

# Music of the English Reformation

A divided culture

by

Brian Goodell  
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## **Setting the Stage for Reform**

When Henry VIII's first wife was unable to bear him a male heir, he decided that his marriage should be declared invalid and so that he might be allowed to find a better mate. The pope at the time, Clement VII, declared that annulling the marriage would be a violation of the will of both the church and of God. This irked Henry to the point where he decided to not only openly defy Clement's orders, but also to have himself declared the head of all religious entities within England. These actions caused Henry to be swiftly excommunicated, but they also allowed him to take the title of the Supreme Head of the Church of England. While Henry now was in full control of his own state religion, he initially seemed to want to keep much of it the same. He enjoyed the grandeur of Catholic mass and the traditions that these services held. Most of all, he enjoyed the music.<sup>1</sup> So, for a while, Henry used his new position to aggrandize himself while largely leaving the traditions of the church intact. However, he had no way of knowing that in taking control of the church, he would begin the process of creating a deep divide within his country.

The English Reformation was never a smooth journey. The Church of England was pulled in a different direction with every monarch from Henry to Elizabeth. Furthermore, while Henry did not want to reform many church practices, the fact that he actively split with Rome empowered groups of citizens who wished to push the Church of England towards either a Lutheran or a Calvinist model. These divisions created different types of religious cultures within various socio-economic classes of England. The cultures of these classes was demonstrated through the type

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<sup>1</sup> Scarisbrick, J.J. Henry VIII, pgs. 88-91 © 1997 Yale University Press

of music that they had access to. As the classes drifted farther and farther apart, it strained the fabric of the country and caused the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England to be rife with religious, political and cultural conflict.

### **After the Schism – Religion and Music under Henry VIII**

When Henry decided to take control of the church in England, he did so not over any specific doctrinal differences<sup>2</sup> but rather as a calculated power grab and as a way to deal with his country's financial problems. Henry had gone to war several times during his reign, and was fairly successful on the field of battle. However, he was often driven back by an empty war chest rather than by opposing generals.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, excommunication from the Catholic Church could almost be seen as more of a blessing than a curse. When Henry was excommunicated, the Pope essentially forfeited the church's claim to tithes within England as long as Henry was king. These tithes were still collected by the church, but it was now the Church of England benefiting, rather than the Catholic Church. Because Henry controlled the Church of England, this was essentially allowed him to enhance his treasury without raising new taxes on his subjects. While the majority money was funneled towards church projects, the fact that all funds are fungible meant that the crown still benefited.<sup>4</sup>

The next step Henry took towards appropriating church money was the dissolution of the monasteries. Led by Thomas Cranmer, the English government decided to take an official survey of all religious monastic holdings in the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless you count the "let me divorce my queen with no consequences" doctrine

<sup>3</sup> Scarisbrick, J.J. *Henry VIII*, pgs. 102-105 © 1997 Yale University Press

<sup>4</sup> Bernard, G. W. *War, Taxation, and Rebellion in Early Tudor England: Henry VIII, Wolsey, and the Amicable Grant of 1525*, © 1986 Harvester Press

Some of these orders had ties to other countries<sup>5</sup> and many orders had grown far too small to justify the large buildings and lands that they owned. Furthermore, while services were still held in monasteries, many of the monks and nuns in England had ceased taking parts of their vows seriously. Henry and Cranmer decided to offer an ultimatum. If the monks and nuns were truly following their vows strictly then they would be allowed to continue practicing in their monasteries. If not, the state would seize the lands for their own purposes. This allowed the state to appropriate a fair number of the monasteries right away, but there were others that could not be so easily acquired.<sup>6</sup> However, it did not take long for Henry to come up with reasons to seize the remaining monastic lands. These lands not only brought a large amount of wealth to offset the growing costs Henry was incurring through his wars, but they also brought a new ability for the crown to buy support through gifts of land.<sup>7</sup>

While it is easy to see the positive effect that these actions had on the coffers of the crown, it is equally easy to see the negative impact of these changes on the religious establishment. While the Dissolution of Monasteries had a concerted negative effect on those living and working there,<sup>8</sup> Henry's system of reforms also

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<sup>5</sup> Particularly France as a result of the Norman Conquest

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, some monasteries tried to physically resist the attempts by the crown to take their land by force. These resistance movements were put down violently and they led to Henry considering any attempt to oppose the dissolution as treasonous.

Baskerville, Geoffrey *English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries* © 1937 New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press

<sup>7</sup> Gasquet, Francis Aidan Cardinal, "Suppression of English Monasteries under Henry VIII," The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 10 © New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 11 Apr. 2013

<sup>8</sup> Granted, the dissolution of the monasteries had a negative effect on the people of England in addition to the monks and nuns who lived there. Monasteries were one of the few institutions at that time that cared for the poor and were also places that encouraged education and the maintenance of knowledge. Unfortunately many books from monastery libraries which had been so well preserved were lost during this period. Some were sold off en masse; others were destroyed for the use of their bindings. Traces of books from this era can be found hidden in the bindings of other books. If it had not been for the fact that there were legitimate protestant reformers helping push the dissolution through, and the fact that

affected many others within the church. Henry's decision to have his marriage annulled went against both Catholic doctrine and a direct order from the pope. Because of this, most of the higher up members of the clergy protested the annulment bitterly. Henry needed to silence this opposition, as religious leaders had a great deal of power over the minds of the people. The tool that Henry used to achieve this end was the law against "praemunire," or the acting on the orders of a foreign power to subvert the state. Henry used this law initially to merely fine religious leader. However, as the reforms grew bolder, and the protests grew louder, Henry turned increasingly towards using this law to justify jailing and executing members of the clergy and replacing them with more pliable subjects.<sup>9</sup>

While the new laws passed by Henry's parliament helped to bring the Catholic hierarchy in England to heel, there were also ancillary members of the church whose lives were affected by the changes. This group was made up of people who worked for the church but were not in liturgical positions of power. Within this group, we are most interested in church composers and musicians. Most, if not all, composers at the beginning of Henry's reign were Catholic and thus wrote music for the Catholic liturgy. The style of this music was distinctly English while also drawing on Catholic musical traditions from the continent. Additionally, most new music was written by composers who were employed either by various churches and cathedrals throughout the country or by the crown. Due to Henry's actions, a large portion of the money that had been going to individual churches and parishes was now going to the crown

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members of the gentry were much enriched by this action then there likely would have been much more resistance to it.

<sup>9</sup> Guy, J.A, "Henry VIII and the Praemunire Manoeuvres of 1530-1531," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 384 pg. 481-503. © July 1982 Oxford University Press

instead. Furthermore, when the monasteries were dissolved, England lost both an important space in which music was composed and performed, as well as an institution that transcribed and preserved music of the church.<sup>10</sup> Despite these factors which could have worked contrarily to composers during Henry's reign, music actually flourished and this time could be seen as the beginning of a golden age for composition in England.

There were several factors that allowed for the blossoming of music that occurred during Henry's reign. Examining Henry's personality gives one clue as to why music in this era was not diminished. Henry thought of himself as a renaissance man, and most contemporary accounts show that he made a point of trying to make this impression on his subjects.<sup>11</sup> Henry was a composer and was accomplished at playing the lute, organ and the virginals. He also was known to be a good singer who reveled in the chance to perform new music.<sup>12</sup> In addition to his love of making music, Henry was also a great patron of the arts. While his grandfather, Edward IV, had employed a mere five musicians to work in the royal court, Henry had up to fifty-eight musicians working for him at the height of his reign.<sup>13</sup> Henry's patronage of the arts combined with his newfound wealth gained from plundering the country's churches allowed him to have a robustly musical court.

