Europe was one that preoccupied the Jacobean and Caroline church and which has attracted significant historiographical attention. Earlier we touched upon the increasing polarisation of discourse as the Personal Rule progressed, and the role of an increased fear of a Popish conspiracy to overthrow the English church and state, both in changing the terms of discourse in which religion was conceived, and in energising active dissent to the Personal Rule. Whether or not this Popish conspiracy was real or imaginary is immaterial at this juncture. More pertinently, recent work by Anthony Milton has revealed how Laudian polemic towards the church of Rome shifted away from a contradictory but durable Jacobean consensus to a more irenic view, and has at the same time revealed the corresponding shifts in attitudes towards Calvinist sister churches on the continent. As the consensus on the state of Rome as not a true church was subtly undermined, so the issue of how ceremonial and liturgical uniformity, or the lack of it, affected the relations between other Protestant churches, and the status of those churches as ‘true’, became increasingly pressing.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, it was also clearly the case that Calvin and his theological heirs were held in considerable esteem in English theology. R.T. Kendall has demonstrated the centrality of Calvin, as mediated by Theodore Beza, in the thought of English divines from William Perkins through William Ames to the Westminster Assembly. C.D. Cremeans has likewise explored the centrality of Calvinist theology, if modified to suit English conditions, in the church by the end of the sixteenth century. In Jacobean and Caroline England, Anthony Milton has also demonstrated the status of Calvin, along with the identification of the Pope with Antichrist, as one of the symbolic touchstones of orthodoxy in theological polemic the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The Church of England, Rome and the True Church: The Demise of a Jacobean Consensus’ in Kenneth Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-42*, (London, Macmillan, 1993) pp.187-210; also *Catholic and Reformed* (Cambridge, CUP, 1995), pp. 173-86, 495-8, 529-46.

acknowledgement of which allowed the writer then to develop potentially controversial ideas unmolested.<sup>2</sup>

The task of this section is to examine the precedents, examples and cautionary tales of thought and practice of church music in the continental reformations, both to elucidate what aid, if any, they gave to theorists and practitioners of church music in England, and also to detect whether such patterns of interpretation shifted along with the broader contexts delineated above. At the very beginning of such an undertaking, it must be made clear that the writings of the continental reformers were at the very most a subsidiary source of authority in the literature under discussion. ‘Marginal’ Prynne, for example, so dubbed due to the volume of citations in the margins of his work, nonetheless in the musical passages of his *Histrionomastix* omits any mention of Luther or Zwingli, and refers to Calvin only once. It was also the case that by no means all polemical use of the continental reformers was a serious engagement with points of doctrine. John Cosin, in common with a growing Laudian elision of all things Calvinist with political sedition, tended to use the name of Geneva as a shorthand for both sedition and lack of learning. According to Peter Smart, Cosin had described the ‘Reformers of our Church ignorant and unlearned Calvinisticall bishopp.’ Smart wondered elsewhere whether Cosin’s removal of the

singing of psalms, in such a tune as all the people may sing with them, and praise God together, before and after sermons, as by authoritie allowed, and here before hath been practised, both here and in all reformed churches?

was only

for spight they beare to Geneva, which all papists hate? (and our popish Arminians as much as they) or for the love of Rome, which because they cannot imitate in having Latin service, yet they will come as near it as they can, in having service in English so said and song, that few or none can understand the same?<sup>3</sup>

This having been said, this subsidiary status of the reformers should not be taken to mean that they were without influence. Richard Baxter’s vision of the

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<sup>2</sup> Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, OUP, 1979), pp. 209-212; Cremeans, *The Reception of Calvinistic Thought in England*. (University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, no. 31 1949) 1-127; especially pp.29-35, 68-75, 118-22. Milton, *Catholic and Reformed* p.538. On Calvinist theology generally, see Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Pennsylvania, Reiner, 1973), chs. 2 and 3. On the distinctiveness of English Calvinism, see William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, Harper, 1957) pp.8, 84.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Articles, or Instructions for Articles, to be exhibited by his Majestie’s Heigh Comissioners, against Mr John Cosin, [et al] in G. Ornsby (ed.) *The Correspondence of John Cosin* (Surtees Society (2 vols: vols 52 (1869) and 55 (1872)) vol. 1 pp.183, 184.

company of heaven in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* included, as well as Peter, Paul and Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, along with lesser figures such as Beza, Heinrich Bullinger and Johan Piscator.<sup>4</sup> An examination also of English printed editions of the reformers reveals the widespread dissemination of their key works. The Pollard and Redgrave *Short Title Catalogue* of English books published between 1475 and 1640 lists some thirty publications by Beza, as well as various reprints and parallel editions in Latin, and some (such as *A discourse of the true and visible markes of the catholique church*, first published in 1582) were reprinted well into the next century, in this case in 1622 and 1623. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* went through some seventeen editions in Latin and English, abridged and full, the last being in 1634.<sup>5</sup> It is clear from this that the precedents of Geneva, Zurich and Lutheran Germany were widely disseminated in early Stuart England.

