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Music and the English Reformation

> Memorandum: the 13th day of March, 1549, the Parliament was prorogued which had been kept at Westminster since the 24th day of November last past, in which session divers godly acts were made . . . at this session of Parliament one uniform book was set forth of one sort of service with the ministration of the Holy Communion and other sacraments to be used in this realm of England and other the king's dominions whatsoever. To be observed after the feast of Pentecost next coming, as by an Act of Parliament against the transgressors of the same doth appear. . . .[1]

The first Edwardian Act of Uniformity, here so carefully noted by the diarist Charles Wriothesley, marked a stage in the English Reformation that was of crucial importance to church musicians.[2] Much of great moment had, of course, happened before this. During the early years of reformation—that is to say from the time of Wolsey's indictment under the Statute of Praemunire in 1529—the practical effects of reform had been to enhance the power of the Crown at the expense of the Church. There were the four anti-clerical acts passed during the four sessions of the "reformation" parliament, the Act for the Submission of the Clergy, and in particular the Act of Supremacy of November 1534, which recognised Henry as "the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England". This last measure had given Henry a power over the Church that no English monarch had ever had, and the King was quick to use it. In the following year he appointed Thomas Cromwell

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Vicar-General, authorising him in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, to draw up Injunctions "to be kept and observed" throughout the Church of England. This was seen at the time to be a radical break with the past, for in all that had gone before the King had acted with the concurrence of Convocation. One of the most striking manifestations of this new power was to be seen in the wholesale redistribution of church property, a process that began in 1536 and which continued in various guises for fifty years or more. The first and most spectacular stage was over within the space of four years. During that short time well over eight hundred monastic foundations were dissolved. Many of these were small, with annual revenues of less than £200 and communities of fewer than a dozen members, and it is unlikely that in these houses music played any important part in the daily services. Many of the greater houses, however, maintained skilled choirs—at a most conservative estimate the number cannot have been much below fifty—and, as Table 1 shows, nearly all disappeared without trace.[3]

During the course of the Henrician reformation the daily services continued to be said and sung in Latin, though steps were taken—of far-reaching consequence—to make them more intelligible to the laity.[4] Item 7 in the first set of Royal Injunctions (1536) required every parish church to purchase a copy of the newly authorised English Bible (see Plate 1). From 1543 onwards, lessons at Matins and Evensong were to be read in English. Sermons were encouraged, and—to ensure a minimum standard of competence and conformity—a system was established requiring all preachers to be licensed. And throughout the closing years of the reign a campaign was waged against idolatrous practices of all kinds: "superfluous holydays" were discontinued, images and relics were destroyed, pilgrimages were discouraged and the "Bishop of Rome's pretended power" denounced.

From time to time, it must have seemed that further substantial reforms and perhaps even a vernacular liturgy were

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imminent. During the latter part of 1537 and the beginning of 1538, Henry toyed with the idea of an alliance with the Lutherans, and a Lutheran delegation actually arrived in London to begin negotiations. It was then that Cranmer and

TABLE I

Some of the Wealthier Monastic Houses, c. 1535, with Annual Revenues of £500 or more*

The Benedictines

	£		£
WESTMINSTER ABBEY	3400	ELY, the Cathedral Priory	1084
Glastonbury Abbey	3311	CHESTER ABBEY	1003
CANTERBURY, the Cathedral Priory	2349	Spalding Priory	933
St. Alban's Abbey	2102	Tavistock Abbey	902
Reading Abbey	1938	Battle Abbey	880
Abingdon Abbey	1876	NORWICH, the Cathedral Priory	874
Ramsey Abbey	1716	Winchester, Hyde Abbey	865
PETERBOROUGH ABBEY	1679	Coventry, the Cathedral Priory	808
Bury St. Edmund's Abbey	1656	Malmesbury Abbey	803
YORK, St. Mary's Abbey	1650	Winchcomb Abbey	759
Tewkesbury Abbey	1598	Chertsey Abbey	659
WINCHESTER, the Cathedral Priory	1507	Pershore Abbey	643
GLOUCESTER ABBEY	1430	Bath Abbey	617
Canterbury, St. Augustine's	1413	Selby Abbey	606
DURHAM, the Cathedral Priory	1366	St. Benet Abbey, Norfolk	583
WORCESTER, the Cathedral Priory	1290	Milton Abbey	578
Evesham Abbey	1183	Cerne Abbey	575
Crowland Abbey	1093	Shrewsbury Abbey	532
		Colchester Abbey	503

