

Goodness of Forms: The Demand for the Artistic Quality of Music for the Liturgy

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ABSTRACT: The demand for the artistic quality (“goodness of forms”) of music for the liturgy is a cornerstone of St. Pius X’s Motu Proprio *Tra le Sollecitudini*. This article examines the genesis of this important criterion in the writings of Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, and elucidates its significance in the context of search for the right relationship between liturgy and music in the Church’s tradition. Post-conciliar liturgical renewal highlights the difficulty of reconciling the principle of active participation with the demand for the artistic quality of sacred music. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI addresses this problem by offering a theological foundation for an artistic transposition of the faith and thus for a more confident role of music in the liturgy.

KEY WORDS: *Tra le Sollecitudini*, liturgy, sacred music, Gregorian chant, active participation

*TRA LE SOLLECITUDINI*¹

Pope St. Pius X’s Motu Proprio *Tra le Sollecitudini* of 1903 became a foundational document for liturgical renewal in the twentieth century; its main objective is the restoration of sacred music, and to this end it formulates general principles in continuity

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with previous magisterial pronouncements. Sacred music is described as “an integral part of the solemn liturgy” and hence it shares in the liturgy’s “general scope, which is the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful.” The “principal office” of music in divine worship is “to clothe with suitable melody the liturgical text proposed for the understanding of the faithful,” with the aim of adding “greater efficacy to the same text.” This is done for the purpose of facilitating the devotion of the faithful and of making them better disposed to receive the fruits of sacramental grace.²

Arguably, the most notable contribution of *Tra le Sollecitudini* consists in the three criteria the document proposes for sacred music:

Sacred music should consequently possess, in the highest degree, the qualities proper to the liturgy, and in particular sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality.³

With reference to the second criterion, “goodness of form,” Pius X expounds that music for the liturgy

. . . must be true art, for otherwise it will be impossible for it to exercise on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the Church aims at obtaining in admitting into her liturgy the art of musical sounds.⁴

2 “La musica sacra, come parte integrante della solenne liturgia, ne partecipa il fine generale, che è la gloria di Dio e la santificazione e edificazione dei fedeli. Essa concorre ad accrescere il decoro e lo splendore delle cerimonie ecclesiastiche, e siccome suo officio principale è di rivestire con acconcia melodia il testo liturgico che viene proposto all’intelligenza dei fedeli, così il suo proprio fine è di aggiungere maggiore efficacia al testo medesimo, affinché i fedeli con tale mezzo siano più facilmente eccitati alla devozione e meglio si dispongano ad accogliere in sé i frutti della grazia, che sono propri della celebrazione dei sacrosanti misteri.” Pius X, *Motu Proprio* on the Restoration of Sacred Music *Tra le Sollecitudini* (22 November 1903) Instruction on Sacred Music, I. General Principles, no. 1. Unless otherwise noted, both the Latin text and translations of recent magisterial documents are taken from the Vatican website (www.vatican.va).

3 Ibid., no. 2.

4 Ibid.

Following these general principles, the Motu Proprio comments on different kinds of sacred music, extolling Gregorian chant, “the chant proper to the Roman Church,” and recommending classical polyphony, above all the Roman school shaped by Palestrina. At the same time, more recent and contemporary compositions are encouraged, if they meet the criteria presented for sacred music.⁵

So far, I have used the common English translation of *Tra le Sollecitudini*'s second criterion, which is “goodness of form.”⁶ However, the original Italian text employs the phrase “la bontà delle forme,” that is, “goodness of forms.” The interpretation of this expression raises some difficulties. In order to clarify its meaning, I propose, first, to look at two documents by Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto that anticipate *Tra le Sollecitudini* and, second, to consider the two different Latin translations of the Motu Proprio that were published in 1904.

In August 1893, when he had already been appointed patriarch of Venice but for political reasons was constrained to remain in his previous Diocese of Mantua, Cardinal Sarto sent a *notum* on sacred music to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. This *notum* had been requested as part of a process of consultation for *Regulations for Sacred Music*, which were published in 1894.⁷ The third part of Cardinal Sarto's short study, entitled “Instruction on Sacred Music,” includes thirty paragraphs, which formed the blueprint for the later Motu Proprio. In the document of 1893, the three qualities of music for the liturgy are listed as “la santità, la bontà e (per quanto è possibile) l'eccellenza delle forme e l'universalità.”⁸ As in *Tra le Sollecitudini*, we read “goodness of forms,” to which is added here “excellence (in so far as possible).”

5 Ibid., nos. 3–5.

6 See, for instance, Robert F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music: 95 A.D. to 1977 A.D.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1979, reprinted Harrison NY: Roman Catholic Books, 2006) 224.

7 The *notum* was published from the archives of *La Civiltà Cattolica* by Fiorenzo Romita, “La preformazione del Motu proprio di S. Pio X sulla musica sacra,” in *Monitor Ecclesiasticus* 86 (1961) 395–497.