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<sup>10</sup> By this point, of course, the printing press had come along rendering the second of these two tasks slightly less important. However, many manuscripts from earlier eras that had been preserved were lost.

<sup>11</sup> Scarisbrick, J.J. *Henry VIII*, pgs. 134-140 © 1997 Yale University Press

<sup>12</sup> All information about the talents of monarchs must be taken with a grain of salt, however, because a criticism taken the wrong way could result in a loss of titles or worse. However, *The Life of Sir Peter Carew* (in *Archeologica*, xxviii, 1840, p.113) mentions that the king was 'much delighted to sing' and that he often sang with Carew 'certain songs they called fremen songs.'

Greer, David, "Henry VIII, King of England," Oxford Music Online, Accessed on 3/28/13

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

Most of the musicians working in Henry's court were Englishmen, but several were accomplished instrumentalists and composers from abroad. On one hand, the fact that some of the most prominent musicians in Henry's court were foreign seems strange when one considers the nationalist flavor of his reign. On the other hand, there was still a stigma that continental Europe was the height of culture so there would be no shame in luring their top musicians to the English court.<sup>14</sup> Far more notable was Henry's decision to include Jewish musicians in his court. Jews had been expelled from England since the late thirteenth century and it would be another hundred and fifty years before they would be officially welcomed back. It seems that Henry cared very little about the provenance or religion of his court musicians. If they could play music that he found pleasing, they were welcomed enthusiastically.<sup>15</sup> This was particularly true of the earlier years of Henry's reign – before political turmoil and attempts on his life soured the king's demeanor. This exuberance was observed by a Venetian ambassador visiting Henry's court who declared that the choristers "non cantavano ma giubilavano (did not sing, but jubilated)."<sup>16</sup>

Aiding the collective jubilation of the English music scene under Henry was the proliferation of new composers who would influence the English music scene for over a century. After all, what good is musical jubilation without the compositions to match? The two most important English composers who wrote during this time period were John Taverner and Thomas Tallis. Both of these composers occupied prominent

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<sup>14</sup> Henry often wrote the lyrics to his compositions in French rather than English as French was considered the more refined language at the time.

Greer, David, "Henry VIII, King of England," Oxford Music Online, Accessed on 3/28/13

<sup>15</sup> There are many anecdotes that demonstrate Henry's love of music. One well known story is of an afternoon when Henry spent over four hours listening to the playing of Venetian organist Dionisio Memo.

ibid

<sup>16</sup> June 1515; quoted in F. Ll. Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* © Buren, 1980 p. 171

positions in the sacred music community before the split with Rome, but afterwards only Tallis remained.<sup>17</sup> In a way, Taverner could be seen as a casualty of the religious uncertainty that plagued this period. He went on to live another decade after he retired from music, and likely could still have held a post at any of the top churches in England. Unfortunately, Taverner seems to have chosen both his friends and his religion unwisely. Taverner was initially appointed to his position as the first Organist and Master of the Choristers at the Cardinal College in Oxford by Cardinal Wolsey. Wolsey had formerly been the Archbishop of Canterbury until his strong disapproval of Henry's annulment led first to his replacement and then to his arrest on charges of treason.<sup>18</sup> Taverner resigned his post shortly thereafter.<sup>19</sup>

This hypothesis that Taverner left his post at the Cardinal College in Oxford for religious reasons is on the one hand quite flawed, but on the other hand very revealing. Indeed, while Taverner was working at his post in this cathedral he was reprimanded for his religious involvements by the church hierarchy. However, contrary to what one might assume, it was not Catholic connections that he was being chastised for. Instead, Taverner was scolded for consorting with Lutherans who supported much more radical changes to church orthodoxy. Despite his involvement with this group, he managed to escape punishment because he was thought of as not much of a real threat.<sup>20</sup> This incident is illuminating in two respects. Firstly, it projects an attitude prevalent in both the royal court and in the church that musicians

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note here that part of the reason for this was simply the difference in age between the two men. Tallis was at the beginning of a career that would span the rest of the century.

<sup>18</sup> Wolsey actually died on the way to his trial of an illness, but it is highly likely that had he lived he would have lost his head.

<sup>19</sup> Bowers, Roger "Taverner, John," © Oxford Music Online, Accessed 4/2/2013

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

were not powerful enough politically or religiously to cause real problems. This makes some sense, as musicians were dependent on their patrons for work and money, therefore making them easily marginalized. The political elites believed that there was far more danger from a priest causing dissent through their sermons than from a composer writing music laced with rebellious words.

The second thing to take away from this incident with Taverner is the fact that his Lutheran connections caused him more problems than any Catholic composer's Catholicism in this period immediately following the split with Rome. We have seen earlier how Henry's decision to take control of the church was far more a political decision than one based in any deeply held religious conviction. Following Henry's takeover of the church, most of the doctrines that did not have to do with Papal authority and deference to Rome remained in place.<sup>21</sup> It was the Lutherans and other later groups of Protestants like the Puritans who wanted to really change the way that the church operated. These groups were seen both by the monarch and the religious establishment as dangerous even despite the fact that the Church of England had technically already undergone a "reformation." In the end, the case of Taverner shows that, as long as composers are creating works that please the aesthetic tastes of their employers, their religious preferences were not terribly important. This seems to have been the case with Thomas Tallis who held onto his Catholic faith while simultaneously rising from one prominent musical post to another.

The musical community during Henry's reign was a very open one. Henry himself seems to have not cared much at all who his composers were, and outside of

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<sup>21</sup> Henry was even known to have written several masses and demonstrated admiration for some Catholic traditions.  
Greer, David, "Henry VIII, King of England," Oxford Music Online, Accessed on 3/28/13

the court, most churches still had financial resources to support multiple musicians to help perform services. The open nature of music in Henry's court allowed for the free flow of ideas between composers, and the works of composers from other cultures doubtless had a strong influence on English court composers for generations. Additionally, Henry's reign was the first time that the English Chapel Royal rose to compositional prominence within Europe.

### **The Chapel Royal**

Before examining how religious and political intrigue dictated the lives of English composers following Henry's reign, it is important to explain what the Chapel Royal was and how it was used by English monarchs. When a composer was assigned to the Chapel Royal it was unlike any other assignation in England. In this time period, the term Chapel Royal did not stand for building or church unto itself, but rather the composers, musicians and priests chosen to serve the spiritual needs of the Monarch. These religious figures and musicians were based in all of the churches that were directly under royal control.<sup>22</sup> The Chapel Royal mainly consisted of two groups of musicians. The first of these groups were the singers who would perform the worship services for the monarch and also for state functions held at the royal court. This group was comprised of both children and adult singers known respectively as Children of the Chapel and Gentlemen of the Chapel. The other musicians in the Chapel Royal were the organists. These musicians were similarly

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<sup>22</sup> This changed in the mid-seventeenth century when the Chapel was permanently housed in a building in Whitehall. However, this building burned down in 1698 and since 1702 the Chapel has been based in St. James' Palace.

