

The “Hermeneutic of Continuity” and Twentieth-century Legislation on Sacred Music¹

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INTRODUCTION

In an address to the Roman Curia delivered on 22 December 2005, Pope Benedict XVI raised some important questions: “What has been the result of the [Second Vatican] council? Was it well received? What, in the acceptance of the council, was good and what was inadequate or mistaken? What still remains to be done?... Why has the implementation of the council in large parts of the church thus far been so difficult?”²

In addressing these questions, the Holy Father reminds us that the proper implementation of Vatican II “depends on the correct interpretation of the council or – as we would say today – on its proper hermeneutic, the correct key to its interpretation and application.” Benedict describes two contrary interpretations which he identifies as “a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” and the “hermeneutic of reform.” The former “risks ending in a split between the preconciliar church and the postconciliar church” by claiming that the texts of the Council “are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless.” According to this view, “it would be necessary not to follow the texts of the council but its spirit. In this way, obviously, a vast margin was left open for the question on how this spirit should subsequently be defined and room was consequently made for every whim.” On the other hand, the “hermeneutic of reform,” which Benedict styles also the “hermeneutic of continuity,”³ is an

1 An earlier version of this paper was read at the 2007 General Conference of the Society for Catholic Liturgy, held at the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio, 20-23 September 2007. The author is grateful to Fr Neil J. Roy, Dr Alcuin Reid, Thomas Gordon Smith, John Haigh, and Brian Austin FSSP, for their helpful comments.

2 BENEDICT XVI, Discourse to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2005; English translation in *Origins* 35 (26 January 2006) 534-39, here 536.

3 BENEDICT XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum cari-*

interpretation of the Vatican II documents “in the continuity of the one subject-church that the Lord has given to us ... a subject that increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying people of God.”⁴

One of the most controversial issues surrounding Vatican II concerns the proper interpretation of its constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, dated 4 December 1963 (henceforth SC). The question of sacred music, which the Council Fathers describe as making a “necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy” (SC 112),⁵ has been a particularly contested one. Despite the explicit mandate that the Church’s musical tradition be preserved and promoted (SC 114), the current state of Roman Catholic sacred music, and in particular the near abandonment of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony, indicates that many have interpreted the constitution on the liturgy through the hermeneutic of discontinuity or simply chosen to ignore its contents.

Although the proper interpretation of some statements in *Sacrosanctum concilium* is not always self-evident – a problem that Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Benedict XVI) attributes to the “definite tension within the Council document,” which “reflects the tension between the various approaches represented in the Council itself”⁶ – many of the contested questions could be clarified by use of the hermeneutic of continuity and reform, that is, by interpreting the ambiguous statements of *Sacrosanctum concilium* in light of the Church’s prior pronouncements on sacred music. This approach is indeed sanctioned by the document itself: the Council Fathers state that they are “keeping the norms and precepts of ecclesiastical tradition and discipline and having regard to the purpose of sacred music, which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful...” (SC 112). Likewise, the 1967 Instruction *Musicam sacram* (henceforth MS) recognizes the continuing relevance of the Church’s musical legislation, noting that, although it attempts to clarify certain questions regarding the implementation of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, “It is not a collection of all

tatis (22 February 2007), in *Origins* 36 (22 March 2007) §3, n. 6, p. 655. All citations are drawn from this translation.

4 BENEDICT XVI, Discourse to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2005.

5 In *Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979*, trans. International Committee on English in the Liturgy (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1982) [henceforth: DOL] 1, §112, p. 23. All citations of *Sacrosanctum concilium* are drawn from this volume.

6 JOSEPH RATZINGER, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 98.

the legislation on sacred music, but a statement simply of the principal norms that seem most needed at the present time" (MS 3).⁷

In this paper, I will consider several questions of crucial importance to the use of sacred music in the contemporary Church within the context of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and the twentieth-century papal directives on sacred music and the liturgy. Which forms of music are encouraged, which are permitted, and which are forbidden in the liturgy? How is sacred music to be employed in the liturgy in light of an accurate understanding of the principle of *participatio actuosa*? Which instruments may accompany sacred song or be otherwise employed in the liturgy? What sort of musical and liturgical instruction should be provided for clergy, religious, and laypeople? What must be done to prepare for a genuine resurgence of musical excellence?