8 Ibid., 471. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 224, translates: “goodness and (in so far as possible) excellence of form.”

After taking possession of the Diocese of Venice in November 1894, Cardinal Sarto issued a pastoral letter on 1 May 1895, which draws on the *rotum* of 1893, and lists the three qualities of sacred music as “*la santità, la bontà dell’arte e l’universalità.*”⁹ While the first and third criterion are the same as in the earlier *rotum* and in the later *Motu Proprio*, the second criterion is presented here as “goodness of art.”¹⁰

In 1904, two considerably different Latin translations of *Tra le Sollecitudini* were published: the first translation appeared in *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, which in 1904 became the official organ of the Holy See; the other translation appeared in the periodical *Ephemerides Liturgicae* and was later included in the authoritative *Codicis Iuris Canonici Fontes* edited by Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.¹¹ In *Acta Sanctae Sedis*, the second criterion for sacred music is rendered as “bonitas formarum,”¹² whereas the collection of canonical sources has “bonitas formae.”¹³ The difference between the more specific plural “forms” and the more generic singular “form” would seem to indicate some uncertainty in translating and hence in understanding “bontà delle forme.”

The translation “bonitas formae” evokes the scholastic definition of beauty (*pulchrum*) as “splendor formae,” the splendour or radiance of the substantial form of a thing. This definition originates in

9 Cardinal Giuseppe Sarto, “Pastoral Letter (1 May 1895),” in *Documenta ad instaurationem liturgicam spectantia 1903–1963*, ed. Carlo Braga and Annibale Bugnini (Rome: C.L.V.–Edizioni Liturgiche, 2000) 3–10, at 3 (emphasis in the original).

10 Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 213, reads, rather misleadingly, “correctness of art.”

11 On the two translations, see Jozef Lamberts, “L’évolution de la notion de ‘participation active’ dans le mouvement liturgique du vingtième siècle,” in *La Maison-Dieu* 241 (2005) 77–120, at 79–81.

12 *Inter Pastoralis Officii*, in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 36 (1903–1904) 387–395, at 389.

13 *Inter Pastoralis Officii*, in *Codicis Iuris Canonici Fontes, Vol. 3: Romani Pontifices A. 1867–1917, N. 545–713*, ed. Pietro Card. Gasparri (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1923) 608–615, at 610. See also *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 18 (1904) 129–149, at 132.

St. Albert the Great's work *De pulchro*,¹⁴ and is much discussed in Thomistic aesthetics.¹⁵ From this perspective, it is entirely legitimate to paraphrase the second criterion for sacred music simply as "beauty," as is often done.

On the other hand, "bonitas formarum," in keeping with the Italian original and the *votum* of 1893, appears to have a more concrete significance. This criterion could be interpreted as allowing a diversity of musical forms, as long as they conform to the standard of "true art." However, the strong emphasis of *Tra le Sollecitudini* on the liturgical nature of sacred music and its promotion of Gregorian chant would in my view not support such a reading. Instead, the American musicologist William Mahrt suggests:

What I think [sic!] this means is that each of the forms of Gregorian music suits its particular liturgical function, an introit works best as an introit, projecting a sense of purposeful motion to accompany the action; a gradual works best as a gradual, creating a sense of recollection and receptivity in the listeners as a complement to the lessons, and so forth. This is how these pieces are intimately linked, not only with their texts, but also with the rite itself.¹⁶

According to Mahrt, different forms of Gregorian chant have a proper goodness which corresponds not only to the liturgical text they set to music, but also to its place and function in the liturgical rite. Mahrt builds an elegant bridge to the scholastic definition of beauty, when he argues that this "is how Gregorian chant constitutes in a special way the beauty of the liturgy, its splendor formae."¹⁷ For this reason, Gregorian chant is indeed the model of all sacred music.

14 Albert the Great, *De pulchro*, q. 1 a. 2, co.; see Christopher Scott Sevier, *Aquinas on Beauty* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015) 159.

15 See Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, trans Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner's, 1962) 24, where he traces the expression back to Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.

16 William Mahrt, "Toward a Revision of *Music in Catholic Worship*," in *Sacred Music* 134 (2007) 54–60, at 56.

17 Ibid.

THE AMBIVALENT LEGACY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The variations in Pius X's second criterion for sacred music and the ambiguity of its rendering in the Latin translations of *Tra le Sollecitudini* may be a legacy of the uneasy relationship between liturgy and music from the beginnings of Christianity.¹⁸ While the early Church saw in the worship of the Jerusalem Temple a pattern for its own liturgy, there was no continuity with the festive musical practice of the Temple, which is described in various psalms.¹⁹ At the same time, the early Christians were anxious to distance themselves from the musical practice of pagan rituals because of its association with idolatry and immorality. A consequence of this twofold demarcation is the exclusion of instruments, which is still maintained in Eastern Christian traditions and has been a strong current in the Latin West as well, leaving aside the special place of the organ, which it gradually acquired since the Carolingian period.²⁰

18 There is a veritable confusion in the different versions of Pope John Paul II's Chirograph for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio *Tra le Sollecitudini* on Sacred Music (22 November 2003) no. 5: "bontà delle forme" in what is presumably the Italian original becomes "beauté formelle" in French, "sound form" in English, and "Qualität der Formen" in German. See <https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2003.index.html#letters>.