Source: "The Chapels Royal: History," <http://www.royal.gov.uk/TheRoyalResidences/TheChapelsRoyal/History.aspx>, Accessed 4/2/2013

called Gentlemen of the Chapel and likely also took part in singing for the monarch. The organists of the Chapel Royal also had the responsibility of composing the works that would be sung for the monarch. The leading musician in the Chapel was known as the Master of the Children and directed the choir. It is unclear what position Tallis held when he was invited to join the Chapel, but at various points he was an organist and shared the duties of the Master of the Children.

In addition to the responsibilities listed above, the Gentlemen and Children of the Chapel were expected to accompany the monarch on state visits and even into battle.<sup>23</sup> This list of responsibilities left little room for the Gentlemen of the Chapel to pursue lives outside of their duty to the monarch. The music that was produced by the Gentlemen could be seen as the official music of the royal court and was used by monarchs as a way of displaying English cultural achievements to rival heads of state. The list of composers who were selected to be in the Chapel Royal covers almost every major English composer of the late Renaissance era. In addition to Tallis, the Chapel employed William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Morley, John Blow, John Bull and Henry Purcell. While there were some well-known composers in England who were never invited to join the Chapel Royal, notably John Dowland and John Taverner, the majority of England's most prolific Renaissance composers took positions in the Chapel at some point during their lives.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The expectation to be with the monarch in battle was more of a remnant of the earlier medieval period, but on the few occasions when he led the English army into battle, Henry was known to bring along a rather large entourage.

Scarlsbrick, J.J. Henry VIII, © 1997 Yale University Press

<sup>24</sup> Granted, while these composers were indeed prolific they also had significant advantages composers who were not in the Chapel in terms of having their music preserved to modern day. Chapel composers had the best access to printers and their works were the most widely disseminated.

While the Chapel Royal was originally concerned primarily with the spiritual needs of the monarch, it was under Henry VIII that the focus of the Chapel began to shift more towards the monarch's aggrandizement. We have already seen how Henry greatly expanded the role of musicians in his court as compared to his father. However, he was not content to simply expand the number of musicians required to serve him. In order to celebrate his marriage to Anne of Cleves,<sup>25</sup> Henry had the Chapel Royal at St. James's Palace constructed.<sup>26</sup> While this was initially only one of many Chapel Royals within England, it later became the official Chapel Royal because of both the beauty of the building and its prominent location. This overtly musical focus may have offended some in the religious hierarchy, but Henry never seemed to care what they thought anyways. However this new attitude towards the purpose of the Chapel Royal was received, it was undeniably a boon to English music as it was likely the spark that allowed for the English musical Renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### **Edward VI and Mary I Escalate Religious Tensions**

While Henry himself was not a serious religious reformer, some of his chief ministers did try to enact real changes in the church towards the end of his reign. The biggest push came from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer likely had been influenced by Lutherans in his travels to Germany and is known to have kept correspondences with Protestant theologians throughout his life. He began to advocate for having church music sung in the vernacular rather than in the

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<sup>25</sup> His fourth marriage for those of you keeping score at home.

<sup>26</sup> Source: "The Chapels Royal: History," <http://www.royal.gov.uk/TheRoyalResidences/TheChapelsRoyal/History.aspx>, Accessed 4/2/2013

traditional Latin so that people attending services might better understand the meanings of the words used in services. Cranmer also tried to replace the complex polyphony of Catholic sacred music with a more homophonic style of music with an emphasis on the text rather than on the notes. Finally, the service itself was transformed as parishioners began to be encouraged to sing the chant sections of the liturgy with the professional singers. The professionals still were the only ones to sing most of the music for the service, but the inclusion of ordinary singers and the use of the vernacular certainly had a large impact on both the English music scene and the services of the Church of England.<sup>27</sup>

While these changes were indeed significant in beginning to adjust English religious culture, they were still incredibly moderate compared to other countries' reformed churches. This was to change following Henry's death and the ascension of Edward VI. Edward was crowned king at the tender age of nine and ruled for a mere six years before succumbing to illness. However despite Edward's lack of political influence on account of his age, the young king took a very keen interest in the state of religion in England. He wished to push the Church of England to more closely resemble other reformed churches in Europe. His first step towards achieving this goal was an act that severely disrupted the lives of musicians throughout England: The Dissolution of Chantries. Nicholas Temperley described the plight faced by musicians employed by the church:

[The dissolution] brought to an abrupt end the careers of many professional musicians and thus placed severe restrictions on the capabilities of a parish choir. In 24 London churches named in the chantry certificates submitted to the authorities, there had been, in all, 74 conducts, all of whom were now disendowed. Organs in most churches were dismantled or

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<sup>27</sup> Elton, Sir Geoffrey R. "Thomas Cranmer," © Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 4/4/2013 <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/141839/Thomas-Cranmer/1606/Martyrdom>

sold...The parish clerks remained, although they too were greatly impoverished when the property of their guild, the Fraternity of St. Nicholas, passed to the Crown.”<sup>28</sup>

Some of the wealthier churches were able to retain a small number of professional musicians, but most could no longer support enough singers to carry out the complex polyphony that had been the tradition of sacred music.<sup>29</sup>

There is little debate on whether or not Edward was sincere in his desire to reform the church. Then again, sincerity is what one might expect from a nine-year old being led to conclusions beneficial to his handlers. While the Dissolution of Chantries did have a devastating effect on the resources available to most churches, it was enormously beneficial to both royal coffers and those who had the real reins of power. In this way, the Dissolution of Chantries was incredibly similar in effect to the Dissolution of Monasteries. The biggest difference is the fact that many monasteries were already hanging on by a thread when they were claimed by the state. The chantries on the other hand were alive and well. They consisted of funds, lands, rents and private chapels which were given by donors in order to perform special services or maintain things like choirs. While the chantries did create two classes of parishioners within churches, they also helped those churches function and provide for the whole congregation. Some of the confiscated assets were held onto by the crown, whereas others were divvied up amongst the regents and their political allies. With the chantries gone, English churches were forced to rely on whatever tithes were left over after the state took its share of religious taxes.<sup>30</sup> This new distribution of power not only pleased the regents who gained resources with which to buy support,

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<sup>28</sup> Temperley, Nicholas “The Music of the English Parish Church” Pg. 13 Vol. 1 © 1979 Cambridge University Press

<sup>29</sup> Morrill, John S. “Edward VI” © Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 4/4/2013  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/179773/Edward-VI/92393/Additional-Reading>

<sup>30</sup> Duffy, Eamon, “The Stripping of the Altars” pgs. 115-118 © Yale University Press

but it also satisfied the more vocal reformers who wanted to see a simpler church that was more equal and less corrupt.<sup>31</sup> By stripping priests and parishes of their special monetary and land grants, Edward and his council of regents managed to move the Church of England in a substantially more Protestant direction.