The popes whose directives on the matter will be noted are St Pius X (1903-14), Pius XI (1922-39), Pius XII (1939-58), John Paul II (1978-2005), and Benedict XVI presently reigning. Each has explicitly acknowledged the continuity of his teaching on sacred music with that of his predecessors. Finally, I will consider what conclusions and recommendations for future progress may be drawn from the history of these documents and their implementation.

PRINCIPLES OF SACRED MUSIC

Pope Pius X explains in his celebrated *motu proprio* on Church music, *Tra le sollecitudini* (henceforth TS) of 1903, that one of the leading concerns of his office is

to maintain and increase the beauty of the house of God, in which the holy mysteries of our faith are celebrated, in which the Christian people come together to ... join in the public and solemn liturgical prayers of the Church. Nothing then should be allowed in the sacred building that could disturb or lessen the piety and devotion of the faithful, nothing that could be a reasonable motive for displeasure or scandal, nothing especially that could offend against the dignity and holiness of the sacred rites, and that would therefore be unworthy of the house of prayer, or of the majesty of Almighty God. (TS, Introduction)⁸

7 CONGREGATION OF RITES, Instruction *Musicam sacram* (5 March 1967) in DOL 508, §4124, pp. 1293-94.

8 PIUS X, *Motu Proprio Tra le sollecitudini* (22 November 1903), in ROBERT F. HAYBURN, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music: 95 A.D. to 1977 A.D.* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1979) 222. All citations of the English translation are drawn from this book.

The Pope expresses his concern that even in churches where most of the liturgy is done well and reverently, there is a tendency

to neglect the right principles of an art used in the service of the liturgy, principles expressed very clearly in the laws of the Church, in the decrees of general and provincial councils, and in the repeated commands of the sacred congregations and of the supreme pontiffs, Our predecessors.... And since indeed Our first and most ardent wish is that a true Christian spirit flourish and be kept always by all the faithful, the first thing to which We must attend is the holiness and dignity of the churches in which Our people assemble, in order to acquire that spirit from its first and most indispensable source, by taking an *active part*⁹ in the sacred mysteries and in the solemn public prayers of the Church....

Wherefore, in order that no one may in the future put forward as an excuse that he does not rightly know his duty, in order that all possible uncertainty concerning laws already made may be removed, We consider it advisable to sum up shortly the principles that govern the sacred music of liturgical services, and to present again the chief laws of the Church against faults in this matter. (Ibid.)

A comparison of the first paragraph of *Tra le sollecitudini* with the chapter on sacred music from *Sacrosanctum concilium* shows the continuity in language and content of the Church's musical teaching between Pius X and Vatican II:

Sacred music, being an integral part of the liturgy, is directed to the general object of this liturgy, namely, the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. It helps to increase the beauty and splendor of the ceremonies of the Church, and since its chief duty is to clothe the liturgical text, which is presented to the understanding of the faithful, with suitable melody, its object is to make that text more efficacious, so that the faithful through this means may be the more roused to devotion, and better disposed to gather to themselves the fruits of grace which come from the celebration of the sacred mysteries. (TS 1)

9 *Acta Sancte Sedis* 36 (1903-04) 331: "Essendo, infatti, Nostro vivissimo desiderio che il vero spirito cristiano refiorisca per ogni modo e si mantenga nei fedeli tutti, è necessario provvedere prima di ogni altra cosa alla santità e dignità del tempio, dove appunto i fedeli si radunano per attingere tale spirito dalla sua prima ed indispensabile fonte, che è la *partecipazione attiva* ai sacrosanti misteri e alla preghiera pubblica e solenne della Chiesa" (emphasis added). [It is worth noting that the Latin translation of *Tra le sollecitudini* that occurs later in the same volume (387-95) lacks an adjective modifying *participatio* (388); Ed.]