19 See James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, reprinted 1993) 1–11, with further bibliography, and *The Advent Project: The Later-Seventh-Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 2000) 19–98.

20 See Joseph Ratzinger, "The Artistic Transposition of the Faith: Theological Problems of Church Music," in *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, Joseph Ratzinger Collected Works 11, ed. Michael J. Miller, trans. John Saward, Kenneth Baker, Henry Taylor, et. al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014) 480–493, at 490, with further references to Dietrich Schubert, *Kaiserliche Liturgie: Die Einbeziehung von Musikinstrumenten, insbesondere der Orgel, in den frühmittelalterlichen Gottesdienst*, Veröffentlichungen der Evangelischen Gesellschaft für Liturgieforschung 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968); Ewald Jammers, *Musik in Byzanz, im päpstlichen Rom und im Frankenreich: Der Choral als Textausssprache* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1962); Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

The chanting of psalms and the singing of hymns had a natural place in early Christian worship, and there may have been interaction with synagogue practice—if indeed the prayer service of contemporary synagogues included music, which is a disputed point.²¹ Nonetheless, the early Fathers of the Church expressed reservation, if not suspicion about singing in worship.

To list a few examples: St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373), the great champion of Nicene orthodoxy, rebukes the idea of “the simple ones among us ... that the psalms are sung melodiously for the sake of good sound and the pleasure of the ear.” Rather, the purpose of praising God with our voices is first, to assure “that men love God with their entire strength and capability” and, second, to create harmony of reason and will in the human person.²²

St. Basil of Caesarea (329/330–379), the father of Eastern monasticism, is not as severe in his judgment, but no less clear that singing is a means to train the souls of the weak in virtue:

What did the Holy Spirit do when he saw that the human race was not led easily to virtue, and due to our penchant for pleasure we gave little heed to an upright life? He mixed sweetness of melody with doctrine so that inadvertently we would absorb the benefit of the words through gentleness and ease of hearing, just as clever physicians frequently smear the cup with honey when giving the fastidious some rather bitter medicine to drink.²³

21 See Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) 55–71 and his collection of sources at 72–83.

22 Athanasius, *Epistula ad Marcellinum de interpretatione psalmodum*, 27 (PG 28,37–40); trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 52–53 (no. 98).

23 Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Psalmum 1* (PG 29,212); translation from McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 65 (no. 130). The passage continues: “Thus he contrived for us these harmonious psalm tunes, so that those who are children in actual age as well as those who are young in behaviour, while appearing only to sing would in reality be training their souls. For not one of these many indifferent people ever leaves church easily retaining in memory some maxim of either the Apostles or the Prophets, but they do sing the texts of the Psalms at home and circulate them in the marketplace.”

St. Jerome (c. 347–420), commenting on Ephesians 5:19, presents a sharp contrast between singing with the voice and singing with the heart. He cautions cantors to avoid “theatrical melodies and songs” and to sing “in fear, in work and in knowledge of the Scriptures.” True praise of God lies in the moral life. “Although one might be, as they are wont to say, *kakophonos*, if he has performed good works, he is a sweet singer before God. Thus let the servant of Christ sing, so that not the voice of the singer but the words that are read give pleasure.”²⁴

The scruples of St. Augustine (354–430) about the delight he took in hearing “a sweet and skilled voice” singing in church are well known. With characteristic depth of introspection, Augustine observes in his *Confessions* how aesthetic pleasure can easily become an end in itself and a sinful distraction from the sacred words that are sung.²⁵ On the other hand, he remembers how right after his baptism in April 387, “the voices of your sweetly singing church” in Milan moved him to tears and opened his heart to divine truth.²⁶ Augustine finds himself wavering between condemnation and approval, but in the end settles for a careful recommendation of “the custom of singing in church so that by the pleasure of hearing, the weaker soul might be elevated to an attitude of devotion (*in affectum pietatis*).” Notably, in the same passage from the *Confessions*, Augustine offers initial reflections on the artistic quality demanded of musical settings of liturgical texts: these should be sung “with flowing voice and the most fitting inflection of tone (*cum liquida voce et convenientissima modulatione*).”²⁷

In an insightful essay, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI attributed the Church Fathers’ austere attitude towards liturgical singing to the influence of Platonic thought and its depreciation of physical and

24 Jerome, *Commentarium in Eph.* III,5,19 (PL 26,528–529); trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 145 (no. 333).

