

Chapter 7

The legislative position of the Church

In the light of the deeply ambiguous nature of the theological literature concerning music, it is perhaps not surprising that the legislative position of the church, an outgrowth of the collective mind of the church, was by no means clear. One striking aspect of this, and perhaps not surprising in the light of the agreement on music's inherent powers, was the very small number of writers who attempted to place music in the category of a thing indifferent. John Whitgift, in the controversy with Thomas Cartwright, placed 'singing, piping (as you [Cartwright] call it) surplice and cope-wearing' as things 'which holy or godly bishops may add, if it seem unto them convenient and profitable for the people, or take away if there be any abuse, as the time requireth'¹ However, it was often the case that writers could at once extol the virtues of music, and warn of its vices, as well as utilising the lower order argument of indifference. The writer of the *Praise of Musicke*, as we have already seen, was able to assent to the commonplace of the music's dual nature. However, he also argued that

Again, grant that it hath no commandment, in either the old or new Testament, is it therefore without all advise and consideration to bee rejected? Verily many thinges have beene very acceptable unto God, which have had no expresse commandment in the Scriptures²

He continued to claim Calvin, Martin Bucer and Heinrich Bullinger in favour of his view that music is an "indifferent thing"³

Similarly, Richard Hooker was also able to take a pragmatic view of the use of music, as well as extolling its virtues. In discussing Cartwright's opposition to *alternatim* singing of psalms, he offered what appears, when set against his paean of praise to the effects of music, to be a rather utilitarian point, that

¹ J. Ayre (ed.), *The Works of John Whitgift, D.D.* (3 vols, Cambridge, 1851-3) iii.108.

² p. 146.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

their counsell must needes seeme verie unseasonable who advise men now to suspect that wherewith the world hath had twelve hundreth years` acquaintance and upwards... men knowe by this time if ever they will know whither it be good or evell..... let noveltie therefore in this give over endless contradictions and let ancient custome prevaile.⁴

It will be noted that none of the writers thus far discussed were writing in either James's or Charles's reign. To the best of my knowledge, the only similar statement from this period was made by Francis Mason, Archdeacon of Norfolk, (and that as early as 1605), who placed church music (although not explicitly) in such a category together with the use of the surplice and the use of the sign of the cross at baptism. However, at the same time Mason was also able to speak of the power of music to

insinuate itsef into the soule of man, preparing the affections for the service of God, lifting up the heart towards heaven, delighting the minde, kindling devotion, and ravishing the spirit with celestiall joy.⁵

It is clear then that, even if music was occasionally seen as a thing indifferent, to be settled by the monarch, it was rarely neutral in its effects.

The Book of Common Prayer, in its 1559 version, appears to give very few explicit sanctions or prohibitions with regard to music. The *Venite* at Morning Prayer "shall be said or sung", as was the case with the *Gloria in excelsis* at Communion and the *Quicumque vult* at Evening Prayer⁶. Before the *Te Deum*, it is suggested:

to the end the people may the better hear, in such places as they sing, there shall the Lessons be sung in a plain tune after the manner of distinct reading, and likewise the Epistle and Gospel⁷

No direction was given regarding the Psalms, the Litany, or the *Kyrie* or *Sanctus* at Communion. The *Sursum Corda* at Communion and the *Benedictus* at Morning Prayer

⁴Chapter 39; "Of Singing or saying of Psalms and other parts of common prayer wherein the people and the minister answere one an other by course": Speed Hill (ed.), *Lawes* pp. 157, 159.

⁵ *The authoritie of the church in making canons and constitutions concerning things indifferent* (London, 1607) p.46. This was a sermon preached in Norwich in 1605, and dedicated to Bancroft. On Mason, see Peter White, "The *via media* in the early Stuart Church" in Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church, 1603 - 1642* pp. 221 - 230: p.215.