Martin Luther's views on music were many and varied, and have attracted much historiographical attention which I do not intend to reproduce here.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, it will be sufficient to demonstrate the presence of traces of the two poles of interpretation already noted in the preceding sections. Luther is justifiably renowned for his waxing lyrical on the subject of the virtues of music. The preface to his harmony of the gospels is typical in this respect. For Luther

next to the Word of God, only music deserves being extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart [ . . . ] Even the Holy Spirit honors music as a tool of his work, since He testifies in the Holy Scriptures, that through the medium of music His gifts have been put into the hands of the Prophets [e.g., Elisha]; again through music the devil has been driven away, that is, he, who cites people to all vices, as was the case with Saul the King of Israel For this very reason

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy* p.137.

<sup>5</sup> STC, pp.46, 96. For the impact of reading the *Institutes* on both Richard Sibbes and the godly Elizabeth Wilkinson, see Haller, *Rise of Puritanism* pp. 75, 99.

<sup>6</sup> The literature is enormous. For example, see Walter E. Buszin, 'Luther on Music', *Musical Quarterly* 32 (1946) 80 – 97; Robert M. Stevenson, *Patterns of Protestant Church Music* (London, CUP, 1953) pp. 3-12; the account of Paul Nettl (*Luther and Music*, Philadelphia, 1948) tends to downplay the cautious element in Luther's thought in favour of the positive pronouncements. For a brief exploration of the contradictions inherent within Luther's thought, and his reluctance to reconcile different parts of that thought, see Joyce L. Irwin, *Neither Voice nor Heart Alone: German Lutheran Theology of Music in the Age of the Baroque* (New York, Lang, 1993) pp.1-7. For the manner in which Luther's influence operated in the later Lutheran church, see Irwin, *op.cit.* and Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in Seventeenth Century Lutheranism* (Saint Louis, Concordia, 1965). A recent brief statement on Luther is Robin A. Leaver, 'Music and Lutheranism' in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge, CUP, 1997), pp.35-45.

the Fathers and Prophets desired not in vain that nothing be more intimately linked up with the Word of God than music.<sup>7</sup>

Many of those themes already encountered in earlier sections are here present: the power of music over the feelings and the heart and the Scriptural and Patristic blessing given to its use. Elsewhere, in the Preface to the *Geistliches Gesangbuchlein* of 1524, Luther expanded further on the Scriptural basis for church music in terms indistinguishable from those writers already examined. The prophets and kings of Israel praised God ‘with songs and stringed instruments’ and the early church

used music already in the early stages of the Church's history. Indeed, St. Paul encouraged the use of music 1. Cor. 14, and in his Epistle to the Colossians he insists that Christians appear before God with psalms and spiritual songs which emanate from the heart, in order that through these the Word of God and Christian doctrine may be preached, taught, and put into practice.<sup>8</sup>

Luther's much cited reference that ‘next to theology there is no art which is the equal of music’ was one noted by, amongst others, Charles Butler.<sup>9</sup> However, it is also a straightforward matter to find in Luther's work a similar caution about the inappropriate use of music. The same preface to the *Harmonias de Passione Christi* ends with a cautionary note:

Diligently beware of corrupt hearts, which misuse this most beautiful natural gift and art, as do those lascivious and lewd poets, who use it for their insane amours. Avoid such people and know that they have become unnatural through the wiles of the devil; use the gift of music to praise God and Him alone, since He has given us this gift. These adulterers convert a gift of God into a spoil and with it honor the enemy of God who is also the adversary of nature and the foe of this lovely art.<sup>10</sup>

We examined in an earlier section the effect on Zwingli of this ambiguity, of the conflict between the power of music to inflame the heart of the worshipper and the corresponding potential for harm if it were to be misused. For Zwingli, the danger of

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<sup>7</sup> *Praefatio D.M. Lutheri in Harmonias de Passione Christi*, 1538: cited by Buszin, *Luther on Music*, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.87.