The Augustinians

	£		£
Cirencester Abbey	1051	BRISTOL ABBEY	670
Merton Priory	960	OSENEY ABBEY	654
Leicester Priory	951	Llanthony	648
Plympton Priory	912	Gainsborough Priory	628
Waltham Abbey	900	Southwark Priory	624
London, St. Bartholomew's Priory	693	Thornton Abbey	591
St. Osyth's Abbey	677	Kenilworth Priory	558

Others

Fountains, Furness, St. Mary Graces (London), Stratford, and Vale Royal (Cistercian); Sheen and Charterhouse (Carthusian) and Lewes (Cluniac).

Many less wealthy foundations also maintained choirs, including the cathedral priories at Rochester (£491) and Carlisle (£418), both of which were refounded.

* Those listed in small capital letters were refounded as cathedrals.

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Cromwell began to draft proposals for a new liturgy, but the negotiations and the proposals both came to nothing.[5] There then followed a period of reaction. "Heretical" books were seized and burned in large numbers, many of them being by liberal Protestants who were later to hold office in the Somerset administration. One of the banned books was Coverdale's *Goostly psalmes*, a collection of devotional words and music in the vernacular based upon the *geistliche Lieder* that were then so popular in the Lutheran States.

That any far-reaching liturgical reforms were being considered at this time is unlikely. Wriothesley did, indeed, record in his diary that an English version of Te Deum had been sung on several occasions after meetings of a progressive London group "called by the papists the new sect".[1] But the very fact that he bothered to note this down testifies to the rarity of the event. Similarly, London gossip had it that an English form of Mass had been celebrated at least twice in small villages north of the city. Again, however, it was obviously the exceptional nature of the event that caught the popular interest.[6]

The Henrician reformation did, nevertheless, see one major liturgical change: the publication of an English Litany in 1544. During the early summer of that year England was at war, both with Scotland and France. Henry, feeling that some divine assistance would be welcome, wrote to Cranmer, as was customary in such circumstances, asking that processions be held throughout the province of Canterbury:

> We greet you well; and let you wit that, calling to our remembrance the miserable state of all Christendom, being at this present, besides all other troubles, so plagued with most cruel wars, hatreds, and dissensions, as no place of the same almost, being the whole reduced to a very narrow corner, remaineth in good peace, agreement, and concord, the help and remedy whereof, far exceeding the power of any man, must be called for of him who only is able to grant our petitions, and never forsaketh nor repelleth any that firmly believe and faithfully call on him. . . .[7]

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A new English form of procession had by then been prepared, but the King insisted that the clergy should instruct the people thoroughly in it before it was actually used, and suggested a delay of a month or two in order to allow time for such instruction. His reasons for requiring an English form of words are particularly interesting. He had evidently accepted by then the basic principle that was to be the mainspring of the English liturgical reformation, namely that the laity should fully understand and take part in public worship:

> . . . being resolved to have continually from henceforth general processions in all cities, towns, churches and parishes of this our realm, said and sung with such reverence and devotion as appertaineth; forasmuch as heretofore the people, partly for lack of good instruction and calling, partly for that they understood no part of such prayers or suffrages, as were used to be sung and said, have used to come very slackly to the Procession. . . .[7]

The Litany or English procession, as it was then often called, was an amalgam of several existing Latin forms of procession. In each case, the Latin procession involved a movement outwards towards a "station". For the festal and Sunday processions the station was made before the rood; during Lent the station was made at some altar within the church; whilst in times of need, and on Rogation days, the station was again made at an altar and involved the celebration of Mass. The procession then returned to the original point of departure, halting at the steps of the choir to sing a versicle, respond and collect. During the penitential processions—all but the Sunday and Holyday processions, that is—the Litany was sung. Cranmer's English procession owes something to all four Latin forms, although it was designed for a time of need.