Sacrosanctum concilium takes its definition of the purpose of sacred music directly from *Tra le sollecitudini*: "the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful [*sanctificatio fidelium*]" (SC 112). Further, Pius X understands that by clothing the liturgical text with suitable melody the actual participation of the faithful mentioned in the introduction is assisted. In light of the emphasis he places on the role of Gregorian chant in the liturgy, Pius X clearly believes that the use of the Gregorian chant repertoire will assist the actual participation of the faithful in the liturgy called for by his instruction and the conciliar constitution. According to *Sacrosanctum concilium*,

sacred music will be the more holy the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite, whether by adding delight to prayer, fostering oneness of spirit, or investing the rites with greater solemnity. But the Church approves of all forms of genuine art possessing the qualities required and admits them into divine worship. (SC 112)

What are the necessary qualities of genuine art? This is a crucial question given the attempts of some to promote "utility music" or so-called "folk music" as embodying the "spirit of Vatican II." Pius X articulates several qualities that must be found in music that is to be used in liturgical celebrations:

Sacred music must therefore eminently possess the qualities which belong to liturgical rites, especially holiness and beauty, from which its other characteristic, universality, will flow spontaneously.

It must be holy, and therefore avoid everything that is secular, both in itself and in the way in which it is performed. It must really be an art, since in no other way can it have on the mind of those who hear it that effect which the Church desires in using in her liturgy the art of sound.

But it must also be universal in this sense, namely, that although each country may use in its ecclesiastical music whatever special forms may belong to its own national style, these forms must be subject to the proper nature of sacred music, so that it may never produce a bad impression on the mind of any stranger who may hear it. (TS 2)

The Pope asserts that these qualities "are found most perfectly in Gregorian chant, which is therefore the proper chant of the Roman Church, the only chant which she has inherited from the ancient Fathers, which she has jealously kept for so many centuries in her liturgical books, which she offers to the faithful as her own music,

[and] which she insists on being used exclusively in some parts of her liturgy....” (TS 3). According to *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the Church “acknowledges Gregorian chant as distinctive of the Roman liturgy; therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services” (SC 116). Pius X instructs that “Gregorian chant should be largely restored in divine worship,” and especially “restored to the use of the people, so that they may take a more active part in the offices, as they did in former times” (TS 3). *Sacrosanctum concilium* likewise mandates that chant be taught at Catholic institutions and schools (cf. SC 115), and that “[t]he people’s own religious songs are to be encouraged with care so that in sacred devotions as well as during services in the liturgy itself, in keeping with rubrical norms and requirements, the faithful may raise their voices in song” (SC 118).

Active or actual participation in the liturgy, first articulated by Pius X, developed in the writings of Pius XI and Pius XII, and codified in *Sacrosanctum concilium*, is primarily an internal participation. Although *Musicae sacram* of 1967 acknowledges this principle with the statement that active participation must first of all be “internal, that is, the faithful make their thoughts match what they say and hear, and cooperate with divine grace” (MS 15a), Benedict XVI cautions that “we must not overlook the fact that some misunderstanding has occasionally arisen concerning the precise meaning of this participation. It should be made clear that the word *participation* does not refer to mere external activity during the celebration. In fact the active participation called for by the council must be understood in more substantial terms, on the basis of a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated and its relationship to daily life.”¹⁰

In urging the musical participation of the laity in the liturgy, the Council reiterates the desire of the preceding several popes that the laity should sing those Gregorian chants of the Mass that are within their ability. The apostolic constitution *Divini cultus* of Pius XI (henceforth DC) indicates that the musical active participation can be fulfilled by a broader use of Gregorian chant: “In order that the faithful may take a more active part in divine worship, let that portion of the chant which pertains to the congregation be restored to popular use. It is very necessary that the faithful taking part in sacred ceremonies should not do so as mere outsiders or mute spec-

10 *Sacramentum caritatis* 52. For a discussion of the meaning of *participatio actuosa* in this journal, see CARDINAL FRANCIS ARINZE, “Active Participation in the Sacred Liturgy,” *Antiphon* 9.1 (2005) 6-15. For an exhaustive treatment, see *Liturgy, Participation and Sacred Music: The Proceedings of the Ninth International Colloquium of Historical, Canonical and Theological Studies on the Roman Catholic Liturgy, Paris 2003* (London: CIEL UK, 2006).

tators, but as worshipers thoroughly imbued with the beauty of the liturgy....” (DC 9).¹¹

Pius X states that the qualities praised in Gregorian chant “are also found to a high degree in music of the classical school, especially in that of the Roman school” which produced many “excellent liturgical compositions” (TS 4). Moreover,

The Church has always recognised and encouraged all progress in the arts, and has always admitted to the service of her functions whatever is good and beautiful in their development during different centuries, as long as they do not offend against the laws of her liturgy. Hence more modern music may also be allowed in churches, since it has produced compositions good and serious and dignified enough to be worthy of liturgical use. (TS 5)

However, he warns that “since modern music has become chiefly a secular art, greater care must be taken, when admitting it, that nothing profane be allowed, ... nothing based as to its form on the style of secular compositions” (TS 5).

