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Editor's Note: This article was originally published by CFN 15 years ago in 2009. We are republishing it in tandem with the latest roundtable we hosted on our YouTube channel, and a free redistribution of an 1860's book on the history and nature of Gregorian Chant which you can find on our Premium Channel.

On September 3, 1958, as the reign of Pope Pius XII nears its end, the Sacred Congregation of Rites promulgates the last sacred music document of Pius XII's pontificate, the *Instruction on Sacred Music and Sacred Liturgy*. This is the last major work on sacred music to be issued during the life of a pre Conciliar Pope, for within less than two months, Pius XII will die and Angelo Roncalli will become Pope John XXIII. Then, within less than three months, on January 25, 1959, John XXIII will announce what later becomes the most disastrous general council ever convened in the history of the Roman Catholic Church: Vatican II. In the aftermath of Vatican II, true Catholic sacred music dies a very quick death. It is soon replaced by "sacred music" that is not even deserving of the name.

Written by several experts on sacred music, as well as members of the Pontifical Commission for the General Renovation of the Liturgy, the *Instruction* of 1958 comes at the end of a long development that begins with Pope St. Pius X's *Motu Proprio: Tra le sollecitudini,* which is promulgated on November 22, 1903.[1] The *Motu Proprio* of 1903 initiates a long awaited reform of sacred music that continues up to the beginning of the Second Vatican Council.[2]

As with any development in liturgical practice, succeeding legislation, if consistent with the basic principles of a reform, should only develop, clarify, and refine the theory and practice of the reform in question. In the case of Pius X's reform, each pre Conciliar Pope, from Benedict XV to Pius XII, mostly cultivates and develops the reform according to the principles set forth in the *Motu Proprio* of 1903.[3]

Now while the vast majority of pre-Conciliar legislation on sacred music conforms to the *Motu Proprio* of 1903, including papal, curial, and even episcopal documents, nevertheless, on at least three points, the *Instruction* of 1958 seems to deviate from some of these principles.

Although these deviations are relatively small in number, they are significant in that they foreshadow certain dubious liturgical practices that will later find their way into the Vatican II and post-Vatican II documents. I would also add that, in spite of these problems, one should not overlook the fact that overall, the *Instruction* of 1958 is a very valuable document on those aspects that conform to the traditional practice of the reform -which is thecase

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with most of the points contained therein. This is important to remember, since the document is written after a long development (begun nearly fifty five years earlier) in which many points of the reform are now well developed, clarified, and highly refined by 1958. Nevertheless, there are still problems with some of the statements in the *Instruction,* which, despite all of the good the document contains, need to be identified, criticized, and ultimately amended according to the principles of Pius X's reform.

Although I will not try to address every problem in the *Instruction,* the focus will be on three major musical issues: first, the definition of sacred music; second, problems with the inclusion of "popular religious singing" as a category of sacred music; and third, difficulties with a directive that gives preference to Gregorian chant *to the virtual exclusion* of all polyphonic sacred music. In passing, I should also mention that the *Instruction* of 1958 is the document that first officially permits the various forms of the "Dialogue Mass" as options to the non Dialogue Mass.[4]

The Definition of Sacred Music

The first question concerns whether the definition of sacred music given in the *Instruction* is in strict conformity to the definition of sacred music found in Pius X's *Motu Proprio* of 1903. Specifically, does the *Instruction* actually expand the definition to include other types of sacred music not previously included in Pius X's legislation? Let us examine the *Instruction* in light of these problems.

The main body of the *Instruction* of 1958 begins with Chapter 1, which is entitled: *General Concepts.* Paragraph number one starts with a description of the liturgical context of the document, as well as a definition ofliturgy. In this paragraph, the definition of liturgy is important because sacred music is necessarily connected to the liturgy, which contains the final causes, both proximate and remote, of sacred music. Paragraphs number two and three concern the Mass and the various divisions of the **Mass insofar as a Mass is "sung" or "read." That is,** the discussion focuses on the distinction between a High Mass and a Low Mass respectively. Paragraph number two also includes the admonition to drop the phrase "private Mass" for the obvious reason that since all liturgies are by definition public worship, and all Masses are liturgies, therefore, all Masses are acts of public worship. Thus, it is recommended that the term "private Mass" no longer be used. Paragraph number four then articulates what we will see is only a mere enumeration of sacred music categories, and not a true definition in the strict **sense.**

The first three paragraphs of the *Instruction* of 1958 are as follows:

1. 'The sacred Liturgy comprises the entire public worship of the Mystical Body of Jesus

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Christ, that is, of the Head and of His members.' *(Mediator Dei,* November 20, 1947;

Acta Apostolicae Sedis 39 [-1947-] 528-529)

'Liturgical functions' are therefore those sacred rites which have been instituted by Jesus Christ or the Church and are performed by legitimately appointed persons according to liturgical books approved by the Holy See, in order to give due worship to God, the Saints, and the Blessed (cf. can. 1256). Other sacred acts performed inside or outside the church, even if performed by a priest or in his presence, are called 'pious exercises'.

2. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is an act of public worship offered to God in the name of Christ and the Church, wherever or in whatever manner it is celebrated. The expression 'private Mass' should, then, be avoided.