25 See Augustine, *Confessiones* X,33,49–50 (CCSL 27,181–182).

26 Ibid., IX,6,14–7,15 (CCSL 27,141–142); trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 154 (no. 351).

27 Ibid., X,33,49–50 (CCSL 27,181–182); trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 154–155 (no. 352)—translation modified.

material reality. A consequence of this attitude, “which more or less borders on iconoclasm,” is theology’s “historical mortgage in the question of ecclesiastical art, which comes up over and over again.”²⁸ The lasting burden of this mortgage can be seen, for instance, in St. Thomas Aquinas’ treatment of sacred music in the *Summa theologiae*, which forms part of the section on the virtue of religion in the *Secunda Secundae*.²⁹ According to Aquinas, the principle interior acts of religion are devotion (*devotio*) and prayer (*oratio*). Devotion can be defined as “the fundamental interior act of the will, which, stimulated by grace, wills promptly and completely the ordering of oneself to God through worship.”³⁰ Aquinas answers the question as to whether God should be praised with singing in the affirmative, and asserts the conducive role of music in stirring the mind to devotion towards God. However, for Aquinas, as for the patristic tradition, music in worship is seen as a concession to man’s need for external stimuli to be moved to interior devotion. The salutary effect of music in divine praises is for “the souls of the faint-hearted (*animi infirmorum*),” and Aquinas supports this claim by quoting the above-cited passages from Augustine’s *Confessions*.³¹

The Angelic Doctor elaborates that “it is a more noble way (*nobilior modus*) to stir men to devotion by teaching and preaching (*per doctrinam et praedicationem*) than by singing.”³² The use of instruments was permitted in the Old Testament for two reasons, chiefly because “the people were more hardened and carnal (*magis durus et carnalis*)” and needed this extra incentive to raise their minds to God.³³ The purpose of singing in worship is not delight or

28 Ratzinger, “The Artistic Transposition of the Faith,” 488.

29 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 91, a. 2; Ratzinger discusses the patristic and philosophical background to Aquinas’ treatment of sacred music in “On the Theological Basis of Church Music,” in *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, 424–439.

30 Conrad T. Murphy, “A Thomistic Foundation for Full, Active Participation in the Liturgy,” in *Antiphon 23* (2019) 145–163, at 147.

31 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 91, a. 2, resp., quoting *Confessions*, X,33 and IX,6.

32 *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 3.

33 *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 4.

enjoyment, but devotion, and this requires on the part of singers a close attention to the words that are sung. On the part of hearers, the end of music in the liturgy does not require that all understand what is sung. It is sufficient to be moved to devotion if they understand why it is sung; that is, for the praise of God.³⁴

GREGORIAN CHANT AND POLYPHONY

Gregorian chant, described by the American musicologist James McKinnon as the “Frankish absorption and transformation of the Roman chant,”³⁵ achieved a remarkable harmony between theological demands on sacred music and the natural desire for artistic expression. In the passage quoted earlier, William Mahrt notes how the musical form created by different genres of chant for the liturgical text is integrated into the structure and movement of the ritual action. Hence it is fitting that magisterial documents of the twentieth century have consistently hailed Gregorian chant as the music “proper to” the Roman liturgy.

Docta Sanctorum Patrum

The question of the right relationship between liturgy and music was heightened again by the development of polyphony, starting in the twelfth century. The move of the papacy to Avignon in 1309 brought an encounter and confrontation between the traditional Roman musical practice of plainchant and the French *ars nova*, which was introduced to the papal court. In 1324/25, the Avignon Pope John XXII (r. 1316–1334) issued the decree *Docta Sanctorum*

34 Ibid., II-II, q. 91, a. 2, ad 5: “Ad quintum dicendum quod per cantum quo quis studiose ad delectandum utitur, abstrahitur animus a consideratione eorum quae cantantur. Sed si aliquis cantet propter devotionem, attentius considerat quae dicuntur. . . . Et eadem est ratio de audientibus, in quibus, etsi aliquando non intelligent quae cantantur, intelligunt tamen propter quid cantantur, scilicet ad laudem Dei; et hoc sufficit ad devotionem excitandam.”

35 McKinnon, *The Advent Project*, 3. For an excellent overview of the rich and complex history of Gregorian chant, see David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

Patrum, which is the first known papal document dealing directly with sacred music.³⁶ The decree is a remarkable combination of canonical norms, technical observations and comments on the moral effects of music. The pope invokes the authority of the “holy fathers” and follows Aquinas in stating that the purpose of singing in the liturgy is to kindle the devotion of the faithful.³⁷ The decree goes on to censure the rhythmic complexities of the *ars nova*, but it does not ban polyphonic singing altogether, as the Dominican Order did at its Chapter General in Bologna in 1242.³⁸ John XXII states that he does not intend

. . . to forbid the occasional use—principally on solemn feasts at Mass and in the Divine Office—of certain consonant intervals superposed upon the simple ecclesiastical chant, provided these harmonies are in the spirit and character of the melodies themselves, as, for instance, the consonance of the octave, the fifth, the fourth, and others of this nature: but always on condition that the melodies themselves remain intact in the pure integrity of their form and that no innovation take place against true musical discipline, for such consonances are pleasing to the ear and arouse devotion, and they prevent torpor among those who sing in honour of God.³⁹

Going into considerable musical detail, the decree approves the use—on festive occasions—of organum, which is based on plainchant and belongs to the practice of the *ars antiqua*. John XXII stipulates that in sacred music the formal structure of chant be preserved both in its tonality (modes) and in its particular rhythmic

36 See Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 17–23. For a critical analysis of the decree, see Helmut Hucke, “Das Dekret ‘Docta Sanctorum Patrum’ Papst Johannes’ XXII.,” in *Musica Disciplina* 38 (1984) 119–131.

