

Chapter 3

Understandings of the Bible and church music.

Religion has been described by one commentator as ‘the mastercode of pre-capitalist society’, ‘the cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic’ and ‘the discourse through which it interpreted its own existence’ and in Protestant England perhaps the central means by which this was mediated was the Bible, the ‘Religion of Protestants’ as William Chillingworth put it.¹ Christopher Hill has demonstrated the extent to which the authority of the Bible extended into almost every field of seventeenth century thought, whether ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ and throughout all denominations or groups of Christians.² The use of church music was such an area of endeavour, and the Bible provided the essential proof-texts for understandings of music in this period.

Some of the main sources of apparent justification in the Old Testament were the Psalms, which are shot through with musical imagery. At the most basic level, this is to be found in the references of the Psalmist to sing of the matter in hand. There are also numerous more general exhortations to praise, such as Psalm 81³, and in particular Psalm 150:

Praise ye the Lord, praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his power
 Praise him for his mighty acts: Praise him according to his excellent greatness
 Praise him with the sound of trumpet; praise him with the psaltery and harp
 Praise him with the timbrel and dance; praise him with stringed instruments and organs
 Praise him upon the loud cymbals; praise him upon the high sounding cymbals

¹ Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1990) pp.5-6, 9, as cited by Patrick Collinson, ‘Biblical rhetoric: the English nation and national sentiment in the prophetic mode’ in C. McEachern and D. Shuger (eds), *Religion and culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, CUP, 1997) pp.15-45: p.17. Chillingworth’s phrase was ‘The Bible, the Bible only I say, is the religion of Protestants.’ *The Religion of Protestants a safe way to salvation* (Oxford, 1638) as cited by Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants. The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1982) p.viii.

² Hill, *The English Bible and the seventeenth century revolution* (London, Penguin, 1994). See especially pp 1-44.

³ ‘Sing aloud unto God our strength, make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a psalm and bring thither the Timbrel, the pleasant harp with the Psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on the solemn feast day’: Psalm 81: 1-2, Authorised Version.

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord [Authorised Version]

The Psalms run through much of the debate on music in Stuart England, and cut across patterns of theological and liturgical preference. Richard Hooker had argued that King David had left the psalms “for the raysing up of men`s hartes and the sweetninge of their affections towards God”. The Church had therefore retained them as an “ornament to God`s service and a helpe to our own devotion.”⁴

Humphrey Sydenham argued that to attempt to disallow the use of instruments in church was to:

not onely destroy the nature and propertie of Psalmes themselves, but cry down the authoritie of the Psalmist too,And what is this but our Prophets Laudate Dominum in chordis et Organo ? Praise the Lord upon stringed instruments and the Organ: ...⁵

Bruno Ryves, chronicler of the depredations of the cathedrals after the outbreak of war, related an episode at Rochester in 1642:

afterwards Sandys and Seaton, coming towards the Church and hearing the Organs, Seaton started back, and in the usual blessing of some of his Country, cryed ‘A Devil on those Bag-pipes’ : perhaps he never read so far in David`s Psalms where it is written, Praise God upon the Strings and Pipes, Psalm 150:4, or if he had, it is more than probable, that it had beene all one to him...⁶

We have seen in an earlier section the centrality of the psalms in Puritan culture, and it is clear that non-Puritan writers such as Sydenham and Hooker had no monopoly on the Psalms as a polemical weapon. Among the copious authorities provided by Prynne to prove that ‘Musicke of it selfe is lawfull, usefull and commendable’ were Psalms 149 and 150. He elsewhere drew a sharp distinction between the Psalms and the stage music he was attacking:

And as those who bring in Stage Players, and Harlots into their Feasts ... doe call in Devils hither: so they who call in David with his Harpe ... doe call in Christ by him. They make their House a Theater, do thou make thy Cottage a Church.⁷

⁴ W. Speed Hill (ed.), *The Folger Library Edition of The Works of Richard Hooker III: The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book 5* (Harvard, 1977), p. 152.