Shortly after this, Cranmer set to work to formulate English versions of the other Latin processions—at the King's command—and to these he added some simple "plainsong" tunes of his own composing. Neither the translations nor the music have survived, unfortunately, but there remains Cranmer's interesting

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letter to the King on the subject of processional music. The letter deserves quotation at length, though it must be borne in

TABLE 2

The Sarum and English Processions Compared

Sundays and Holydays	*In times of need*	*During Lent*	*Rogation*	*The 1544 English Procession*
		During the outgoing procession		
Anthems with prose	Anthems, penitential psalms, Litany, Pater noster, versicles, responses and collects	Respond	as *In times of need*	Litany, Our Father, versicle, response and collect
		At the station		
(The station being made before the rood)	(The station being the altar at which Mass is to be celebrated)	(The station being made at an altar within the church)	as *In times of need*	
Antiphon, versicle, response and collect Bidding of the Bedes	Respond or anthem, collect, Kyrie, Pater noster, versicles, responses and collects MASS	Kyrie, Pater noster, Preces and Miserere, collect		
		During the returning procession		
Anthem	Litany	Invocations of the Litany	Invocations of the Litany	Anthem (O Lord arise. O God we have heard . . . From our enemies . . .)
		Before the steps of the choir		
Versicle, response, collects MASS	Versicle, response, collects		Versicle, response, collects	Versicle, response collects MASS

mind that Cranmer's opinions were not necessarily those of the Church at large; nor did they refer to part-music—a fact that has often been overlooked:

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> . . . in mine opinion, the song that shall 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 Matins and Evensong *Venite*, the hymns *Te Deum*, *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, *Nunc dimittis*, and all the Psalms and Versicles; and in the mass *Gloria in excelsis*, *Gloria Patri*, the Creed, the Preface, the *Pater noster* and some of the *Sanctus* and *Agnus*. As concerning the *Salve festa dies*, the Latin note, as I think, is sober and distinct enough; wherefore I have travailed to make the verses in English, and have put the Latin note unto the same. Nevertheless, they that be cunning in singing can make a much more solemn note thereto. I made them only for a proof, to see how English would do in song. But because my English verses lack the grace and facility I would wish they had, your majesty may cause some other to make them again, that can do the same in more pleasant English and phrase. . . .[7]

In the years that followed, Cranmer's more radical colleagues were to insist more and more that church music of all kinds—both monodic and polyphonic—should be in the simplest note-against-note style.

During the last two years of Henry's reign, Cranmer was at work upon a revised Latin Breviary in which he was considering the elimination of non-scriptural texts, a new yearly calendar of readings from the Old and New Testaments, a monthly rather than a weekly rota of psalms, and the compression of the eight daily office hours into two services—Matins and Evensong. For some unknown reason, however, nothing came of these projects, and it seems that the English procession was the only form of service in the vernacular to be approved during the thirty-eight years of Henry's reign.

Henry's death, on January 28th, 1547, caused Cranmer unusual distress.[8] The Archbishop undoubtedly felt a keen sense of personal loss, but he also mourned the passing of one who, he believed, was best able to carry through further reforms. Cranmer's fears for the future can well be understood, for Henry's successor was a mere nine-year-old boy. The new administration, headed by the Lord Protector Somerset, did

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indeed lack the firm authority to ensure the ultimate success of a liturgical reformation. It lost no time, however, in implementing a radical policy of reform.

Within six months of Edward's coronation a Royal Visitation was in progress to ensure the end of "popish" practices and ceremonies.[4] No more than two candles were to be lit at Mass; bells were to be rung before the start of service and at no other time; Latin processions were to be replaced by the 1544 English procession (a remarkable decision, this, since the original Litany had been designed for times of need and not for general use); monkish habits were to be discarded; cathedral musicians were no longer to have their hair tonsured—and so on. At the same time, new emphasis was given to the need for informed teaching and preaching.