37 “Dulcis quippe omnino sonus in ore psallentium resonat, quum Deum corde suscipiunt, dum loquuntur verbis, in ipsum quoque cantibus devotionem accendunt;” cited in Hucke, “Das Dekret,” 121.

38 “Cantus debet fieri . . . sollemnius in diebus festivis, semper vero sine discantu et organo;” cited in Hucke, “Das Dekret,” 123.

39 Translation Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 21, slightly modified.

movement. What makes plainchant eminently suitable to the liturgy can be understood in comparison with the more elaborate and autonomous forms of polyphony that do not meet with approval in the papal document.⁴⁰ Although this is not made explicit in *Docta Sanctorum Patrum*, it would seem right to conclude, as Ratzinger does, that a primary concern is the music's relation to the text—and, we may add, to the rite; on both counts plainchant is exemplary. For this reason, the decree makes “reference to the formal structures of the chant as the point of departure for ecclesiastical polyphony.”⁴¹

The Council of Trent

The debate on liturgical use of polyphony continued and was intensified by the flourishing of Renaissance music. Sacred music became part of the reform agenda at the Council of Trent, although not before its final period between 1559 and 1563. Two main issues that had occupied local synods and individual bishops in the decades before Trent emerged in the council's deliberations: first, the integrity and intelligibility of the text set to music (which was also a general concern of musical humanists), and, second, the use of music from secular contexts in divine worship.⁴² In the twenty-second session of the council in 1562, a committee drafted a canon that treated these aspects comprehensively:

Everything should indeed be regulated so that the Masses, whether they be celebrated with the plain voice or in song, with everything clearly and quickly executed, may reach the ears of

40 See Karl Gustav Fellerer, “Die Constitutio Docta SS. Patrum Johannes XXII.,” in *Geschichte der katholischen Kirchenmusik. Bd. 1: Von den Anfängen bis zum Tridentinum*, ed. Karl Gustav Fellerer (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1972) 379–380.

41 Ratzinger, “The Artistic Transposition of the Faith,” 492.

42 See Craig A. Monson, “The Council of Trent Revisited,” in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55 (2002) 1–37 (reprinted in *Music and the Renaissance: Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation*, ed. Philippe Vendrix [London and New York: Routledge, 2017] 487–524) and, for the text of the most essential sources, Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 25–31.

the hearers and quietly penetrate their hearts. In those Masses where measured music and organ are customary, nothing profane should be intermingled, but only hymns and divine praises. . . . But the entire manner of singing in musical modes should be calculated, not to afford vain delight to the ear, but so that the words may be comprehensible to all; and thus may the hearts of the listeners be caught up into the desire for celestial harmonies and contemplation of the joys of the blessed.⁴³

However, this text was not included in the final *Decree concerning the Things to be Observed, and to be Avoided, in the Celebration of Mass*, which was promulgated on 17 September 1562. The decree contains only this very short paragraph on music in the liturgy:

Let them keep away from the churches compositions in which there is an intermingling of the lascivious or impure, whether by instrument or voice.⁴⁴

Thus only the question of the proper distinction between sacred and profane music entered the council's decree, but not the central argument of the original draft on the intelligibility of the text sung at Mass, with its theological emphasis on the priority of the word and its spiritual benefits.

The matter of sacred music was taken up again in the council's twenty-fourth session in 1563, when a new impetus for Church reform was provided by the new papal legates, Cardinals Giovanni Morone and Bernardo Navagero, and by the papal confidant and later Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti. It was at this session that an unsuccessful attempt was made to ban polyphony from the sacred liturgy,

43 Trans. Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," 9. For the Latin text, see *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, actorum, epistularum, tractatum nova collectio*, ed. Societas Goerresiana (Freiburg: Herder, 1901–) vol. VIII, 927. Ratzinger, "The Artistic Transposition of the Faith," 492, quotes from this draft canon as if it were from an official conciliar decree. This misreading is widespread and has even entered standard works of musicology, as noted by Monson, *ibid.*, 11–12.