At this point, it is hardly surprising to note the political motivation behind these big religious changes in England. It is likely that there were some factions within the English regency that were pushing for real reform beyond simply stripping the church of power and money. This is best evidenced by some of the other religious laws passed by Edward's government. The first of these was a mandate that required compulsory attendance at worship services. While this reform did not include many punishments for disobedience, it did lay the groundwork for more repressive laws passed by later regimes. The other big change was a new English liturgy written by Thomas Cranmer called the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>32</sup> This new liturgy became mandatory in all English churches through the Act of Uniformity, and the combination of this act with forced attendance at religious services led to what became known as the "Prayer Book Rebellion" and other religious uprisings.<sup>33</sup>

These changes had a profound effect on music and composition in England. On the negative side, we have already seen how reduced funding for churches led to considerably fewer professional musicians in England. Additionally, Edward was not nearly the patron of the arts that his father was. While composers who were already in the Chapel Royal had secure jobs, there were very few added during under Edward's

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<sup>31</sup> Granted, the Dissolution of the Chantries was an enormously corrupt act. The only difference was that the corruption was on the part of the government, not on the Church.

<sup>32</sup> Duffy, Eamon, "The Stripping of the Altars" pgs. 150-167 © Yale University Press

<sup>33</sup> Elton, Sir Geoffrey R. "Thomas Cranmer," © Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 4/4/2013  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/141839/Thomas-Cranmer/1606/Martyrdom>

rule. Furthermore, by reducing the funds that churches had to provide singers for worship, access to music and musicians became highly stratified. It was common for wealthier members of English society to have music performed at personal occasions like weddings and funerals. Lord Wentworth, to use one example, had a procession of around one hundred singers perform an elaborate service at his funeral despite his protestant faith.<sup>34</sup> This would seem to point to some hypocrisy amongst wealthier members of society who had formerly decried the use of complex music in worship services. However, accounts of such services do show that music was not as diminished as it could have been under a stricter Reformation regime. In addition to playing for wealthy patrons, there were some aspects of the newly reformed church that enabled musicians to find work. For example, very little of the new liturgy had musical settings. While many churches made up for this by either having previously sung portions of the service spoken or by using old melodies and chant with the new words, others were able to employ a very small number of musicians to embellish the texts with their music.<sup>35</sup> However, the sparser worship services and a Chapel Royal of diminished importance made life very difficult for most musicians throughout Edward's short reign.

### **Mary's Counterreformation**

While there is no doubt that Edward's government drastically altered the way that the Church of England operated, these changes were, for the most part, extremely short-lived. Cranmer's second Book of Common Prayer containing reformation ideas

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<sup>34</sup> Temperley, Nicholas "The Music of the English Parish Church" Pg. 14 Vol. 1 © 1979 Cambridge University Press

<sup>35</sup> Ibid pg. 15

was published in 1552. Unfortunately for Cranmer and Protestants throughout England this period of reform came to an abrupt halt in 1553 when Edward died and was succeeded by his half-sister Mary I.<sup>36</sup> Mary was Henry VIII's child by his first marriage, and although that marriage was annulled she was still able to claim the throne. Mary came to power with her mind set on restoring Catholicism in England by whatever means necessary. One of the first acts of her government was to repeal the religious laws passed under Edward. This action was originally seen in an optimistic light as it gave more freedom to parishes wishing to pursue different types of worship. These positive feelings dissipated quickly, however, when Mary began to enforce Catholic doctrine as law and the people began to revolt. Mary beat down resistance to her changes in a brutal fashion burning over 280 religious dissenters at the stake during her five year reign and leaving the bodies out for all to see. Amongst these dissenters was Thomas Cranmer who Mary held most responsible for the institutional changes that she despised. While Henry certainly killed far more people during his reign than Mary did, the burnings that Mary conducted helped create a strongly anti-Catholic sentiment amongst many people. It also gave the victims the status of martyrs rather than enemies of the realm.<sup>37</sup>

Mary's restoration of Catholic services throughout England did have a positive effect on musicians who had been put out of work by Edward's reforms. According to Temperley, "Mary brought about a full return to the old Latin services in all their elaboration, and with as much splendor as the time and the situation

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<sup>36</sup> Mary's succession was not nearly as simple as that though. Edward wished to pass on crown to Lady Jane Grey, a decision likely heavily influenced by several of his regents. However, Mary did end up seizing the throne and having Jane executed.

<sup>37</sup> Simons, Eric Norman, "Mary I" © Encyclopedia Britannica, Accessed 4/4/2013  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/367515/Mary-I>

permitted.”<sup>38</sup> This was fairly easily done in large churches particularly in London. These churches still had enough funds to hire several professional musicians for their services thanks to their central location and large congregations. However, even these churches were unable to fully recreate their formerly grandiose services because the money confiscated by Edward’s regime was never returned with the return of Catholicism. Smaller parishes had an even worse time trying to replicate what they had had before, as they often only had the funds to hire one or two musicians. In addition to the return of choirs, there were other areas of sacred music that benefited greatly from Mary’s Catholicism counter-reformation. The first of these was the reconstruction and replacement of some of the dismantled organs that had been scrapped during Edward’s reign. While, again, poorer churches often could not afford this, the restoration of the organ as an instrument of the church was a boon to composers and other musicians. Finally, this period saw the return of published Latin, liturgical songbooks the likes of which had not been seen since 1520.<sup>3940</sup>

While the return of organs and small choirs was certainly important in maintaining the music scene in England, it was the revival of published Latin music that helped foster a new era of musical growth. This growth came in the form of new publications from composers who would influence English music for the latter half of the century. The most notable of the composers who began their rise to prominence in this period was William Byrd. Byrd was a devout Catholic and likely welcomed the return of Catholicism to his country’s churches. One of Byrd’s earliest pieces is a

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<sup>38</sup> Temperley, Nicholas “The Music of the English Parish Church” Pg. 27 Vol. 1 © 1979 Cambridge University Press

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Steele, Robert “The Earliest English Music Printing,” © 1903 Bibliographical Society Chipwick Press

collaborative motet that he wrote with William Mundy and John Sheppard. Both of these composers were current Gentlemen of the Chapel which made their decision to work with young William all the more notable. He had studied with Tallis, who by this point was one of the Chapel's more senior members, and this connection may have helped Byrd gain access to these other two composers. The motet written by the three was not only a Catholic liturgical work, but it was also based on texts for the most important Christian holiday of the year: Easter. While the choice of texts reflected the Catholic nature of the Chapel Royal at this time, it also showed Byrd's strong adherence to his Catholic faith throughout this tumultuous period. Byrd's work throughout Mary's reign and his ties to the Chapel Royal through his teacher and his associates allowed him to gain prominence within the English musical community and paved his way into better jobs later in life.<sup>41</sup>

While the years of Mary the first were certainly bloody and, in the end, regretted even by many of her early supporters, they were necessary for the continuation of English musical growth during this era. Had Mary not attempted to restore Catholicism throughout England, it is possible that the English music tradition would have become more and more similar to the Lutheran tradition and other hymn based traditions.<sup>42</sup> While it is true that the restoration of Catholic music was never as complete as Mary would have liked, the return of complex polyphony after a short absence was certainly a boon those composers who were able to find work. However, the brief restoration of Catholicism in England could only have been beneficial in the

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<sup>41</sup> Bacon, Ariel Foshay "William Byrd: Political and Recusant Composer," *Musical Offerings* Volume 3, No. 1, pgs. 14-17 © Cedarville University

<sup>42</sup> Not that this is a bad thing. There were some English hymns published during this period that are beautiful in their own right.

long run if Mary was succeeded by a monarch who would not undo everything that she had done. Fortunately for England, that leader was Elizabeth I.