Pius XII, in addition to decreeing in his 1955 encyclical *Musicae sacrae disciplina* (henceforth MSD) that “Gregorian chant should be most widely used and great care should be taken that it should be performed properly, worthily, and reverently” (MSD 44),¹² also lauds the art of polyphony, including within that category works with organ and other instrumental accompaniment: “Since the Church always held this polyphonic chant in the highest esteem, it willingly admitted this type of music even in the Roman basilicas and in pontifical ceremonies in order to increase the glory of the sacred rites. Its power and splendor were increased when the sounds of the organ and other musical instruments were joined with the voices of the singers” (MSD 15). After giving a brief history of sacred music from the apostolic age to his own time, Pius XII writes:

The progress of this musical art clearly shows how sincerely the Church has desired to render divine worship ever more splendid and more pleasing to the Christian people. It likewise shows why the Church must insist that this art remain within its proper limits and must prevent anything profane and foreign to divine worship from entering into sacred music along with genuine progress, and perverting it. (MSD 17)

11 Pius XI, Apostolic Constitution *Divini cultus* (20 December 1928), in Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 331. All citations are drawn from here.

12 Pius XII, Encyclical *Musicae sacrae disciplina* (25 December 1955), in Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 351. All citations are drawn from here.

In his encyclical *Mediator Dei* of 1948 (henceforth MD) Pius XII permits modern compositions under certain circumstances:

It cannot be said that modern music and singing should be entirely excluded from Catholic worship. For, if they are not profane nor unbecoming to the sacredness of the place and function, and do not spring from a desire of achieving extraordinary and unusual effects, then our churches must admit them since they can contribute in no small way to the splendor of the sacred ceremonies, can lift the mind to higher things and foster true devotion of soul. (MD 193).¹³

Indeed, “to disdain and reject polyphonic music or singing in parts, even where it conforms to regulations issued by the Holy See” (MD 62) would be to fall into what Pius XII calls an “exaggerated and senseless antiquarianism” (MD 64).

Vatican II likewise recognizes that “other sorts of sacral music, especially of course polyphony, are in no way excluded from the celebration of religious services, provided that they fit in with the spirit of the liturgical event, in keeping with article 30” (SC 116). And what is this spirit? Article 30 of *Sacrosanctum concilium* states: “In order to encourage their taking an active share, acclamations for the people, together with responses, psalmody, antiphons and hymns, should be developed, as well as actions, movements and bodily self-expression. When it is appropriate, a worshipping silence should also be kept.” However, the Council Fathers do not insist that the congregation sing all of the music at Mass:

During liturgical celebration, everyone, whether minister or in the congregation, should, while carrying out their own role, do all that and only that which is their due – this being determined by the nature of the celebration and by liturgical norms. (SC 28)

Servers, readers, commentators and those who belong to the choir are also performing a genuine liturgical ministry. (SC 29)

The Instruction *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia* (henceforth DMS), promulgated on 3 September 1958 (the feast of St Pius X), legislates the manner in which “the active participation of the faithful may be brought about” within the context of sung Mass, presenting three degrees of participation to be incrementally achieved (DMS 25).¹⁴ The

¹³ PIUS XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947), ed. Gerald Ellard (New York: America Press, 1948) 75-76. All citations are drawn from here.

¹⁴ CONGREGATION OF RITES, Instruction *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia*

participation most strongly encouraged is the singing of the liturgical responses such as the Amen, *Et cum spiritu tuo*, etc. The second degree is the singing, in addition, of all of the Ordinary of the Mass, although if this be not possible “there is no reason why the easier parts, *Kyrie, eleison, Sanctus-Benedictus, Agnus Dei* should not be selected to be sung by all the people, while *Gloria in excelsis* and *Credo* are sung by the special choir [*schola cantorum*].” Finally, the third degree is attained “if all who are present are so skilled in Gregorian chant that they are capable of singing also the parts of the Proper of the Mass. This full choral participation should be insisted on especially in religious communities and in seminaries.”