44 Council of Trent, Session 24, *Decree Concerning the Things to be Observed, and to be Avoided, in the Celebration of Mass* (17 September 1562): *Concilium Tridentinum*, vol. VIII, 963; trans. Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," 11.

as some prelates, among them Morone as bishop of Modena, had done in their dioceses in the first half of the sixteenth century. Among those who strongly opposed such a proposal were Cardinal Otto Truchseß von Waldburg, bishop of Augsburg, and even the Emperor Ferdinand I, who was alerted to the debate at the Council and intervened with a letter in August 1563.⁴⁵

Historical scholarship has refuted the story that polyphony was saved when Pope Marcellus II, who reigned for less than a month in 1555, heard Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli*, because, in fact, the composer had no influence on the debates about musical reform at the council.⁴⁶ As for the *Missa Papae Marcelli*, it is more probable to see in it a creative response to the council's reforming ideas on sacred music.⁴⁷ Ratzinger has an interesting suggestion in this regard: the story that the immediate impact of hearing Palestrina's music averted a ban of polyphony in the liturgy expresses the truth that "the *composition* must be convincing, and not the theory, which can only follow the composition."⁴⁸

In the end, the only pronouncement on the matter was included in the *Decree on Reform* of the twenty-fourth session, which delegates decisions on the Divine Office, including "the proper manner of singing or playing therein," to provincial synods. In the interim

45 See Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," 13–14, and Christian T. Leitmeir, "Catholic Music in the Diocese of Augsburg c. 1600: A Reconstructed Tricinium Anthology and its Confessional Implications," in *Early Music History* 21 (2002) 117–173, at 121–122.

46 The composer who can claim to have had some bearing on Trent's deliberations was the Franco-Flemish Jacobus de Kerle, whose *Preces speciales*, a set of polyphonic devotional responsories, were sung several times a week at prayer services during the last sessions of the Council. The musical setting was commissioned by Cardinal Otto Truchseß von Waldburg. See Patrick Bergin, Jr., "Preces Speciales: Prototype of Tridentine Musical Reform," in *The Ohio State Online Musical Journal* 2 (2009), at <http://www.osomjournal.org/issues/2/bergin.html?>, with ample bibliography. The idea of Palestrina as the "saviour" of sacred polyphony seems to have been presented first by the Sienese composer and music theorist Agostino Agazzari in 1607 and was then often repeated.

47 This was suggested by Karl Gustav Fellerer and Moses Hadas, "Church Music and the Council of Trent," in *The Musical Quarterly* 39 (1953) 576–594.

48 Ratzinger, "The Artistic Transposition of the Faith," 493.

period before such synods are held, the local bishop, with the help of at least two canons, may provide as seems expedient.⁴⁹

In sum, the council said as little as possible on sacred music, but its discussion of it gave a strong impulse to local synods and bishops who implemented the council's programme for the reform of ecclesiastical life and discipline. In the years after Trent, the concerns for the intelligibility of the text and for an exclusion of secular music from the liturgy were perceived as being according to the mind of the council. The practical solutions to these problems differed considerably from one place to the other, and this is reflected in the rich variety of polyphonic music at the time.⁵⁰

Annus Qui

The most important papal document on sacred music of the post-Tridentine period is Benedict XIV's encyclical letter *Annus Qui* of 19 February 1749. Its author, born Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, was a canonist and scholar with a wide range of interests; the actions and documents of his pontificate reflect a general concern for the Church's liturgy that includes theological, pastoral and juridical aspects.⁵¹

The encyclical, written for the Jubilee Year of 1750,⁵² offers a number of criteria for sacred music that remain valid beyond the

49 Council of Trent, Session 24, *Decree on Reform* (11 November 1563), ch. 12: *Concilium Tridentinum*, vol. IX, 983–984. The question came up once again in the twenty-fifth session, when the practice of music in female religious houses was discussed and an attempt was made to exclude polyphony from convents altogether. However, there was opposition to this move, and in the end, it was agreed that decisions on music should be made by the competent religious superiors. See Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," 19–22.

50 See Monson, "The Council of Trent Revisited," 24–28; also Lewis H. Lockwood, "Vincenzo Ruffo and Musical Reform after the Council of Trent," in *The Musical Quarterly* 43 (1957) 342–371.

51 See Jo Hermans, *Benedictus XIV en de liturgie: Een bijdrage tot de liturgiegeschiedenis van de Moderne Tijd* (Brugge–Boxtel: Uitgeverij Emmaüs–Katholieke Bijbelstichting, 1979).