### **The Elizabethan Era**

Imprisoned throughout part of the Mary's reign, Queen Elizabeth I ascended to the throne and proceeded to preside over one of England's greatest eras of cultural achievement. It was not, however a period that avoided political and religious strife. Elizabeth was not a zealot like her half-sister, but she certainly ruled as a protestant and made a concerted effort throughout her reign to tamp down the threat of Catholic rebellion. Elizabeth ruled in a way that simultaneously persecuted Catholics for their beliefs while still extending the olive branch of pragmatism to keep both internal and external Catholic threats from challenging her reign. For example, her coronation ceremony was performed by Owen Oglethorpe who was the Catholic bishop of Carlisle. Furthermore, Elizabeth removed the heresy laws that were put in place by Mary which had been used as the justification for most of her executions.<sup>43</sup>

While her years were marked by economic and political instability, the arts in Elizabethan times reached perhaps their greatest height. In addition to Tallis and Byrd, this era saw prolific composers like John Dowland and Thomas Morley come into their own. Furthermore, literary masters, notably Shakespeare and Milton, produced some of the greatest works in English cultural history. This blossoming of the arts in England has led many scholars to come to the conclusion that the renaissance merely came to England late and this was its result. Whether or not this cliché is true, it is well-known that Elizabeth loved the arts and doted on the artists in

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<sup>43</sup> Morrill, John S, "Elizabeth I (Queen of England)" © Encyclopedia Britannica accessed 3/29/2013

her kingdom.<sup>44</sup> She always made sure to keep the Chapel Royal well stocked with musicians from prestigious abbeys and churches around the country. Though she did not have quite as many musicians in her court as Henry, almost every prominent one was an Englishman. These musicians were granted privileges and powers that elevated them above all other composers and performers and ensured that their works would be the primary ones heard throughout the country and abroad. Promoting musicians to this post served the double goal of allowing Elizabeth to enhance the prestige of the crown whenever she traveled while simultaneously rewarding those artists that she thought fit to represent her court.

Many scholars have pointed to Elizabeth's open-mindedness as a reason for this blossoming of the arts. They depict her as an even-minded and fair ruler who took a sharp departure from the government by persecution that Mary had run. This has some truth in it, as Elizabeth made some important concessions regarding certain sacraments to Catholics at the very beginning of her reign. These concessions allowed services to be conducted in a way that blended the Protestant and Catholic styles together.<sup>45</sup> However, this view of Elizabeth is incomplete. At the very beginning of her reign she expelled most of the Catholic members of the Privy Council in order to quell dissent. She also passed new laws which led to far more arrests and executions than had been carried out even under her half-sister who had managed to earn the nickname "Bloody-Mary."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Elizabeth's government passed laws

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<sup>44</sup> Haigh, Christopher, *Elizabeth I* (2nd ed.), © 2000 Harlow (UK): Longman Pearson

<sup>45</sup> Collison, Patrick "Elizabeth I (1533-1603)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008) accessed 3/12/13

<sup>46</sup> Granted, Mary ruled for far fewer years than Elizabeth did, so the numbers are a little bit skewed. Furthermore, both of these monarchs' execution lists were dwarfed by Henry VIII who is said to have been responsible for somewhere between 57,000 and 72,000 executions during his reign. This is a truly

against “recusancy” for the first time. Recusancy was the act of subverting the Church of England in some way. The main offense that was punished was simply the refusal to attend Anglican services, but there were other ways to incur penalties as well. These subversive actions carried with them penalties ranging from petty fines to imprisonment or the confiscation of property. However, serious offenses against the Church of England, like going abroad to be ordained as a priest or attempting to convert a protestant, could be met with torture or the capital punishment.<sup>47</sup> Overall, there are one hundred and ninety official Catholic martyrs from this era,<sup>48</sup> most of whom were priests, but some of whom were laypeople or Jesuits.<sup>49</sup> However, this total is far short of those who died for their faith, as many who were killed in rebellions did not have their names recorded.

At the time of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation, the influence that Thomas Tallis commanded over the music scene in England was unparalleled. He had survived three regime changes and much religious upheaval without either sacrificing his Catholic faith or losing his prestigious position within the Chapel Royal. Additionally, he had many pupils who had grown into fine composers, carrying bits of his style forward into the next generation of British music. Following the death of composer Robert Parsons,<sup>50</sup> Tallis was joined in the Chapel Royal by the most prolific of his students,

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staggering number, especially when one considers that England’s population at the beginning of Henry’s reign was only around 2.3 million people.

<sup>47</sup> Somerset, Anne Elizabeth I, pg. 101-103 © Anchor 1/7/2003

<sup>48</sup> Although there are likely more who have been forgotten or were not notable enough to be recorded in the official roll of martyrs.

<sup>49</sup> Hungerford, John “English Confessors and Martyrs (1534-1729) in Herbermann, Charles Catholic Encyclopedia © Robert Appleton Company

<sup>50</sup> Parsons was a fine composer and a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal himself until he drowned around 1571 in the river Trent. He was thought to have been one of Byrd’s teachers as they both served at Lincoln Cathedral concurrently. It is believed that he was either Catholic or at least to have harbored

William Byrd. While the entirety of the English sacred music scene in the sixteenth century was fraught with secret Catholics, few composers were as feisty and outspoken as Byrd. Eschewing the calm unobtrusive manner of his teacher and friend, Tallis, Byrd obstinately held onto his Catholicism and expressed it in his writing, his actions and his associations. While Tallis seemed to focus on survival and compliance in a career that spanned the reigns of four different monarchs, Byrd was unafraid of letting his religious convictions be known. Furthermore, it is likely that one of Byrd's pupils who also eventually joined the Chapel Royal, Thomas Morley, converted to Catholicism directly due to Byrd's tutelage.

Looking at the religious makeup of the Chapel Royal under Elizabeth and the way that it contradicted some of the laws that she passed, it would seem likely that one or more composers would have landed themselves in prison. It appeared directly subversive to Elizabeth's authority to have three prominent composers, Tallis, Byrd and Morley, in the Chapel Royal all breaking the law by observing a non-state sanctioned religion. However, despite this, neither those three composers nor John Dowland who was another influential Catholic composer can be found to have been punished in any major way for their faith. This makes some sense in the case of composers like Tallis and Morley, the former because he kept his head down by attending the protestant services and the latter because he is said to have converted back to the Church of England and even went so far as to conduct espionage abroad

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Catholic sympathies. Then again, he mostly served under Queen Mary, so the choice of Catholicism might have been out of self-preservation.

on its behalf.<sup>51</sup> The actions of these composers to shrink from their faith or to at least to mask it in compliance with the wishes of the monarch are rational given the danger faced by those who outwardly expressed their Catholic faith. However, this sort of double life was unacceptable to William Byrd.<sup>52</sup>

William Byrd has been described by scholars as the most unapologetically Catholic composer in sixteenth century Britain. His insubordination was well known as Byrd brought his religious protestations to every aspect of his life. Of these protests, the ones hidden within his music were often the most daring and borderline treasonous. For example, his 1588 publication of "*Psalms, Sonnets and Songs*," included a setting of a poem by Henry Walpole entitled "Why do I use my Paper, Ink and Pen?"<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, this poem was dedicated to the memory of Edmund Campion, a Catholic martyr who was hanged, drawn and quartered for high treason after he had been arrested by priest hunters.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, when this piece was being published, the poet himself was in prison for the crimes of Catholic priesthood and serving as a chaplain for Spanish troops fighting against England in the Netherlands. Walpole was eventually hanged, drawn and quartered after over five years in the tower of London where he had been repeatedly racked and tortured.<sup>55</sup> Had Byrd simply decided to write a piece that could be interpreted as having vaguely Catholic