That the third degree is of particular importance to seminaries and Religious communities is self-evident. If it is assumed that many churches will be unable to get the entire congregation to sing the entire Ordinary, it would of course be absurd to expect those congregations to sing the Propers in their Gregorian forms. This document certainly acknowledges the worth of “parish churches or other important churches [having] their own permanent ‘choir’ or *schola cantorum* which can give real ministerial service” (DMS 99) and could perform these more difficult repertoires.

According to Pius X,

Each part of the Mass and the Office must keep, even in the music, that form and character which it has from tradition, and which is very well expressed in Gregorian chant. Therefore Introits, Graduals, antiphons, psalms, hymns, the *Gloria in excelsis*, etc., will be composed each in their own way. (TS 10)

It is important to keep this distinction in mind when interpreting statements such as the following from *Musicam sacram*:

In some places there is the lawful practice, occasionally confirmed by indult, of substituting other songs for the entrance, offertory, and communion chants in the Graduale. At the discretion of the competent territorial authority this practice may be kept, on condition that the songs substituted fit in with those parts of the Mass, the feast, or the liturgical season. (MS 32)

(3 September 1958), in *Sacred Music and Liturgy: The Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites Concerning Sacred Music and Sacred Liturgy in Accordance with the Encyclical Letters of Pope Pius XII “Musicae Sacrae Disciplina” and “Mediator Dei,”* trans. J.B. O’Connell (Westminster MD: Newman, 1959) 41. All citations are drawn from here. [A second edition of O’Connell, ed. Christopher R. J. Ruder (n.p., 2008), includes a translation of *Musicae sacrae disciplina*; regrettably, this edition is riddled with typographical errors; Ed.]

This is not unbridled permission to replace the Gregorian repertoire with vernacular hymns more or less randomly selected. The music that is sometimes permitted to substitute for the proper chants must be inspired by the form and function of the various Gregorian forms.¹⁵ Also, the document here permits the “retention” of these repertoires, rather than encouraging their use, particularly when their texts deviate from the prescribed liturgical texts. If, as *Sacrosanctum concilium* teaches, “sacred music will be the more holy the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite,” (SC 112), then clearly the appointed liturgical texts are the “gold standard” for music used at Mass.¹⁶ In 1969 the newly-established Congregation for Divine Worship responded to an inquiry whether the rule still applies that appears in the 1958 Instruction, which permitted “religious songs of the people” to be sung at Low Mass. The response stated:

That rule [permitting vernacular hymns] has been superseded. What must be sung is the Mass, its Ordinary and Proper, not ‘something,’ no matter how consistent, that is imposed on the Mass. Because the liturgical service is one, it has only one countenance, one motif, one voice, the voice of the Church.... Thus texts must be those of the Mass, not others, and singing means singing the Mass not just singing during Mass.¹⁷

One element of the Church’s discipline on sacred music that developed over the course of the twentieth century was the regulation of the use of instruments in the liturgy. Pius X emphasizes:

Although the proper music of the Church is only vocal, nevertheless the accompaniment of an organ is allowed. In any special case, within proper limits and with due care, other instruments may be allowed too, but never without special leave from the Bishop of the Diocese, according to the rule of the *Caereemoniale Episcoporum*.” (TS 15)

15 See WILLIAM MAHRT, “Gregorian Chant as a Paradigm of *Sacred Music*,” *Sacred Music* 133.1 (2006) 5-14.

16 There has been significant confusion on this question because the texts of the Proper chants in the reformed *Missale Romanum* often differ from those found in the *Graduale Romanum* of 1974. See CHRISTOPH TIETZE, “*Graduale or Missale: The Confusion Resolved*,” *Sacred Music* 133.4 (2006) 4-13 and LÁSZLÓ DOBSZAY, “*Proprium Missae: Unity, Variety, and Rupture in the Roman Rite*,” *Sacred Music* 134.1 (2007) 16-32.