⁵ ‘The Well Tuned Cymbal’ p.23. Sydenham`s opening epigram for this sermon was Psalm 150:4, 5 ‘Laudate Dominum in Chordis & Organo, laudate eum in Cymbalis Inbilationis.’

⁶ *Mercurius Rusticus : Or, The Countries Complaint* (London, 1685): p.137.

⁷ *Histriomastix* pp. 274, 267.

Edward Elton, in detailed pastoral instructions to his readers on the use of psalms, epitomised the dynamic relationship between Puritan piety and these godly hymns. After the injunctions of Psalms 33 and 96 on singing a ‘new song’

thou must make choice of such a Psalm as is most proper and fit for the present occasion, and sing it with new affections, and to that end thou art to call to minde and consider the new benefits and blessings, the Lord hath vouchsafed to his Church, to the place where thou livest, or to thee in particular: ... though the Psalm or song bee old in regard of the words or matter of it, yet it bee a new song to thee in regard of the motions and affections of thine heart .⁸

It is clear that the Psalms were a universally acceptable sanction, if only at a very general level, for the employment of music in some form as part of worship. Other parts of the Old Testament however presented more thorny hermeneutic problems. In strictly legal terms, most theologians in England were agreed that the ceremonial law of the Temple had been superseded under the new covenant of Christ’s sacrifice, and therefore could only hold at best typological significance for the Christian. Likewise, a general consensus held that some parts of the judicial law could still hold, dependent on circumstance, and the moral parts of the Law still very much held. However, there was less agreement on which parts of the Law were which.⁹

The most contentious source of guidance on the use of church music was the service of the Israelites in the Temple, centred around the accounts in the Books of Chronicles. The Levite order of professional musicians in the Temple was first established by David to ‘be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy.’¹⁰

Charles Butler cited Old Testament descriptions of elaborate music at all of the most important events in the history of the Israelites, such as the three solemn movings of the Ark of the Covenant, conducted “with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with Trumpets and with Cymbals, making a noise with psaltery and harps”¹¹ For Butler

⁸ Edward Elton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Colossians* (London, 1637) 3rd edition, ‘corrected and revised’ p.531. The first edition was published in 1615, and a comparison between editions reveals only minor spelling corrections.

⁹ J.S.Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England* (Oxford, OUP, 1970) pp. 23-4.

¹⁰ Authorised Version, 1 Chronicles 15; 16.

¹¹ Butler, *Principles*.; p. 100: Jeremy Taylor noted similar material in 2 Chronicles 24:30: ‘An Apology for Authorised and Set Forms of Liturgy, against the Pretence of the Spirit’ (1646): C.P. Eden, *The Whole Works of the Rt. Rev. Jeremy Taylor, D.D.* (10 vols, London, 1859) v.238.

the most solemn Musik, and ful Harmoni of Voices and loud Instruments in Consort, is most fit for the most solemn Congregations, at solemn Times & in solemn places; when, upon some extraordinari occasion, the Church is assembled to prais and pray God for his goodness:¹²

John Cosin regarded ‘the setting forth of God’s worship in praise and psalms’ as not an outdated practice of the Old Covenant, the ceremonial law, but as

that part of moral and perpetual service, the order whereof was most particularly set down in the Old Testament in Solomon’s Temple, As the sacrifice was burning on the altar and the wine poured out upon it in the inward court, which was their ceremonial and figurative service; in the meantime the Levites stood upon their pulpits in the outward courts, where the people, men and women, were licensed to come, singing the psalms of God’s praises which was their moral service of it, to last for ever... the psalms of God’s praises.. was not to be reckoned of by the by, but as a main part of God’s public service¹³