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<sup>51</sup> Philip Brett and Tessa Murray, "Morley, Thomas" *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, © Oxford University Press, Accessed April 12, 2013

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19147>

<sup>52</sup> Bacon, Ariel Foshay "William Byrd: Political and Recusant Composer," *Musical Offerings* Volume 3, No. 1, pg. 14 © Cedarville University

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid* pg. 20

<sup>54</sup> Guiney, Louise Imogen, "St. Edmund Campion," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 5, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05293c.htm> Accessed 4/5/2013

<sup>55</sup> Wainwright, John, "Ven. Henry Walpole," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 15, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15540a.htm> Accessed 4/4/2013

sympathies,<sup>56</sup> it would be easy to pass off as an acceptable level of protest. However, he was honoring the words of a man who had committed actual crimes against the state by setting them to music from a musician of the Chapel Royal.

As Byrd retired from the Chapel Royal, his output of religiously charged music increased. After settling down in a home in Essex, he published three masses, the *Cantiones Sacraes* and *Gradualia*. The publication of masses was the most obviously insubordinate, as music like that only could be used in a Catholic service. The other two major publications included several motets that were written about politically sensitive subjects. Furthermore, these collections included settings of words based on “Gallows Texts” which are texts based on the last words of Catholic Martyrs.<sup>57</sup> Byrd was likely able to be freer with his output in this late period of his life because his reputation was secure and he was no longer representing the Royal Family with his compositions. Furthermore, his patron while he resided in Essex was another recusant, Sir John Petre. However, composing these sorts of pieces was not an entirely safe thing to do and Byrd was still likely taking the risk of imprisonment, fines or the loss of his estate.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to his musical protestations, Byrd showed a willingness to defy the crown in other areas of his life as well. For one thing, he and other members of his household were constantly on the list of recusants who refused to attend services. While it is unclear how often he actually had to pay the fees associated with this

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<sup>56</sup> This he did often. One good example is his setting of the text “Civitas Sancti Tui” which includes a section in which the singers cry out for Zion which has become a desert. Granted, this is a common text, so setting it wasn’t too out of the ordinary, but the frequency with which Byrd set these sorts of pleas does lend some credibility to the theory that he was expressing his own feeling of alienation due to his Catholic faith.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid pg. 21

<sup>58</sup> Ibid pg. 13

recusancy, it is known that his servant, John Reason, was imprisoned for around a year because of his inability to pay the fines associated with his absence from services. Furthermore, Byrd's wife, Juliana, was continually defiant of the laws against missing services and her name was a regular on the rolls of recusants.<sup>59</sup> Byrd himself was found on the rolls occasionally, but not with the same frequency as his servant or family members.<sup>60</sup> It is possible that Byrd's attendance in church was part of a requirement for his job and thus he could not skip services. Similarly, it is possible that his position within the Chapel Royal protected him from the consequences that were faced by his associates. This is the more likely of the two scenarios as Byrd's name was also found on a list of citizens known to be harboring or aiding Catholics in the country, but he was very rarely fined for these actions. Indeed, for all of William Byrd's defiance, he rarely faced any legal repercussions at all.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, instead of facing legal recompense for his actions in defiance of both the crown and the Church of England, Byrd was rewarded for his work like no composer before him had ever been. To start with, Byrd was granted a large land lease in conjunction with Tallis almost as soon as he was selected to join the Chapel Royal. Such a gift of land was not uncommon for members of the Chapel Royal, but being given this grant only a few years after joining was nearly unheard of.<sup>62</sup>

However, what was more notable even than the gift of land was the other grant given

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<sup>59</sup> Harley, John, William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal pg. 72 © 1997 Scolar Press

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 277  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> accessed September 22, 2011

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>62</sup> It is likely that Byrd's connection to Tallis helped him in obtaining this lease, as Tallis was at this point the longest tenured member of the Chapel Royal.

Harley, John "William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal," pgs. 65-67 © 1997 Scolar Press

to Byrd and Tallis by Queen Elizabeth: a monopoly on both the printing of music and lined music paper. This honor was incredibly important as it officially put Tallis and Byrd at the center of the English music scene.<sup>63</sup> Any composer that wanted to have their music published had to go through the two of them and their printer of choice. Furthermore, this gave Byrd the license to write what he wanted to write both musically and lyrically with only his sense of propriety and caution censoring him. Both of these grants were given prior to the Byrd's publication of much of his more incendiary works, but there is no evidence to support a claim that Elizabeth would have thought twice about giving the land or the monopoly based on Byrd's output.<sup>64</sup>

The way that Byrd was treated despite his defiance of the state religion creates interesting contradictions in the way that England was governed. On the one hand, religious persecution was a real problem. Catholics were often fined, imprisoned or killed for their faith. However, on the other hand the musicians who represented the court in the Chapel Royal were headlined by a pair of unrepentant Catholics, one of whom was openly insubordinate when it came to matters of faith. One explanation for this disparity of punishment is the fact that Byrd, Tallis and other artists like Shakespeare who was believed to have been at least raised Catholic were all geniuses in their respective fields. It's one thing to kill or imprison a priest or another member of the Catholic hierarchy, it's another to kill or imprison a prominent member of the country's art community. While there were protestant composers in both the Chapel Royal and other churches around England, Byrd and Tallis were considered the best, and therefore were irreplaceable.

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<sup>63</sup> Granted, their skill as composers had already done that to some extent, but this gave them the official seal of approval.

<sup>64</sup> Harley, John "William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal," pgs. 55-57 © 1997 Scolar Press

Part of the reason why artists were so celebrated in England at this time was because the initial renaissance movement seemed to pass the country by. Much of the great art and music of continental Europe failed to find an equal in England. There was no English Michelangelo or Da Vinci, and the musical renaissance seemed to hit the continent first as well with composers like Guillaume Dufay, Johannes Ockeghem and Josquin des Prez bringing innovative new musical styles. While England did boast a pair of distinguished composers in this early to mid-renaissance era – John Dunstaple and John Taverner – it was clear that most of the musical creativity that was occurring was based on the continent. This changed definitively when Tallis and Byrd occupied the Chapel Royal. In these two composers, England finally had a match for the musicians of the continent. However, Tallis and Byrd were not the only English composers of note during this era. They were joined by the blossoming English Madrigal School. Some of the notable composers in this style include Thomas Morley, Orlando Gibbons and Thomas Tomkins, all of whom composed while serving in the Chapel Royal.