52 Both the Italian original and the Latin translation are available in *Sanctissimi Domini Nostri Benedicti Papae XIV. Bullarium, Tomus III* (Mechlinae: Typis

confines of their historical context: *Annus Qui* presents plainchant as normative for the Roman liturgy, while it also approves of unaccompanied polyphony and allows for orchestral music as long as it is distinct from the style of contemporary operas and cantatas. Where the practice of orchestral music has already been introduced, it may continue, “as long as it is serious and does not, because of its length, cause boredom or serious inconvenience to those who are in choir, or who are celebrating at the altar, during Vespers and Mass.”⁵³

At first sight, this particular ruling may appear pedestrian, but Claudio Bacciagaluppi has drawn attention to relevant sources from the archives of Benedict XIV that reveal a genuine concern to integrate sacred music into the structure and flow of the liturgy. A memorandum of Roman origin notes that the length of a musical piece should correspond to the length of the liturgical action and not unnecessarily prolong it. The older Roman school of polyphony is presented as a model, because its Mass compositions correspond in length to the time it takes the celebrant to perform the respective ritual element. Andrea Adami, *Maestro di cappella* of the Sistine Chapel from 1700 to 1714, observes that in papal ceremonies particular attention was given to the coordination between the choir and the celebrant with his assistance.⁵⁴

In continuity with the discussions at the Council of Trent and the subsequent pronouncements of popes and local councils, the main concerns of Benedict XIV with regard to sacred polyphony are the integrity and the intelligibility of the liturgical texts of the Mass and the Divine Office. The encyclical *Annus Qui* in many ways anticipates *Tra le Sollecitudini*; however, its reach was limited and it had

P.-J. Hanicq, 1827) vol. VII, 34–91; an English translation can be found in Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 92–108.

53 Translation Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, 104.

54 See Claudio Bacciagaluppi, “‘E viva Benedetto XIV!’ L’enciclica *Annus qui* (1749) nel contesto dei rapporti musicali tra Roma e Bologna,” in *Papsttum und Kirchenmusik vom Mittelalter bis zu Benedikt XVI: Postitionen—Entwicklungen—ontexte*, ed. Klaus Pietschmann, *Analecta musicologica* 47 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2012) 222–262, at 230–232.

little effect outside the Papal States, where Benedict XIV was able to implement its norms directly.

ARTISTIC QUALITY AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

This brief historical overview has put into relief the achievement of Pius X's demand for the artistic quality of sacred music. However, I see a fundamental difficulty in meeting this criterion—a difficulty that came to the fore in the post-conciliar period but stems from *Tra le Sollecitudini* itself. After insisting that “priest at the altar” should not be kept “waiting on account of the chant or the music for a length of time not allowed by the liturgy,”⁵⁵ the Motu Proprio's Instruction on Sacred Music cautions:

In general it must be considered a very grave abuse when the liturgy in ecclesiastical functions is made to appear secondary to and in a manner at the service of the music, for the music is merely a part of the liturgy and its humble handmaid.⁵⁶

In other words, as an integral part of the solemn liturgy, music is not autonomous, but subject to proper character and movement of the ritual action, like “its humble handmaid (*sua umile ancilla*).”⁵⁷ This is in keeping with the Church's traditional teaching that sacred music is directed to an end beyond itself, namely raising the minds and hearts of worshippers in devotion to God. A problem arises, however, when this traditional conception of music for the liturgy is governed by the modern principle of “active participation.” Much ink has been spilt on the right interpretation of this principle, which was introduced by Pius X into the Church's magisterium and later made the driving force of liturgical renewal by the Second Vatican Council. More recently, there have been valid attempts at a renewed reading

55 Pius X, *Tra le Sollecitudini*, Instruction on Sacred Music, VII. The Length of the Liturgical Chant, no. 22.

56 Ibid., no. 23.

57 The *Ephemerides Liturgicae* translation has “humilis ancilla” (*Codicis Iuris Canonici Fontes*, vol. III, 614), while the phrase is omitted altogether in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 36 (1904) 394.

of *actuosa participatio*, which gives priority to interior participation in the prayer and sacrifice of Christ and his Church.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the question remains: how can music of artistic quality that requires trained singers—and this includes Gregorian chant—be reconciled with the supreme principle that the faithful should participate externally, above all in congregational singing?

The sixth chapter of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* begins with fulsome praise of the “musical tradition of the universal Church” as “a treasure of inestimable value, greater than that of any other art,” because sacred music gives expression to the words of the rite and hence is “a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.”⁵⁹ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy goes on to say that this “treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care.” At the same time, however, in the sung liturgy “bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that . . . the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs.”⁶⁰ Gregorian chant is acclaimed as “proper (*proprium*)” to the Roman liturgy and should therefore “be given the first place (*principem locum*) in liturgical services”—however, with the qualification “other things being equal (*ceteris paribus*),” which immediately weakens the recommendation.⁶¹

Given these tensions in the text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, it is not surprising, therefore, that Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler in their widely received *Short Compendium of the Council* (*Kleines Konzilskompendium*), commenting on the conciliar constitution,

58 See Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000) 171–177; Alcuin Reid, “*Ut mens concordet voci*: Sacred Music and Actual Participation in the Liturgy,” in *Benedict XVI and Beauty in Sacred Music: Proceedings of the Third Fota International Liturgical Conference, 2010*, ed. Janet E. Rutherford, Fota Liturgy Series (Dublin–New York: Four Courts Press–Scepter Publishers, 2012) 93–126; Daniel G. Van Slyke, “*Actuosa Participatio* from Pius X to Benedict XVI: Grace and Gregorian Chant,” in *Antiphon* 23 (2019) 101–144.