Henry Peacham, writer and traveller, engaged directly with the critics of church music in his *Compleat Gentleman* (1622), a manual for aspiring gentry.¹⁴ He, in common with many, commentators, was able to use the precedent of the Psalms and certain parallels with the singing of individual Israelites, such as Miriam. He rejected the charge of ‘our sectaries’ that worship was not advanced by singing and instruments, and by ‘antiphony, rests, repetitions, variety of moods and proportions and the like’ and continued

For the first, that it is not contrary but consonant to the word of God so in singing to answer either, the practice of Miriam, the prophetess and sister of Moses, when she answered the men in her song, will approve; for repetition, nothing was more usual in the singing of the Levites, and among the psalms of David.¹⁵

The passage continues to consider the Levitical service directly:

And wherein doth our practice of singing and playing with instruments in his Majesty’s chapel and our cathedral differ from the practice of David, the priests and Levites? Do we not make one sign in praising and thanking God with voices and

¹² *The Principles of Music*: p.99.

¹³ “Notes on the Book of Common Prayer”; *Works* vol v, p. 446

¹⁴ *DNB* ‘Peacham’ xliv.133-5.

¹⁵ In Exodus 15: 20, Miriam led the other women of Israel of a song of praise to celebrate the crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of Pharaoh and his horsemen. The AV translates her song as ‘Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.’

instruments of all sorts ... and which, lest they cavil at as a Jewish ceremony, we know to have been practised in the ancient purity of the church.¹⁶

This crucial question of the extent to which the elements of the Jewish service discussed above had been abolished by Christ's sacrifice and which ones remained incumbent upon Christians was one broached by Humphrey Sydenham:

And here I cannot but juttle once more with those spirits of contradiction [the critics of church music]..... A Psalm by Voyce barely they can allow, but not by Instrument, as if this were abrogated by the Ceremoniall Law; the other not, and yet if one, why not the other? And what other is that in use now in our Cathedralls; which is like those of old is an Instrument of Exultation Job 21;12 and had his originall (for ought I know) from the invention of Iubal himselfe¹⁷

For Sydenham, music in church was

not so obsolete, now, or superannuated, that it should be buried wholly with that Law of Ceremonies; it hath been the practice of God's best servants, in most ages of the Church, nay in most ages of the world, except that first age of Sacrifices... but not long after them, when there was not yet a Temple built, but an Arke onely (a mysticall porch or entrance to that Temple to come) we finde a Representative Cathedrall amongst the Jewes. Singing men, and Psalmes, and Instruments of Musicke¹⁸

Fulke Robarts argued that it was wrong to suggest that everything done by the Levites was necessarily a practice of the old dispensation

But as that onely is Popish which is peculiar to a Papist, and wherein he in doctrine or ceremonie innovateth against the Word of God, and the faith and practice of the primitive and purer Church; so that is Jewish or Leviticall, which is peculiar to the people of the Jewes or Leviticall worship;

There were some ceremonies that it 'becommeth all men to doe', which could also be derived from Scripture, 'the light of nature' and the Fathers. These were 'neither Jewish, Leviticall nor Popish, but morall pious and Christian.'¹⁹

Peter Lake has explored the maximum and minimum positions taken in Laudian polemic over Old Testament precedent. One of the key figures in this was

¹⁶ Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622): 'Of Music', reprinted in O. Strunk (ed.), *Source Readings in Music History* (London, Faber, 1952) pp. 331 - 337: p.332.

¹⁷ Sydenham, 'The Well tuned cymbal', pp. 23-4. Jubal was widely credited with the invention of music itself, being described in Genesis 4: 21 as 'the father of all such as handle the harp and organ' (AV).

¹⁸ 'The Well Tuned Cymbal' p.8.

¹⁹ *God's Holy House and Service* (London, 1639) p.13.