17 *Notitiae* 5 (1969) 406, in DOL 508, §4154, p. 1299, n. R4. The last sentence in the original Italian reads: “Cantare *la* Messa, dunque, e non solo cantare *durante* la Messa” (emphases in original).

He further stipulates, "Since the singing must always be the chief thing, the organ and the instruments may only sustain and never crush it" (TS 16).

Pius XI likewise emphasizes the primacy of vocal music:

It is proper that the voice itself rather than musical instruments should be heard in the churches; that is the voice of the clergy, singers and congregation. It must not be thought that the Church is opposed to the advance of musical art in preferring the human voice to any instrument: but no instrument, however excellent and perfect, can surpass the human voice in expressing the feelings of the soul, most of all when it is used by the mind to offer up prayer and praise to Almighty God. (DC 7)

However, he recognizes the organ as an instrument "which properly and by tradition belongs to the Church.... On account of its grandeur and majesty it has always been considered worthy to mingle with liturgical rites..." (DC 8). Although he declares that "chant combined with orchestra is by no means considered by the Church as a more perfect form of music or as more suited to sacred things" (DC 7), he does not specifically forbid the use of the orchestra or of other instruments.

Pius XII, however, demonstrates a broader appreciation for instrumental music in the liturgy:

Besides the organ, other instruments can be called upon to give great help in attaining the lofty purpose of sacred music, so long as they play nothing profane, nothing clamorous or strident, and nothing at variance with the sacred services or the dignity of the place. Among these the violin and other musical instruments that use the bow are outstanding because, when they are played by themselves or with other stringed instruments or with the organ, they express the joyous and sad sentiments of the soul with an indescribable power. (MSD 59).

However, like his predecessors, Pius XII notes the privileged position of the organ: "Among the musical instruments that have a place in church, the organ rightly holds the principal position, since it is especially fitted for the sacred chants and sacred rites" (MSD 58).

De musica sacra of 1958 gives specific regulations on the use of these various instruments, noting that

account must also be taken of the difference between *sacred* and *profane* music. There are some instruments, such as the classical

organ, which by their nature and origin are directly ordained for sacred music; others, such as certain stringed instruments played with a bow, are easily adapted to liturgical use; while, on the contrary, there are other instruments which, in common estimation, are considered so associated with profane music that they are entirely unfit for sacred use. (DMS 60b)

In order to use instruments in the liturgy or at pious devotions, it is necessary that these instruments can “really be adapted to sacred use” (DMS 68a) and that “the playing of these instruments must be done in such a matter, with gravity, and, as it were, with a religious purity, that the strident sounds of profane music are avoided and the piety of the people fostered” (DMS 68b). The document clarifies that when sacred music with instrumental accompaniment “is composed specifically for liturgical use it must be animated by a spirit of devotion, and piety; only on this condition can it be admitted as suitable accompaniment for these services” (DMS 7).

It is with these regulations in mind that one must read article 120 of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, which after praising the pipe organ states that “other instruments also may be admitted for use in divine worship, with the knowledge and consent of the competent territorial authority.... on condition that the instruments are suitable, or can be made suitable, for sacred use, are in accord with the dignity of the place of worship, and truly contribute to the uplifting of the faithful.” In interpreting this clause, *Musicam sacram* cites *De musica sacra* after the following statement: “Instruments that are generally associated and used only with worldly music are to be absolutely barred from liturgical services and religious devotions” (MS 63). Neither *Sacrosanctum concilium* nor *Musicam sacram* overturns any of the earlier instrumental regulations of Pius X that were not directly relaxed by Pius XII. The common opinion of the Church has thus been clearly demonstrated: certain instruments such as the piano, which Pius X explicitly forbade (see TS 19), are suitable in the secular sphere only.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSICAL EDUCATION

Any authentic revival of Catholic sacred music will necessarily involve great effort on the part of both teachers and students. Pius XI acknowledged, “We are well aware of the zeal and labor demanded by all which We have here ordained.... Let the difficulties of this holy undertaking stir up the spirit of the Bishops of the Church instead of discouraging them” (DC 11). Each of the popes who have legislated on sacred music has given specific norms for the task. Praising the efforts of St Pius X in this regard, Pope John Paul II noted: “Wherever

the papal disposition was put into practice, it has yielded abundant fruit."¹⁸ Of what have these norms and guidelines consisted?