### **Politics, Religion and the Chapel Royal**

The beginning of Elizabeth's reign had been marked by great enthusiasm from her people. Mary I's devout Catholicism and decision to marry Prince Phillip of Spain caused many to believe that the English crown was being controlled by Catholic powers outside of the country. However, Mary's actions in this era also emboldened Catholics who had been quieted by the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Further complicating matters was the fact that Queen Mary of Scotland was another fiercely devoted Catholic whom many believe should have inherited the throne instead of

Elizabeth. As Queen of Scotland, Mary Stuart did not have nearly as much power as Elizabeth, but she did have the backing of the Spain, France and Rome. Mary's continued resistance eventually forced Elizabeth to send in the English army to forcefully take the crown and put it into Protestant hands. However, instead of quelling resistance, the act of imprisoning Mary caused Catholics across the country to rise up and led to Elizabeth's excommunication by Pope Pius V. Elizabeth dealt with these protests harshly, having nearly seven hundred Catholics executed. Despite the fear that this brutality caused, however, Elizabeth had to deal with both rebellions and attempts on her life for the entirety of her reign.<sup>65</sup>

These internal and external Catholic threats shed some light on why Elizabeth ruled in a way that seemed full of contradictions. Many of the harshest laws against Catholic practices were not put into place until after the Marian revolts.<sup>66</sup> The point of these new laws was not to impose a certain faith on the populace, but rather discourage citizens from taking part in actions against the crown because of religious beliefs. Additionally, by limiting the ability of Catholic citizens to participate in mass or gather openly together, their ability to plan rebellions was diminished. Finally, these new laws gave the crown the ability to prosecute people based on suspicion of treason. If Elizabeth's agents suspected a Catholic citizen was attempting to cause an uprising but didn't have any proof, they could arrest or fine that person simply due to their religion. This allowed Elizabeth to keep a tighter hold on the reins of power and to use the fear of religious persecution to keep her citizens in line. By examining the

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<sup>65</sup> Collison, Patrick "Elizabeth I (1533-1603)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008) accessed 3/12/13

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

political reality that Elizabeth faced, the relative strictness of her laws against the Catholic faith begin to look more like pragmatism than zealotry.

However, what did this mean for her Catholic composers in the Chapel Royal? If Elizabeth's primary goal was to simply keep order, then her lack of prosecution or punishment makes sense. She was far more concerned with creating personal loyalty to the crown and herself than she was with creating religious loyalty to the Church of England. Elizabeth shrewdly figured out that by making her composers entirely dependent on her for their income, their estates, and their ability to publish music, she could guarantee their loyalty regardless of their religious beliefs. Furthermore, because the Gentlemen of the Chapel were constantly around the royal family, it would be quite easy for Elizabeth to have them watched for any signs of treasonous activity. For their part, Byrd and Tallis rarely gave Elizabeth cause to doubt that she had their full loyalty. The two composers dedicated many works to both Elizabeth and to her favored courtiers. Furthermore, Byrd was the first composer to set a madrigal in honor of the queen, and subsequently wrote music commemorating the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the queen's thirtieth Accession Day amongst other things.<sup>67</sup> Byrd was also known to have composed a large amount of music specifically for Elizabeth to play on the virginals.<sup>68</sup>

While Elizabeth was assured that she was unlikely to have to deal with any treasonous activities from her Royal Chapel, it is still somewhat puzzling that she would allow them so much freedom with what they wrote. It is likely that many of the

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<sup>67</sup> Bacon, Ariel Foshay "William Byrd: Political and Recusant Composer," *Musical Offerings* Volume 3, No. 1, © Cedarville University

<sup>68</sup> Kerman, Joseph "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," Lecture: 8/20/2005 published in: *A Byrd Collection* pg. 78

seemingly Catholic pieces written by Tallis and Byrd made their way into clandestine services throughout England. Furthermore, because of Tallis and Byrd's placement in Elizabeth's court, they were able to support Catholic causes financially with the money that they made composing. Thus, while Byrd and Tallis were not treasonous in their own right, their compositions and support of Catholics did act to subvert the Church of England and thus, by proxy, the crown. Elizabeth knew that Byrd in particular was doing this, but never felt the need to punish him or strip him of his privileges. Indeed, Elizabeth was even known to have forgiven charges and fees levied against Byrd on many occasions.<sup>69</sup>

To find an explanation for why Elizabeth continued to employ Catholic composers, one must look both at the nature of the protestant reformation as a whole and at the nature of international politics at that time. Let's first look at the nature of the reformation as a whole and how it differed on the continent and in England. As discussed previously, the main impetus for breaking with the Catholic Church in England was so Henry VIII could divorce his wife. Viewed cynically, one could argue that the break from the Catholic Church was merely a way for the King Henry to obtain more power and to confiscate church property. On the continent, however, religious reform had a far more theologically based start. Protestantism began with ideas from thinkers like Martin Luther and John Calvin who decried the corruption and extravagance of the church. Furthermore, they protested having services conducted in Latin and having the priest be the middleman between the people and God.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid*

<sup>70</sup> Luther, Martin "95 Theses" <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/274>, Accessed 4/2/2013

Part of limiting the extravagance of church services included changing the way that music was used. Prior to the reformation, most church music had a level of complexity that necessitated the use of professional or at least highly trained singers. Furthermore, because all church music was written in Latin, it was incomprehensible to the majority of church goers. While the texts may have become familiar over time, Protestant reformers wished to have all church music sung in the vernacular so the people would understand it. In addition to this, reformation composers tried to make their worship songs focus on the text rather than the polyphony. This is not to say that the music lost its importance completely as Martin Luther himself was an avid composer and believed that “God has preached the Gospel through music.”<sup>71</sup> However, it did mean that complex vocal polyphony began to fall by the wayside in countries that embraced the protestant tradition. This was even truer for some of the stricter sects of Protestantism like those modeled on the thinking of John Calvin. Calvinism, which informed the later Puritan movement in England, believed in a severe limiting of the types of songs that could be used in worship services and completely banned the use of musical instruments.<sup>72</sup>

While this era saw changing norms for music in protestant countries, it also saw a flowering of the musical tradition in Catholic countries. This was particularly true of some of Elizabeth’s chief rivals, namely France, Italy and Spain. The musical cultures of these countries gave rise to three of the sixteenth century’s most prolific composers: Orlando di Lasso, Giovanni Palestrina and Tomás Luis de Victoria. All

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<sup>71</sup> Leaver, Robin A, quoted in “Luther’s Liturgical Music,” pg. 97 © 2007 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>72</sup> Clive, H.P, “The Calvinist Attitude to Music, and its Literary Aspects and Sources,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*, T. 19, No. 1, pg. 80-102 © 1957 Librairie Droz <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20673881> Accessed 4/10/2013

three of these composers wrote in a Catholic style and are considered part of the counter-reformation that was sparked in response to the protestant movement.<sup>73</sup> These composers were considered to be the cream of the crop amongst musicians in continental Europe. While this recognition is well deserved, all three of these composers benefited from the fact that they composed in a style that was considered the pinnacle of musical expression at the time. Complex polyphonic Catholic music was both well-endowed and prominently featured in royal courts and in the church. This music was thus considered to be fit for kings, popes and God. While the counter-reformation did advocate for a simpler use of text within compositions,<sup>74</sup> the complex beauty of the lines written by these composers were not actively restricted in the same ways that their protestant peers were.