Giles Widdowes, who made what is possibly the most direct prescription for music (although not what kind of music) in the literature of the period. He identified

decent orderly signs [which were] universal, ordained for the whole church [firstly, the raising of hands, from Hebrews 6:2 and Acts 8: 17: secondly, uncovered heads in church, from 1 Corinthians 11: 4, 7] The third is loud musical instruments, Psal. hence organs and bells are used in the church 4. Bowing at the name of Jesus. Phil 2: 10 and many such like. These are necessary ceremonies because they signify the substantial, internal duty of the catholic church²⁰

He then went on to identify a category of ceremonies not given but necessarily derived from scripture, including the cross in baptism, kneeling at communion, the surplice, and other contentious matters, and finally some indifferent ones. This is the most direct use of such precedents to be found in the literature of the period, but restricted to the Psalms, rather than the more contentious Levitical service.

However, it is also possible to find thinkers who placed music among that category of practices of Israel which had been figurative or typical of the new dispensation under Christ, and were thus now rendered obsolete. The anonymous writer of the Puritan tract *The Holy Harmony* conceded that

tis true the Levites were there with their instruments of musick, which David made to praise the Lord, which I conceive he was forced to do, to comply with the people .. so that David happily suffered these plausible things, whereby to attract the peoples recourse to the Temple...

However the situation had now changed: the Christian must now know

that our hearty devotions are the only musick for the house of God, Psalmes and Prayers are not the heavenlier for Copes and Vestments, not the louder for wind-Instruments.²¹

William Ames, the Puritan divine living in exile in the Netherlands, elicited figures as diverse as Erasmus and Thomas Aquinas to counter his opponent's suggestion that 'Organall musicke was gods ordinance in the old Testament, and that not significant, or typicall, and therefore is sinfully called Idol-service.' For Erasmus, music with instruments was no more suitable 'then if we should recall the incense, tapers and other shadowes of the Law, into use.'

²⁰ Peter Lake, "The Laudians and the Argument from Authority" in B.Y. Kunze/ D.D. Brautigam (ed.), *Court, Country and Culture: Essays in Early Modern British History in Honor of Perez Zagorin* (Rochester U P, 1992) pp. 149-175: p. 154. Widdowes, *The lawless, kneeless schismatical Puritan* (Oxford, 1631) pp. 71 -2. On Widdowes' Laudianism, see Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* p.81.

Ames concluded that the claim that such music was not part of the obsolete dispensation of the Old Testament ‘is without reason and against the current of our Divines.’²² Henry Barrow had made a similar point in his *Brief Discoverie of the False Church*. It had pleased God at that time to command

such Scriptures to be there read upon such daies, occasions etc. such psalmes to be sung by such Levites of such an order, of Asaph, Heman, or Jeduthun, to be sung in such a time, with such musickes, such instrumentes etc.

However these were practices ‘inseparably joynd’ to that ministry of that particular temple

and were meerly ceremonial, now utterly abrogate, with that temple and ministerie, and no way belong to the ministerie or church of Christ.²³

However, the issue of how closely these interpretative tendencies map onto divisions of Laudian and Calvinist is complicated by instances such as George Wither, the poet generally regarded as clearly Calvinist in his theology and style of piety. He nonetheless invited his polemical opponents to consider how different the use of instrumental music by the early church was from the ceremonial law

both in the nature of the thing itself, and the time of instituting it, they would I believe perceive, that praising God with Musicke were no more to be abolished, then praying unto him; and that it as properly appertaineth to his service throughout all the Ages of the Law of the Church, as any circumstances of honouring him whatsoever.

Indeed, if one were to look in the book of Revelation

you shall finde mention both of Harps and Trumpets among the worshippers of the Lambe, even after the abolishing of the ceremoniall Lawe; and that in the use of those Instruments, there may bee yet included some Mysteries, which we are to search after²⁴

It was also possible to find in the Old Testament censures of the use of inappropriate music. Throughout the account of Israel’s history there is a subtle connection between peoples not in conformity with the will of God, and the use of

²¹ *The Holy Harmony, or A Plea for the abolishing of Organs and other Musick out of the Protestant Churches of Great Britain [etc.]* (London, 1643): no pagination.