Pius X enunciates four chief means of restoring sacred music. *First*, bishops "should, if they have not already done so, appoint in each Diocese a special commission of persons who are really competent in the matter, to whom they will entrust the duty of watching over the music performed in the churches in whatever way may seem most advisable. The commission will insist on the music being not only good in itself, but also proportionate to the capacity of the singers, so that it may always be well executed" (TS 24). *Second*, "In ecclesiastical seminaries and institutions the traditional Gregorian chant ... must be studied with all diligence and love, according to the law of the Council of Trent; and superiors should be generous in their appreciation and encouragement of this point with their students" (TS 25). In addition to singing chant, students are to study "the principles and laws of sacred music," with an attempt to "complete this teaching with some special instruction on the aesthetics of sacred art, so that the clerics may not leave the seminary without having right ideas on these subjects, which are also part of ecclesiastical knowledge" (TS 26). *Third*, choirs of singers (*scholae cantorum*) are to be restored "at least in connection with the more important churches," although Pius X, who as a parish priest and bishop had had considerable success reviving the practice of chant during his various assignments, also reminds that these choirs can be established "even in small parishes and in the country" (TS 27). *Finally*, "higher schools of Church music" are to be supported wherever they already exist and founded where they do not, as "it is most important that the Church should herself provide instruction for her own choirmasters, organists, and singers, so that she may inspire them with the right principles of this sacred art" (TS 28).

Pius XI, after acknowledging with approval the legislation of Pius X, notes that

in certain places these wisest of laws have not been fully observed, and thus the fruit which they were intended to produce has been lost.... In order, however, that clergy and people alike may obey more scrupulously the rules and regulations which are to be kept holy and inviolate by the universal Church, We are minded to add a few things here which the experience of the past twenty-five years has taught Us (DC, Introduction).

18 JOHN PAUL II, Chirograph for the Centenary of the Motu Proprio *Tra Le Sollicitudini* (22 November 2003), in *Origins* 33 (12 February 2004) §13, p. 601.

His recommendations are essentially similar to those of his predecessor but more detailed. For instance, he decrees: “Those who aspire to the priesthood, not only in seminaries but also in religious houses, should be trained from their earliest years in Gregorian chant and sacred music, because in childhood they learn more easily what belongs to melody, modulations and intervals, and any faults of voice can then be more readily eradicated or at least corrected, whereas in later years they become irremediable” (DC 1). He recommends “brief but almost daily reading and practice of Gregorian chant and sacred music. If this be carried out in the spirit of the liturgy, it will prove a solace rather than a burden to the minds of the pupils after the study of more exacting subjects” (DC 2). Pius XI likewise encourages the establishment of polyphonic choirs in addition to the chant *scholae* (see DC 5). Also encouraged is the establishment of “*Scholae Puerorum* (junior choir schools for boys)... not only in the Cathedrals and large churches but also in the smaller parish churches. The boys should be trained by the choirmaster so that, according to the old custom of the Church, they may join in singing in the choir with the men” (DC 6).

Pius XI recommends that

the efforts of both secular and regular clergy, under the leadership of their Bishops and Ordinaries, either working directly or even through others specifically trained for the task, should be devoted to the instruction of their people in liturgical music, since this is so closely connected with Christian doctrine. This will be best accomplished by readily teaching Gregorian chant in the schools, pious sodalities and other liturgical associations. Moreover, the communities of Religious, whether men or women, should be eager to bring about this end in the educational institutions which have been entrusted to them (DC 10).

To achieve this goal, however, the Pope realizes that “there is a great need of a large number of skilled teachers” and thus emphasizes the importance of “Schools and Institutes, founded here and there throughout the Catholic world, which are training competent instructors by carefully imparted knowledge of the subject in question” (DC 11). Finally, while Pius X had recommended in particular the restoration of the public singing of Vespers,¹⁹ Pius XI gives specific directions for those bound to choral recitation of the Office (DC 3), desiring the

¹⁹ PIUS X, Letter to Cardinal Respighi, 8 December 1903, in Hayburn, *Papal Legislation*, 233.

restoration of "the Divine Office in choir, which is a most important part of sacred worship, to its ancient dignity and splendor" (DC 2).