Elizabeth had been brought up with a strong musical education, and she doubtless would have known what was considered high art music and what wasn't. This likely informed her decisions when it came to giving the composers in her court somewhat free rein over the music that they wished to write. They still wrote music suitable to be used with services for the Church of England, but they wrote it in a style more akin to their Catholic counterparts than to the Protestant ones. Byrd noted this in the introduction to a book of motets that he published, saying "With soundest judgment, Alexander forbade that he should be painted or cast in bronze by anyone

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<sup>73</sup> Orlando di Lasso's work while living in Munich was particularly notable as Germany was one of the countries that had the strongest reformation movements. Munich became something of a hub of both counter-reformation sentiment and artistic achievement. Lasso was in the middle of both of these movements.

<sup>74</sup> The council of Trent was somewhat adamant on this fact. The Tridentine Reforms attempted to limit the complexity of music used in the church in favor of a simpler style that would convey the message of the text better. Granted, these reforms were not strictly enforced, but they did occasionally lead to more homophonic passages as opposed to the complex polyphonic ones.

Source: "Council of Trent". *Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1913.

but Apelles or Lysippus. Likewise, it was not permitted for me to fulfill my office in any other way than to adorn divine things with the highest art of which I was capable.” By writing his music in what was considered the highest art of the time, Byrd was not only glorifying God, but also the court that he represented. Elizabeth, in her travels to other countries, would have been able to elevate Byrd and his fellow composers for the world to see.<sup>75</sup> This allowed for Elizabeth to show her rival countries that England was more than a match for them culturally while her army and navy were demonstrating the point militarily.

### **The English Reformation: A Political, Economic and Cultural Power Grab**

The reformation in England affected nearly every aspect of life for both commoners and for the political and religious elites. Firstly, we will look at the effect that these changes had on the power structure in society. The biggest shift that occurred through the religious turmoil was the privatization of many religious lands and assets. While most of the confiscated lands were given to political allies of the monarch, some of them found their way into the hands of favored members of the religious establishment. This was particularly prominent under Henry, as he needed support of enough members of the clergy to make sure that his break with Rome didn't cause popular unrest. This practice was also common under Edward's reign when the sixteen members of his regency benefitted handsomely from the young king's decision to dissolve the chantries.

However, the actions taken by the government throughout the English Reformation had the largest effect on the poorest members of society. It's true that

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<sup>75</sup> Bacon, Ariel Foshay “William Byrd: Political and Recusant Composer,” Musical Offerings Volume 3, No. 1, © Cedarville University

when the monasteries were shut down, England lost a great store of cultural wealth. On a more pragmatic level, though, the country lost one of its biggest charitable institutions. Monasteries had been mainstays when it came to feeding and housing the poor in England, and when they were removed, nothing stepped up to fill the gap left behind. Furthermore, when the chantries were dissolved and confiscated by the crown, the individual parishes of England lost a great deal of their capacity to help serve the poor.<sup>76</sup> These stockpiles of money, assets and land were certainly used to enrich the members of the clergy tied to them, but they also helped churches provide charity. Finally, while the wealthy of the country seemed ready to jump on the religion of the day as long as they were receiving handouts from the crown, everyday people saw no real benefit from the constant changing of religions. Instead, political manipulations from the monarch disrupted their daily lives and tarnished the sanctity of their faith.

The result of the English Reformation from a musical standpoint was a centralization of compositional talent. With each wave of change came a weakening of the power of the church to hire and retain musicians for services. State funding increasingly became the best chance for a composer to establish himself and the only significant source of funding for music.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, with the institution of the Book of Common Prayer across England and the lessening of the role of music in worship services, music performance became a great deal less common throughout England. It is almost ironic that during this period of unprecedented musical growth within England, music would begin to have such a diminished role within society.

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<sup>76</sup> Dickens, A. G. "The English Reformation (2nd ed.)" pg. 86-89 © 1989 London: B. T. Batsford

<sup>77</sup> It should be noted that major composers were able to find wealthy patrons following their work in the Chapel Royal, but these patrons were usually only interested in established musicians.

Instead, the large output of music in this period was funded by and performed for the crown and wealthy elites. Granted, this is not too much of a break from the past, as musicians had almost always relied on these sources of funding for their works. The major change now was simply that there was much less of an avenue for new music to reach the average citizen. Churches had been a bastion of at least relative equality in many societies, and they had always supplemented their spiritual messages with music to glorify the words. England was different than other protestant nations in which hymn singing and simpler musical styles united people of a common faith. In England the churches had been stripped bare musically and the style of singing practiced by poorer and typically stricter Protestants was looked down upon by the elites of society.<sup>78</sup>

What is interesting about the reformation within England during this period is that it stratified into two different paths. As we have already seen, the path of the upper class was one in which religious reforms were almost always used as a way to obtain power and resources from the church. This was a reformation path that seemed to actually eschew changes to tradition, particularly musical tradition. The upper class and royalty of England wished to use the reformation to gain power, while still maintaining the cultural heritage of Catholicism in order to keep pace with their rivals. Many of the works written by Tallis and Byrd whilst in the Chapel Royal were written in Latin. This makes little sense from the point of view of the reformed English church that wanted to move towards the vernacular. However, it fits perfectly

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<sup>78</sup> Temperley, Nicholas "The Music of the English Parish Church" Pg. 50 Vol. 1 © 1979 Cambridge University Press

with the goals of a monarchy that does not want to give up their Catholic heritage and the cultural prestige that goes with it.

The lower class version of religious reform was quite a different story. Here the singing of complex polyphony in worship services had all but died out during Edward's reign. In many places it was replaced by congregational singing of simpler hymns and psalmodies.<sup>79</sup> This type of music was found utterly distasteful to the cultural elites and even Elizabeth herself who was said to have once walked out in protest when a psalm was sung to open a session of parliament.<sup>80</sup> The lower class reformers like the Puritans had fairly humble religious aspirations that were completely different from what the elites expected from their worship services.

Taking all of this into consideration, we can see that the English reformation was largely used to centralize power and wealth for the crown. With the exception of Mary's reign, the actual religious consequences of the actions taken were rarely considered. Even Edward, who was known to be quite devoutly protestant, was never really in charge of the religious change. Rather, it was his council of regents who wished to take advantage of a weakened church and enrich themselves by bringing it to the brink of bankruptcy. However, these changes had broader reaching effects than the monarchs ever knew. They were insulated, first by their court which could provide spectacular music and worship services that never diminished in splendor, and then by the city of London itself which did not have the same financial difficulties that the more rural and poorer areas did. The people resented the power grab made by the monarchy almost as much as they resented the cultural elites

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<sup>79</sup> Temperley, Nicholas "The Music of the English Parish Church" Pg. 45 Vol. 1 © 1979 Cambridge University Press

<sup>80</sup> Ibid pg. 46

sneering at their worship services.<sup>81</sup> In other countries, reforms in the church were made to cut out corruption. In England, the very act of reforming enabled corruption far greater than what had previously been engaged in by the church. What the monarchs failed to realize was the fact that to the common people, matters of religion were important for their own sake, not just for their political implications. It's as if the monarchy started out making a bet with monopoly money, but the country switched to real currency without telling them. The years towards the end of Elizabeth's reign and following her death included much religious unrest amongst the populace. These years saw the gunpowder plot devised by Catholic dissidents and, more importantly, the English Civil War which was born more as a result of the persecution of Protestant sects than of Catholics. These two events and the cultural and material inequality that sparked them off would change the shape of British politics and culture forever.

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<sup>81</sup> Temperley, Nicholas "The Music of the English Parish Church" Pg. 57 Vol. 1 © 1979 Cambridge University Press

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