59 Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963) no. 112.

60 *Ibid.*, no. 114.

61 *Ibid.*, no. 116.

claim that traditional church music, “because of its—in the good sense—esoteric character,” does not agree with “the essence of the liturgy” and “the highest principle of the liturgical reform,” that is, the active participation of the faithful, which demands above all congregational singing.⁶² In the immediate post-conciliar years, this was not an uncommon position among liturgists and theologians. Rembert Weakland, in an address entitled “Music as Art in Liturgy,” which he gave in November 1966, shortly before becoming abbot primate of the Benedictine Confederation, called on sacred music to “deny her exalted position of being a ‘telephone to the beyond’” (a charged expression coined by Friedrich Nietzsche in his polemic against Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal*, which he considered a capitulation to Christianity).⁶³

Ratzinger sees in Rahner and Vorgrimler’s reading of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* a typical example of the difference between what the council texts actually say and what has been made of them in the post-conciliar period.⁶⁴ The question remains, however, how music can maintain its artistic aspirations and at the same time truly serve the sacred liturgy. In his discussion of the development of *actuosa participatio* since Pius X, Daniel Van Slyke draws attention to Pope Pius XI’s apostolic constitution *Divini Cultus Sanctitatem* of 1928. This lesser-known document refers to the prescriptions of *Tra le Sollecitudini* regarding Gregorian chant and sacred music, and its promotion of the faithful’s active participation in the sacred liturgy, but then modifies the language of the earlier Motu Proprio:

62 “. . . von ihrem im guten Sinn esoterischen Wesen her mit dem Wesen der Liturgie und dem obersten Grundsatz der Liturgiereform kaum in Übereinstimmung zu bringen.” Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines Konzilskompendium*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1967) 48 (my translation). On the impact of this interpretation, not least in Italy, see Joseph Ratzinger, “The Image of the World and of Human Beings in the Liturgy and Its Expression in Church Music,” in *Theology of the Liturgy: The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, 443–460, at 444–447.

63 Rembert Weakland, “Music as Art in Liturgy,” in *Worship* 41 (1967) 5–15, at 15. More statements of this kind are documented by James Hitchcock, *The Recovery of the Sacred* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974) 8–9.

64 See Ratzinger, “On the Theological Basis of Church Music,” 422–423.

Therefore it is of very great importance that whatever is an adornment of the liturgy be controlled by norms and certain precepts of the Church, so that the arts in reality, as is proper, may serve divine worship as most noble handmaidens (*quasi ancillae nobilissimae*).⁶⁵

The shift from addressing music as “humble handmaid” to acclaiming the arts in general as “most noble handmaidens” is significant, as it provides a far wider space for artistic expression. This passage is subsequently quoted by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mediator Dei* of 1947, when he speaks of music and the fine arts in relation to worship.⁶⁶

In a number of seminal contributions, Ratzinger has developed a theological foundation for the “artistic transposition of the faith” and thus for a more confident role of music in the liturgy. The Letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as a priest in language that draws on Temple worship: he is “high priest of the good things that have come” (Heb 9:11) and “the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15), established in his blood which purifies our “conscience from dead works” (Heb 9:14). The Christian liturgy is the exercise of the priesthood of Christ the Head and his Body, which is the Church.⁶⁷ Ratzinger argues that the Church “accepts with Christ the heritage of the Temple in a modified way,” because the heart of her divine worship consists not only in readings and prayers, but in the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Hence the Church “in the external form of her celebration . . . can and must lay claim to the heritage of the Temple.”⁶⁸ At the same time, Christ’s announcement of worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23–24), marking “the transition from Temple sacrifice to universal worship,”⁶⁹ gives the Church’s liturgy a cosmic char-

65 Pius XI, Apostolic Constitution on the Liturgy and on Fostering Gregorian Chant and Sacred Music *Divini Cultus Sanctitatem* (20 December 1928); trans Van Slyke, “*Actuosa Participatio* from Pius X to Benedict XVI: Grace and Gregorian Chant,” 120.

66 Pius XII, Encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947) no. 195.

67 See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7; *Mediator Dei*, nos. 20 and 22.

68 Ratzinger, “The Artistic Transposition of the Faith,” 489.

69 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 54.

acter. Ratzinger goes as far as to say that the liturgy, because of its cosmic character, finds in the artistic aspirations of music “a necessary way of expressing belief in the universal glory of Jesus Christ.” Therefore it belongs to the essence of the liturgy “to transpose the cosmos, to spiritualize it into the gesture of sung praise and thus to redeem it.”⁷⁰ By opening this cosmic perspective, Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI moves beyond the anthropocentrism that has dominated discussions of “active participation” in recent decades, offers a hermeneutic for interpreting St. Pius X’s criterion of “goodness of forms,” and renders justice to the fundamental premise of *Tra le Sollecitudini*—that sacred music shares in the liturgy’s general scope, which is the glorification of God and the sanctification of his people.

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