Pius XII expands on these directives, emphasizing the importance of musical education for children and adults (MSD 67, 79), and likewise insists on the formation of choirs at cathedrals and other churches (MSD 73). He states that it is of great importance that "those who are preparing for the reception of sacred orders in your seminaries and in missionary or religious houses of study are properly instructed in the doctrine and use of sacred music and Gregorian chant according to the mind of the Church by teachers who are experts in this field, who esteem the traditional customs and teachings and who are entirely obedient to the precepts and norms of the Holy See" (MSD 75), suggesting that students who show "remarkable facility in or liking for this art" should be sent "to the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome or to some other institution of learning in which this subject is taught" for further training (MSD 76).

Finally, various congregations of the Roman Curia published guidelines regarding sacred music during the pontificate of Pius XII. A circular letter published in 1957 by the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities gave a detailed "Program for the Teaching of Sacred Music in the Seminaries of Italy," proposing a curriculum that went from *Scuola Media* through the fourth year of theological studies.²⁰ In 1958 the Sacred Congregation of Rites published additional guidelines for the musical education of the clergy and laity (DMS 104-118), reiterating Pius XI's recommendation that each diocese have "an institute or school of singing and of organ playing" (DMS 115) and Pius X's injunction that each diocese have a Commission for sacred music (DMS 118).

Benedict XVI has repeated many of his predecessors' injunctions, especially with regard to the need for instruction in the art of Gregorian chant: "I ask that future priests, from their time in the seminary, receive the preparation needed to understand and to celebrate Mass in Latin and also to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian chant; nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant."²¹ He has also urged musicians "to integrate the valid innovations of the present into the heritage of the past in order to achieve a synthesis worthy of the lofty mission reserved to it in divine service," but has acknowledged that to accomplish this task

20 HAYBURN, *Papal Legislation*, 310-314.

21 *Sacramentum caritatis* 62.

“the ecclesiastical Authority must work to guide wisely the development of such a demanding type of music.”²²

Finally, Pope Benedict has called for a renewed emphasis on communal prayer, particularly the singing of the Divine Office:

The interior disposition of each priest and of each consecrated person must be that of “putting nothing before the Divine Office.” The beauty of this inner attitude will find expression in the beauty of the liturgy, so that wherever we join in singing, praising, exalting and worshipping God, a little bit of heaven will become present on earth.

Truly it would not be presumptuous to say that in a liturgy completely centered on God we can see in its rituals and chant an image of eternity....²³

In all of these statements the Pope demonstrates a self-conscious continuity with the tradition of the Church and indicates that the renewal called for by the popes of the twentieth century still needs to be fully realized.

CONCLUSION

Judging from the remarkable similarity of papal pronouncements on sacred music throughout the twentieth century, one gathers that they were not widely obeyed. That is, each pope has felt it necessary to repeat his predecessors’ teachings because these have gone largely unobserved, albeit with notable exceptions. In this way, there has clearly been continuity in papal teaching on the subject between the pre- and postconciliar periods.

If there is to be an authentic revival of sacred music within the Latin Church, the consistent teaching of the Church’s magisterium must be heeded, and the “hermeneutic of discontinuity” that regards *Sacrosanctum concilium* and Vatican II as a fundamental departure from previous teaching must be abandoned. Remarkable efforts have been made worldwide both by individuals and by groups dedicated to sacred music. Many religious and monastic communities continue to provide a noble example of the integration of sacred music and liturgy. For a serious revival of music in other sectors of the Church, choir schools and higher institutes of sacred music must be multiplied, and greater emphasis given to musical formation in seminaries and religious

22 BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music, 13 October 2007, in *Sacred Music* 134.4 (2007) 81.

23 BENEDICT XVI, Speech at Heiligenkreuz Abbey, 9 September 2007, in *Origins* 37 (20 September 2007) 228.

houses. Certain aspects of the Gregorian chant repertoire can indeed be challenging, but the attainment of competence is not beyond the reach of most clergy, religious, and laity. The history of sacred music in the twentieth century has shown that a true and lasting revival of sacred music will not be possible by legislation alone. A serious educational effort is required.

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