²² *A Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies in God’s Worship* (Amsterdam, 1633) pp.404, 405, 406.

²³ Leland H. Carlson, (ed.), *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590* (London, Allen, 1962) p.370.

music. In Daniel 3: 5, the call to adoration of King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image had been given by music of various instruments,²⁵ and the prophet Amos had censured those rulers who turned from God and 'that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music'.²⁶ Peter Smart, when attacking the innovations of Cosin, condemned the introduction of

Organs, Shackbuts and cornets and all other instruments of Musicke, which were used at the Consecration of Nabuchadonozer's image (unfit instruments for Christian churches).²⁷

The writer of the *Holy Harmony* also noted that

at the dedication of Nebuchadnezzars image, the Cornet, Trumpet, Harp, Sackbut, Psaltery and all instruments of Musick Dan 3; 7 were alarums appointed as Ushers to the adoration of those living statues to a dead image, as if the eare must be rouzed before the heart, or as if men's devotions were like Bucks, Bores or Hares, not to be rouzed without hollowings, hornes and hounds.²⁸

William Prynne noted with approval the comment of St Jerome on the passage from Amos above:

The lust of the pallate, and all variety of dainty meates is not sufficient, for you soothe your eares with the songs of the Pipe, the Psaltery and the Harpe: and that which David hath made for the worship of God, finding out variety of Organs, and musicall instruments, you transfer to pleasure and luxury.²⁹

The earlier treatment by John Bale of the city of Babylon in Revelation 18 has very clear parallels with this association of music with dissolute and sinful peoples:

The merry noise of them that play upon harps, lutes and fiddles, the sweet voice of musicians that sing with virginals, viols and chimes, the harmony of them that pipe in recorders, flutes and drones, and the shrill shout of trumpets, waites, and shawms, shall no more be heard in thee to the delight of men.
Neither shall the sweet organs, containing the melodious noise of all manner of instruments and birds, be played upon, ... nor yet the fresh descant, pricksong,

²⁴ *A Preparation to the Psalter* p. 85. The reference to harps is Revelation 14:2-3, those to trumpets are various.

²⁵ 'O people, nations and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship [the image].

²⁶ Amos 6: 5.

²⁷ 'A briefe, but true historicall Narration' article 8.

²⁸ *The Holy Harmony*: no pagination.

²⁹ *Histriomastix* p. 276.

counterpoint, and faburden be called for in thee, which art the very synagogue of Satan.³⁰

The Old Testament then provided an ambiguous set of indications to the Stuart church, at once offering an universally acceptable sanction to the praise of God, and a tangled web of conflicting precedents over the particulars of that praise. A consideration of the hermeneutically more acceptable New Testament will reveal a no less troublesome legacy.

The witness of the New Testament is at once the most important and the most ambiguous source of reference available to thinkers of this period. In terms of references to actual practice, one of the few references available is that in Matthew 26, when Christ and his disciples sang what is described as an hymn after the Last Supper. John Cosin adduced from this that ‘the antiquity of hymns in the Christian church doth sufficiently appear, by that of our Saviour.’³¹ ‘Touching the lawfulness of singing Psalmes’ wrote Edward Elton ‘I hope wee doubt not, wee have Christ his own example to warrant it.’³² Elton, along with many other commentators including George Wither, referred to the passage in the epistle of James; ‘Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.’³³ However, the two most powerful and controversial references in the New Testament are both of St Paul, both with a similar import:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spirituall songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord [Colossians 3: 16: Authorised Version]

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to your selves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord [Ephesians 5: 18-19: AV]

³⁰ The passage is Revelation 18: 21-22. Bale renders it ‘with sch violence shall that great city Babylon be cast [down]... and the voice of harpers, and musicians and of pipers, and trumpeters shall be heard no more in thee’: ‘The Image of both churches, being an exposition of the most wonderful book of Revelation’ in Henry Christmas (ed.), *Select works of John Bale* (Cambridge, Parker, 1849) pp.535-6. This edition gives no date. The *STC* suggests 1548: p.30.