⁶ Booty (ed.), *Book of Common Prayer* p. 52, 265, 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53

were to be said.⁸ The key passages in the Book are actually to be found in the opening rubrics, which leave sufficient room for interpretation to allow a very varied use:

Let all things be done among you, saith Saint Paul, in a seemly and due order...[only permit those things] which do serve to a decent order and godly discipline, and such as be apt to stir up the dull mind of man to the remembrance of his duty to God⁹

Hence we can see the room for interpretation present in the Book of Common Prayer. Other official utterances display a similar malleability- the 1559 Visitation Injunctions discuss music thus:

Item, because in divers collegiate and also some parish churches heretofore there hath been livings appointed for the maintenance of men and children to use singing in the church, by means whereof the laudable science of music hath been in estimation, and preserved in knowledge; the Queen's majesty neither meaning in any wise the decay of anything that might conveniently tend to the use and continuance of the said science, neither to have the same in any part so abused in the Church that thereby the Common Prayer should be the worse understood of the hearers, willeth and commandeth that first no alteration be made of such assignments of living, as heretofore hath been appointed to the use of singing or music in the Church, but that the same so remain. And that there be a modest and distinct song, so used in all parts of the Common Prayers in the Church, that the same may be as plainly understood, as if it were read without singing. And yet, nevertheless, for the comforting of such that delight in music, it may be permitted, that in the beginning, or in the end of Common Prayers, there may be sung an hymn, or such like song, to the praise of Almighty God, in the best sort of melody and music that may be conveniently devised, having respect that the sentence of the hymn may be understood and perceived.¹⁰”

It can be argued that this passage allowed the use of almost any music at all, given that almost all churchmen of whatever hue were concerned to disseminate a doctrinal message of some sort, and even the most florid of polyphonic music could be understood as significant of something, in a sense, even if one did not perceive the text at every point.

The second Book of Homilies of 1563, in the homily on ‘The time and place of prayer’, is explicitly negative about music in certain forms:

⁸ Ibid., p.260, 56.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 18 -19

¹⁰ W.H. Frere, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the period of the Reformation*. Vol III 1559-1575 (London, Alcuin Club xvi, 1910) pp. 22-3.

[the idolatrous] see the false religion abandoned, and the true restored, which seemeth an unsavoury thing to their unsavoury taste, as may appear by this, that a woman said to her neighbour: ‘Alas Gossip, what shall we now do at church, since all the saints are taken away, since all the goodly sights we were wont to have are gone, since we cannot hear the like piping, singing chanting and playing on the organs, that we could before? But dearly beloved, we ought greatly to rejoyce, and give God thanks, that our churches are delivered out of all those things which displeased God so sore, and filthily defiled his Holy House and his place of prayer...¹¹

This homily was referred to explicitly in a reforming tract of the 1580s, which asked the question:

Whether the pricksong used in our Churches, full of descant with Organs and such like instruments be not also against the doctrine set forth in the homilie of the time and place of praier, where it is saied that such things displease God greatlie and defile his holie word filthilie?¹²

However, it must be remembered that the passage from the Homily does not specify in what sense ‘piping, singing, chanting and playing on the organs’ was to be disallowed, as to rule it out entirely would contradict the previous passages from the Prayer Book.

The authoritative status of the aforementioned pronouncements can be demonstrated by an examination of the use made of them. Peter Smart in 1630 took John Cosin and colleagues at Durham to task

being a principall senior residentiary of the sayd church, whereof you all, save one, are novitij or symoniaci, freshmen or simoniaks, and consequently unlawfull Deane and governors: he, I say, being authorised, by the Injunctions, to resist your new fangled and profane innovations.

Contrary to one of those injunctions, Cosin had

changed the whole forme of service, and the administration of both the sacraments, and brought in many popish, ridiculous and superstitious ceremonyes, not so much as mentioned in the Communion booke and Canons, but most of them expressly disallowed, and straitly forbidden by the said Booke of Common-prayer, Injunctions, and Homilies.¹³

Similarly, Cosin had introduced

¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹² ‘Questions to be awnswered concerning the archbps. urginge of subscription’ (1584): Peel (ed.), *The seconde parte of a register* vol. 2, p. 199.

¹³ Cosin, *Correspondence* i.164-5.

confusedness of voices of so many singers, with a multitude of melodious instruments (directly contrary to the Injunctions and Homilies)¹⁴

There was also a battle for ownership of the previous incumbents of Durham. Smart drew attention to the alleged confusion of the common people, who asked:

Alas, alas, what is become of all the Bishoppes, Deanes, and praebendaries which are dead? We thought them learned and good men, yet they never observed these new ceremonyes, of bowing to the Altar, of worshipping towards the ease [etc] . Did they all renounce their baptisme? Then they are all damned, as we also shalbe if we stand not up at Gloria Patri [hence they have damned] all, both Cathedrall and parish churches in England [who don't].¹⁵