<sup>9</sup> The whole section, in a letter of 1530 to the composer Ludwig Senfl reads ‘next to theology there is no art which is the equal of music, for she alone, after theology, can do what otherwise only theology can accomplish, namely, quiet and cheer up the soul of man, which is clear evidence that the devil, the originator of depressing worries and troubled thoughts, flees from the voice of music just as he flees from the words of theology. For this very reason the prophets cultivated no art so much as music in that they attached their theology not to geometry, nor to arithmetic, nor to astronomy, but to music, speaking the truth through psalms and hymns.’ Buszin, *Luther and Music* p. 84; Butler, *Principles of Musick*, p.92.

<sup>10</sup> Buszin, *Luther and Music*, p.82.

music's distracting from the matter of worship was so acute that it was necessary not to sing at all, and that the Pauline injunction to sing in the heart should be taken absolutely literally. Calvin's understanding of the power of music both for good and bad and his exegesis on the same Pauline texts led him to a position quite distinct from that of both Luther and Zwingli.

The central principle in Calvin's thought on music in worship was the absolute primacy of the heart of the worship. The 1536 edition of the *Institution of the Christian Religion* stated in a the section on prayer

that unless voice and song, if interposed and prayer, spring from deep feeling of heart, neither has any value or profit in the least with God.<sup>11</sup>

However, he did not take the same stance as Zwingli on the inescapable distracting power of singing from the matter sung. Rather, through a combination of his own experience of worship while at Strasbourg, and his reading of both Augustine and the Platonic tradition of the power of both good and bad music, he saw enormous potential for music to augment and facilitate the worshipping experience. In the 1537 Articles relating to Genevan worship, argued that

We are not able to estimate the benefit and edification which will derive from [the singing of psalms] until after having experienced it. Certainly at present the prayers of the faithful are so cold that we should be greatly ashamed and confused. The psalms can stimulate us to raise our hearts to God and arouse us to an ardor in invoking as well as in exalting with praises the glory of His name.<sup>12</sup>

In the later Epistle to the Reader (prefacing the *Form of Prayers* of 1543), he again uses this vocabulary of music's power to arouse [*esmouvoir*] and inflame [*enflamber*]:

And in truth we know from experience that song has great force and vigor to arouse and inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For this and the following I am greatly indebted to Charles Garside Jr, 'The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music: 1536-43' p.26. See also his 'Calvin's Preface to the Psalter: A Reappraisal' *MQ* 37 (1951), 566-77. See also H.P. Clive, 'The Calvinist attitude to music, and its literary aspects and sources' *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 19 (1957), 80-102, particularly pp.80-89. Also R.M Stevenson, 'Reformed church music: the basic implications of Calvin's philosophy of church music' in *Patterns of Protestant Church Music* (London, CUP, 1953), pp.13-22.

<sup>12</sup> Garside, *Origins* p.10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.17.

The other edge of this particular sword, however, was an acute sense in Calvin of the corresponding power of music, if not properly regulated, to deprave and corrupt; of the power of those ‘unseemly and obscene songs’ condemned in Patristic writing to incite man to the ‘disordered delights’ of the world

It is true that every evil word (as Saint Paul says) perverts good morals, but when the melody is with it, it pierces the hearts that much more strongly and enters into it: just as through a funnel wine is poured into a container, so also venom and corruption are distilled to the depth of the heart by the melody.<sup>14</sup>

As H.G. Koenigsberger observed, this is ‘pure Plato, even to the metaphor of the funnel’. Professor Koenigsberger makes also the observation that ‘it is difficult to escape the impression that Calvin was profoundly uneasy about music, that he was frightened by its dionysiacal powers of giving men joy beyond moderation.’<sup>15</sup> It is in this context of a rather schizoid combination of enthusiasm and fear that Calvin’s conclusion that only the Psalms, God’s own words, could safely be sung should be seen. Once Calvin had solved the difficulty of the combination of corrupting words with music by restricting the words, he could develop an all-encompassing union of sacred text and music of an explicitly sacred style to fulfil the apostolic injunction to pray, in this case through music, without ceasing. To this end, he envisaged a complete end to all secular vocal music, so that men and women, whether in church or at table, should sing only the ‘divine and celestial hymns’ of David, memorised and internalised by the godly.<sup>16</sup>

English Protestants were therefore faced with a troublesome variety of precedents from the continental reformations. Although Zwingli and Calvin had come to clear, although radically different, settlements of actual practice, the central ambiguities in the principles behind such thinking mirror very clearly the difficulties in English debate. Music was both uniquely able to excite devotion, and frighteningly adept in provoking vice and dissolution. The key condition to stimulating and maximising the former and avoiding the latter was to engage the heart and understanding of the worshipper.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.23.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.23: Koenigsberger, ‘Music and religion in modern European history’ in J.H. Elliott and H.G. Koenigsberger (eds), *The Diversity of History* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 35-78: pp.44, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Garside, *Origins* pp.24-5.