³¹ “Notes upon the Book of Common Prayer” in J. Sansom (ed.), *The Works of the Rt. Reverend John Cosin, Lord Bishop of Durham*. 5 vols. . (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1851) : vol. v; p. 59. The Geneva Bible has “And when they had sung a psalme, they went out into the mount of olives”; Matthew 26:30. The Authorised Version renders ‘psalme’ as ‘hymn’. This verse was also noted by Jeremy Taylor, “An Apology for Authorised and Set Forms of Liturgy, against the Pretence of the Spirit” p. 291.

³² Elton, *An exposition* p. 531. The reference is to Mark 14: 26, the parallel reference to the same occasion.

³³ James 5: 13 (AV). Elton, *An exposition* p.531: Wither, *A preparation to the psalter* p.84.

It will be noted that both these texts are at once clear on the necessity to praise in music, but at the same time imposing a condition that the heart of the worshipper must be fully engaged. A brief consideration of reactions to these texts in the continental reformations will illustrate the fault lines in understandings of this Pauline inheritance.

Martin Bucer, in the *Justification and Demonstration from Holy Scripture* of 1524, gave a detailed account of musical practice in his new Strasbourg liturgy:

After [the confession and absolution] the whole congregation sings some short psalms or a song of praise...[after Communion] the congregation sings again: a song of praise

He justified such a use of music from both the Colossians and the Ephesians passages:

With all our might we are to love God. Why, then, should we not sing to Him as all the saints of the Old and New Testament have done, provided that such song take place in the heart and not with the mouth only; but rather that it arise and come forth from the heart. This is what the Apostle means when he says: and sing to the Lord in your hearts, for his meaning is not that we sing without voice, for how could the others be admonished and edified, or how could we discuss with each other what he writes to the Ephesians.³⁴

John Calvin was later to take a similar position, in the *Articles* of 1537. The singing of psalms could be derived from

the example of the ancient church and also the testimony of Saint Paul, who says that it is good to sing in the congregation with mouth and heart. We are not able to estimate the benefit and edification which will derive from this 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.³⁵

Hence we can see that both Bucer and Calvin took a positive position on the use of music in worship, with the crucial stipulation that the understanding and the hearts of the participants should be engaged. In contrast, Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich took a far more radical view of the implications of Paul's text. Zwingli viewed true prayer as an essentially private, silent and individual act, and public liturgy was a necessity, rather than something desirable. For anyone therefore to interpret Paul's

³⁴ Charles Garside Jr, 'The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music: 1536-43' *Trans. American Philosophical Soc*, new series, 69 (1979) Part IV 5 - 35; pp. 11-12.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.10.

words in Ephesians as prescriptive of actual music was therefore going beyond the actual text. Paul's words

concerning psaltery and singing in the heart give no help to those who protect their swan songs by them. For in the heart, he says, not with the voice. Therefore, the psalms and praises of God ought to be treated as if our minds sing to God ...[therefore] as soon as it can be done, this barbarous mumbling should be dispatched from the churches.³⁶

The thinker on music in worship in England was confronted with an ambiguous heritage of instruction from the Apostle. Music was at once exhorted unto, but under a clear, but yet difficult to define, condition of the engagement of the heart. It could also be read as disallowing the use of music entirely. We must now examine the various functions of these texts in English debate.

Jeremy Taylor, usually regarded as a Laudian figure, adduced from the Pauline passage in Colossians that it “became a precept evangelical that we should praise God ‘in hymns and psalms and spiritual songs’”.³⁷ The commonplace status that the phrase had achieved is demonstrated by its inclusion in the dedication to part 1 of William Byrd's *Gradualia* collection of 1605, ‘To the True Lovers of Music’³⁸:

For you, most high minded and righteous, who delight at times to sing to God in hymns and spiritual songs, are here set forth for your exercising the Offices for the whole year which are proper to the chief Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of All Saints...