The ambiguity of the established Church's position is further demonstrated if we examine the various sets of visitation injunctions. In 1571, in the most explicit statement to be found in these sources, Bishop Horne effectively ruled out contrapuntal music at Winchester with the following directive:

that in the quire no note shall be used in song that shall drown any word or syllable, or draw out in length or shorten any word or syllable otherwise than by the nature of the word it is pronounced in common speech, whereby the sentence cannot well be perceived by the hearers. And also the often reports or repeating of notes with words or sentences whereby the sense may be hindered in the hearer shall not be used.¹⁶

A set of articles for the diocese of London, dated 1571, displayed a similar concern:

4. Whether in any church or chapel, if singing be there be used, such parts only of the Common prayer be sung as by the Book of Common Prayer are appointed to be sung, and the rest reverently said and read with an audible voice: and whether there be a modest and distinct song, so used concerning the said parts of the Common prayer which be sung, that the same may be plainly understood as if they were read without singing: or whether any parts thereof be so abused that thereby the Common Prayer is the worse understood of the hearers.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., p.144.

¹⁵ Cosin, *Correspondence*, i.173.

¹⁶ Frere, *Articles* : iii.319. Horne had in fact published a similar article in 1562: 'Also in the quire no other note be sung but such as every syllable thereby may be both plainly and distinctly pronounced and also the same perceived and well understood of the hearers and without any reports or repeating w

¹⁷ Frere, *Articles* iii.304.

This is in line with the expressed policy of Archbishop Cranmer, (which was followed in a number of articles of Edward's reign), in a letter to Henry in 1544:

But in my opinion, the song that should be made thereunto would not be full of notes, but, as near as may be, for every syllable a note, so that it may be sung distinctly and devoutly as be in the matins and evensong.¹⁸

However, it should be noted that such stipulations were by no means universal across the cathedral foundations, and their very particular nature, applying to one institution, meant that their status as precedent across the whole church was extremely limited. In fact, the collected visitation articles and injunctions for the rest of Elizabeth's reign, and those issued by the Jacobean and Caroline episcopal benches, were surprisingly constant in the scope of their musical interest. Almost no attention is paid to the actual music used. The matters under consideration were limited to the numerical strength of the choir, and the behaviour and general level of competence of choir and organists. When Laud intervened at St Paul's in 1639 to prevent any lay vicar also singing at the Chapel Royal, and enquired of the Salisbury chapter 'whether is there care had that men of skill and good voices be chosen into your quire' and whether 'have you in your quire a fair and tuneable pair of organs and skillfull orgainst to play thereon', he stood in a long line of continuity in episcopal supervision.¹⁹

John Piers enquired of the chapter of Rochester in 1576 'whether the choristers of your Church be diligently taught to sing; whether they be examined by the master of the children and other the singing men before their admission; and whether they be admitted

¹⁸ Strunk, *Source Readings* pp.350-1. Archbishop Holgate's 1550 articles for York Minster also stipulated 'that there be none other note sung or used in the said church at any service there to be had, saving square note plain, so that every syllable may be plainly and distinctly pronounced, and without any reports or repeatings which may induce any obscureness to the hearers;' and also that 'there be no more playings of the organ, either at the Morning Prayer, the Communion or the Evening Prayer within this Church of York, but that the said playing do utterly cease and be left the time of Divine Service within the said Church.' Frere, *Articles* vol 2 (London, Alcuin Club Collections xv, 1910), pp.318, 320.

¹⁹ W.R. Matthews and W.M. Atkins, *A History of St Paul's Cathedral* (London, Phoenix, 1957) p.165: 'Archbishop Laud's visitation of Salisbury in 1634' *Wiltshire Notes and Queries* i (1893) 10-23, 70-79, 110-122; p.15. See also his articles for Exeter Cathedral of 1634 (also used at Bristol, Wells, Peterborough, Gloucester and St Paul's in subsequent years): K. Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions* vol. 2 pp. 110-14.

for their aptness, voices and towardness, or for friendship, rewards or money.²⁰

Similarly, Bishop Bancroft's set of articles for St Paul's of 1598 desired to know of the singers whether 'by your sober and modest attire and behaviour' they gave 'testimony of the reverence you have to those holy exercises which you then go about.' It is difficult then safely to suggest that there was any increase in quantity or alteration in quality of these articles from Laudian prelates as the century progressed, as has been suggested.²¹

Hence we can see that the Church's official position was deeply ambiguous, and thus potential for controversial interpretations of that position was present. The situation was further complicated by the signals and precedents being set by the practice of those services attended by successive monarchs. When Elizabeth visited King's College, Cambridge in 1564, there was said after the *Deus misereatur*:

a collect for the Queen, which done, the whole quire began to sing, in English, a song of gladness; and so went orderly into the stalls of the quire. The Queen following, and going to her travas under the canopy; and marvellously revising at the beauty of the chapel, greatly praised it above all other within her realm. This song ended, the Provost began the Te Deum, in English, in his cope; which was solemnly sung in pricksong, and the organs playing.²²