The Royal Visitors carried out their work with great thoroughness and, as they visited each cathedral in turn, they enquired minutely into details of routine and organization. Frequently, musical matters came within the scope of their enquiry, and the decisions reached show that moves were already being made towards a simpler and more comprehensible liturgical style. At Winchester, for instance, the Visitors forbade the singing of sequences and stipulated that chapters from the Old and New Testaments should be read to the choir every day before Mass and Evensong. At Canterbury, they decreed that Mass should only be sung in the choir, and that sung Lady Mass on Holydays be discontinued in order to make way for a Sermon or a reading from the Homilies. At York, they forbade the singing of more than one Mass each day, and they recommended that the lesser hours, Dirges and "Commendations" should be discontinued. They also forbade the choir to sing responds, and ordered that all the traditional Latin "anthems" (antiphons) should be replaced by English substitutes. At Windsor, the Royal Visitors decided that the choristers should be required to say Matins and Evensong together in English before going into the choir to sing—an unusual provision, this, and one that pointed the way more

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than any other to future developments. The Church's representative on the Windsor commission was William May, Dean of St. Paul's, who was well known for his progressive views.

The Lincoln Cathedral Injunctions—dated April 14th, 1548—contain more specifically musical information than any of the others. In addition to many of the points already mentioned, the Visitors decreed that:

> 25. [The choir] shall from henceforth sing or say no anthems of our Lady or other Saints, but only of our Lord, and them not in Latin; but choosing out the best and most sounding to Christian religion they shall turn the same into English, setting thereunto a plain and distinct note for every syllable one: they shall sing them and none other. And after them read the collect for the preservation of the King's Majesty and the magistrates, which is contained and set forth in the English suffrage.

Injunction 28, too, would seem to imply severe restrictions in the use of music if, that is, Lady Matins and Evensong were customarily celebrated with as much music as was the Lady Mass:

> 28. To the intent the service of this Church called the Lady Matins and Evensong may be used henceforth according to the King's Majesty's proceedings, and to the abolishing of superstition in that behalf, there shall be no more Matins called the Lady Matins, Hours, nor Evensong, nor ferial dirges said in the choir among or after other Divine Service, but every man to use the same privately at their convenient leisure, according as it is purported and set forth in the King's Primer.

Under such circumstances, it is not unreasonable to suppose that in other churches, too, where the principles of liturgical reform found sympathetic support, restrictions were placed on the more extravagant forms of Latin service music, and simple settings of English texts were encouraged in their stead.

The first reports of impending change, however, came from London—and, as might be expected, from the Chapel Royal where, it seems, the prototypes of the new English services

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were first tried out. On April 11th, not two months after the young King had been crowned at Westminster "with great honour and solemnity" according to the Latin rite, an English form of Compline was sung by the Chapel Royal choir.[9] In November of that year, the customary service was held in Westminster Abbey to mark the opening of the new sessions of Convocation and Parliament, and Charles Wriothesley carefully noted in his diary the fact that the choir sang English versions of the Gloria, Creed, Sanctus, Benedictus qui venit and Agnus Dei. Early in the following year an English supplement to the Latin Mass was published,[10] and shortly afterwards new English versions of the daily offices were tried out by the choir at St. Paul's. In the same month, at the annual commemoration service for Henry VII in Westminster Abbey, the ordinary of the Mass was again sung in English, as in the previous November.[11]

To those who lived in London at the time, events must have seemed confusing enough. Changes were constantly being made in the established forms of service—changes that obviously had official approval. Yet, apart from the 1548 *Order of Communion*, official guidance was sadly lacking. Outside London there was even greater confusion. In an attempt to establish some kind of liturgical uniformity, until such time as an English Prayer Book could be completed, Somerset wrote to the Vice-Chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge. In his Cambridge letter he urged that the University should do its utmost to avoid "dissension and disorder", since its influence was so widespread:

> September 4th, 1548: from Somerset "to our loving friend our Vice-chancellor of Cambridge, and to all masters and rulers of colleges there.... For so much as upon divers orders in the rites and ceremonies of the church, there might peradventure some dissension or disorder arise amongst you in the university, to the evil example of other, we have thought good to advertise you and in the king's majesty's behalf to will and command you that until such time as an order be taken and prescribed by his Highness

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