The godly Sir William Waller took the view that ‘there is nothing of greater use for the raising and sweetning of our affections towards God then the singing of his high praises in Psalmes and Hymnes and Spirituall Songs.’³⁹ Edward Elton interpreted the Colossians passage as a exhortation to ‘sanctification, as well in putting off the old man with his workes, as in putting on the new man with his parts’ and to ‘diligent study of the word of God, to invocation, and calling on God in the name of Christ, and to thanksgiving’. Christians were being encouraged to use and dwell upon the word, indeed ‘yea, to make use of it in their mirth, shewing forth mirth in singing

³⁶ Ibid. p. 11: see also C. Garside, *Zwingli and the arts* (Yale, 1966).

³⁷ ‘An Apology for Authorised and Set Forms of Liturgy’ p. 292.

³⁸ The *Gradualia* was a large collection of Catholic liturgical texts set to music, published in two volumes. The preface is reprinted in Oliver Strunk (ed.), *Source Readings in Music History* p. 329

after a holy manner, in Psalmes, and Hymnes and Spirituall songs, singing with a grace in their hearts to the Lord⁴⁰

However, many thinkers would also stress the cautionary, and in some cases prohibitive, reading of the text. William Prynne cited the opinion of Erasmus:

Why doth the Church doubt to follow so worthy an author - yea, how dare it be bold to dissent from him. What other thing is heard in Monasteries, in Colledges, in Temples almost generally, than a confused noise of voices? But in the time of Paul, there was no singing but saying onely.⁴¹

A striking feature of the debate over music is the regularity with which this dual interpretation appears from the very early years of the English Reformation, and how little the terms in which it was expressed altered as the period progressed.

Thomas Becon, the Protestant chaplain to Thomas Cranmer, expounded a view of true prayer with numerous Zwinglian overtones:

now God is a spirit; therefore requireth he a spiritual manner of worshipping , which doubtless proceedeth from the heart, and not from the stentoreous and crying voice of the mouth. The pure affection of the heart, and not the whispering noise of the lips, doth God require. Moreover St Paul saith: "God is my witness, whom I worship in my spirit" "In my spirit" saith he, and not in the unfruitful babbling of my lips.

In the passage from Ephesians, the Apostle

maketh mention of the heart, willing that all praises, songs and melody be done in our hearts to the Lord our God. As though he should say, All that is ever done without the heart is vain , unfruitful, yea, and plain abomination before God, rather working damnation than salvation to the doers of it⁴²

Elsewhere, Becon made a participant in a debate declare the following to much the same effect, although without appearing to go as far as Zwingli and disallow church music *per se*:

A christian man's melody, after St Paul's mind, consisteth in heart, while we recite psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and sing to the Lord in our hearts "giving thanks always for all things unto God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" All other outward melody is vain and transitory , and passeth away and cometh to nought⁴³

³⁹ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry* p.27.

⁴⁰ *An Exposition* pp.520-21.

⁴¹ *Histriomastix* p. 285.

⁴² 'The pathway to prayer full of much godly fruit and Christian knowledge' in J. Ayre (ed.), *The Early works of Thomas Becon, STP* (Cambridge, Parker 1843) p.123.

⁴³ 'The jewel of joy' (1553) in Ayre (ed.), *The Catechism of Thomas Becon with other pieces* (Cambridge, Parker, 1844) p.430.