Similarly, on Midlent Sunday, 1620, James, Charles, Buckingham and others went to St Paul's, where the combined forces of the Chapel Royal, St Paul's and Westminster Abbey

with solemn singing brought the king into the quire .. they began to celebrate Divine Service, which was solemnly performed with organs, cornetts, and sackbuts.²³

²⁰ W.P.M. Kennedy, *Elizabeth Episcopal Administration. An essay in sociology and politics vol 2: visitation articles and injunctions 1575-82* (London, Alcuin Club Collections xxvi, 1924) p.29; Kennedy, *Articles and Injunctions vol 3: 1583-1603* (Alcuin Club Collections xxvii, 1924) p. 306. The articles and injunctions of the Stuart Church are edited by Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church* (2 vols, Woodbridge, Boydell, Church of England Record Society, volumes 1 & 2, 1994 and 1998).

²¹J.H. Shepherd utilised such evidence of interest in the strength and standard of cathedral choirs in articles and injunctions from Laud himself as evidence of Laud's unusual interest in music: *The changing theological concept of sacrifice* pp.275-276. Ian Payne has suggested that the first decade of the century saw a growing 'high church awareness' reflected in visitation enquiries concerning numbers and behaviour of choristers: *Provision and Practice* pp.77-8.

²² British Library Harl. MSS 7037; 109: V. Staley (ed.), *Hierurgia Anglicana* vol. 1, p. 169

²³ David Scott, *The Music of St Paul's Cathedral* (London, Stainer & Bell, 1972) p.15: Staley, *Hierurgia* vol. 1 pp. 183-4.

However, the crucial ambiguity of these apparent precedents is demonstrated by Smart's insistence that

Sure I am that King James, receiving the Communion in Durham on Easter Day, 1617, would have all things done in plaine manner, without either singing or organ playing...I myself being Treasurer of the Church of Durham at that time, was one of the 7 which received the Communion with his Majesty, and saw it so administered by the then Bishop of Winchester, Dr Mountague. But that which pleased such a Prince so learned and religious cannot content our carnall Canons.... they must have singers chant, and organs play all the tyme the Communion is administered²⁴

It is therefore apparent that the church in England had no clear official stipulations in place as to the conduct of music in worship, to add to the conceptual confusion adumbrated earlier.

²⁴ A note in Smart's Memoranda: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawl.A.441 p. 115: Cosin, *Correspondence* i.193.

Conclusion to Part One

In this first part of the thesis, it has been argued that, contrary to the historiographical consensus delineated in the Introduction, it is impossible to identify distinctive theologies of church music that match categories of ‘Laudian’ or ‘Puritan’. Through an examination of the polemical context of the 1630s, it was demonstrated that the polarisation of discourse that led in part to the musical iconoclasm of the years after 1642 was not due to clear principled disagreement, but rather to the conflation of previously neutral musical activity with wider narratives of popish conspiracy. Through an examination of the touchstones of the debate preceding and during the 1630s, of understanding and participation and of music ‘rightly used’, and by an examination of the treatment of the sources of authority available to thinkers on music, a different polemical situation was proposed. Almost all thinkers assented to two central but mutually contradictory axioms: the power of music to contribute positively to worship, to raise the worshipper to new heights of devotion, and also its inherent and powerful capability to distract, deprave and corrupt. This ambiguity was central to the witness of the Bible, the early church and the precedents of reformed Europe.

Ranged around this central contradiction was a less explicitly stated but equally powerful cluster of concepts of the musical nature of the universe and of man, and the interconnected nature of the two. A huge weight of classical and psychological insight into the power of music over the affections of man weighed heavily on those writers under discussion. In the light of this, it is unsurprising that the number of writers who were indifferent to music as a tool in worship were very few. Music was often wicked or marvellously efficacious, but rarely was it neutral. In this context, the ambiguities of the church’s expressed legislative position on music were perhaps to be expected.

A particular feature of practically all discussion of music in the theological literature was an unwillingness or inability to specify what it was about music, in practical compositional and performance terms, that made it either so bad or so good. Part Two of the thesis will consider whether, despite this, any patterns of Laudian and Puritan musical *practice* can be identified.