An anonymous commentator from the 1540s also suggested that

thou mayest perceave thys maner of musyck that the Apostle wyllthe us to use, doth dyffer from those songes and voyces in whyche nothyng is regarded but the sounde. No man teacheth ner can teache other by such manner of songes, but only use it to satisfye their covetous and gredy appetyte, in whyche nether Goddes glorie is soughte, nor theyre neyghboures edefyed &c

This was however no grudging acceptance of the use of music:

‘Syngynge to the Lorde in your harte’: The meanyng of all these wordes is, that the word of God maye so abounde and encrease amongst Christen men, that oure whole delyte and pleasure maye be therin, and that we speake of it, syng of it, have meditation in it and that after such a sorte, that it be done in all wysdome, and to the edefyng of all men, so that it maye be harde frute fully and folowed earnestlye. And thaate it maye be swetely songe with devotion of mynde and burnyng of the harte, to the laude and prayse of the Lorde, and that there be no fayned nor colde devotion in it.⁴⁴

Edward Elton asked his reader in 1615⁴⁵

Doe not wee (many times) when wee are singing of Psalmes either in private or public, thinke of nothing lesse, than of the matter we sing ? yea, are [our hearts] not many times ranging and roving abroad, and far removed from it.

This would not do; the reader ought to ‘looke that thine heart bee thus tuned and prepared, that thy singing may come from the inward affection of thine heart, as the chiefest instrument of that heavenly musicke.’ In singing these ‘Psalmes and Hymnes, and spirituall songs’ the heart

must goe with our voyces and tongues, our singing must not be only with the voyce, or rise onely from the throat, but it must proceed from the depth of the heart; wee must sing Psalmes and holy songs with understanding, and with an holy feeling in our hearts; our hearts must be cheerefull in singing, even possessed with heavenly joy, and affected according to the matter that wee doe sing’

This was clearly both cautious, but by no means reticent in its commendation of the virtues of singing the psalms. What is being offered here is less a rigid strait-jacket to

⁴⁴ this appears in a printed collection of sermons or expositions on epistles and gospels for Sunday and holy days, beginning 'the Epistle on the fyrst Sondaye of Advent' and ending 'the ende of this brefe Postyl' (London, Grafton 1540-3) f.107r: Short Title Catalogue no. 2971. The only copy is in the Cambridge University Library, classmark Syn 8:54.234. The text for the epistle of the fifth Sunday after the Epiphany is 'Teachynge & admonyshynge one another with Psalmes hymnes and spretuall ballettes'. I am indebted to Alec Ryrie for the reference.

⁴⁵ *An Exposition* pp.534, 533.

prevent abuse than a ideal marriage of text and song, capable of exciting the highest state of devotion.

The work of the Laudian sympathiser Humphrey Sydenham exemplifies the simultaneous use of both sides of Paul common to very many of the commentators under discussion. He too notes that “in the dawne and rising of the Primitive Church, we read of Spirituall Songs, Hymnes, and Psalmes”. He then, however, goes on to utilise the Apostle’s reference in Ephesians 5 to demonstrate this same concern with the inner state of the singer rather than with the singing itself. These hymns and psalms were, in the time of Paul:

(it seemes) spoken only, not sung; or if there were singing then, no singing aloud. No Melody so proper then, as of the heart (and surely then, and now, that is the best private Melody) Speaking to your selves (saith Saint Paul) and making melody in your hearts to the Lord Ephs. 5: 19. And this was the loudest melody the Church could or durst make awhile, being yet but a handfull of Apostles, with their Proselytes or Catechumeni, and these for the most part under the sword of persecution too.⁴⁶

Despite the melody of the heart still being the paramount kind, the church began to use church music (and, for Sydenham, rightly so) as the sword of persecution was lifted.

It is therefore clear that the Scriptures, the central source of authority for Christians, gave a multi-faceted and ambiguous witness on the right ordering of church music. Scripture was full of exhortations to sing and praise God, but subject to paramount yet ill-defined conditions of the engagement of the whole man in singing them. The hermeneutic relationship between Old and New Testaments was also an unresolved question with regard to the use of music in worship. We now move on to consider the equally troublesome legacy of the early and medieval church.

⁴⁶ ‘The Well Tuned Cymball’ p. 12.