3. There are two kinds of Masses: the 'sung Mass' and the 'read Mass.' The Mass is called a 'sung Mass' if the priest celebrant actually sings those parts which are to be sung according to the rubrics. Otherwise it is a **'read Mass'.**

Furthermore, if a sung Mass is celebrated with the assistance of sacred ministers, it is called a solemn Mass. If it is celebrated without the sacred ministers it is called a *'Missa cantata'.*[5]

The *Instruction* commences with a quote from Pius XII's famous document on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei,* which correctly emphasizes the public worship aspect of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, both head and members, as being essential to the liturgy. The first paragraph also contains a reference to **"other sacred acts" called "pious exercises."** Unfortunately, the authors of the document do not articulate a clear definition of "pious exercises." One will search the *Instruction* in vain for a lucid **description, or even an example of a "pious exercise."** (This is because Pius XII's encyclical *Musicae sacrae disciplina* [MSD] introduced the term for the first time, and the authors of the *Instruction* probably assumed that most of their readers would already be familiar with MSD.)

Furthermore, Pius X, in his *Motu Proprio* of 1903, makes no mention of such things as "pious exercises," which (according to the authors of the *Instruction),* are extrinsic to the liturgy. Why does Pius X not mention these exercises, which are extrinsic to the liturgy, at the beginning of his *Motu Proprio?* Because this is not the appropriate place to address things **extrinsic** to the liturgy, when one is attempting to define what is **intrinsic** to the liturgy, especially in preparation for a definition of sacred music, which is an intrinsic and integral part of the sung liturgy.

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In their own way, of course, the authors of the *Instruction* are attempting to begin with the proper context of sacred music, namely, sacred liturgy. Piu.s X, in his *Motu Proprio* of 1903, also begins with the proper liturgical context, except that, unlike the *Instruction* of 1958, Pius X does not begin with a discussion of pious exercises, the definition of the Mass, or the differences between a "sung Mass" and a "read Mass."[6] – Instead, Pius X immediately launches into the liturgical context of sacred music by defining *precisely* the goals of liturgical sacred **music:**

1. 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

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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.[7]

From the very outset of the *Motu Proprio* of 1903, Pius X shows us that sacred music is a *pars integrans* of the sacred liturgy, which is directed to the general (i.e., the remote) goal of the liturgy, namely: "the *glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful*." Furthermore, there are other, proximate goals of sacred music, which include: *"increasing the beauty and splendor of the liturgy,"* as well as composing melodies to the texts so that the faithful: *"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.'*[6] The richness of this paragraph is in stark contrast to the first and second paragraphs of the *Instruction* of 1958, which paragraphs, besides giving us an ambiguous definition of the Mass, as well as murky references to "pious exercises," *completely fail to mention any of the various proximate goals of sacred music.* This, I would argue, is a rather serious omission given the importance of these proximate goals to the definition of sacred music.

Finally, in a very short paragraph four, the authors attempt to define sacred music:

4. By 'sacred music' is meant: a. Gregorian chant; b. Sacred polyphony; c. modern sacred music; d. sacred organ music; e. popular religious singing; f. religious music.[9]

From this paragraph, it is clear that *no real definition of sacred music has been articulated!* By this, I mean that the authors have given us *no essential definition* of sacred music. The authors have merely enumerated several supposed species of sacred music. This is like defining "fruit" as meaning apples, oranges, grapefruit, and the like. The description gives us some examples of fruit, but it neglects all of the *essential* elements of fruit, such as those things that specifically differentiate each fruit from one another, to name just one. In like manner, the description in paragraph four of the *Instruction* tells us nothing about the essential notes of Catholic sacred music. Compare this description in paragraph four of the *Instruction* of 1958 (above) to Pius X's definition of sacred music in paragraph number two of the *Motu Proprio* of 1903:

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

It must be holy, and therefore avoid everything that is secular, both in itself and in the way it is performed.

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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.[10]

According to Pius X, Catholic sacred music must be art, that is, it must have *integrity of form;* it must be holy, that is, contain the *sense of the sacred* and be free of all secular elements, from which **will** follow "spontaneously," the characteristic of *universality.* Integrity of form, the *sensus sacrae,* and universality: these three elements constitute true Catholic sacred music.[11] Once these traits are present in a sacred composition, and are performed by properly trained musicians, the music will arouse greater devotion, the members of the congregation will then be better disposed to the graces of the sacraments, and God will be glorified in a most magnificent way. Pius X's exposition is a model of logical integrity, linguistic precision, as well as theological and musical excellence. The same cannot be said of the *Instruc tion* of 1958, at least up to this point in the document, which, as we have already seen, has a number of ambiguities in it.

Although the *Instruction* does not provide an essential definition of sacred music, one can examine the six species of sacred music articulated by the authors to ascertain whether these categories imply a use of the term "sacred music" that is commensurately universal with the definition of sacred music in the *Motu Proprio* of 1903.[12] If the implicit definition in the *Instruction* is more universal than the one in the *Motu Proprio,* then the term deviates from Pius X's conception, and thus probably introduces a novelty into the theory and practice of the reform. Let us compare these six categories in the *Instruction* to the ones found in the *Motu Proprio.*

The first four categories articulated in the ***Instruction,*** **namely, "Gregorian chant," "sacred polyphony," "modern music," and "sacred organ** music," are all found in the *Motu Proprio* of 1903; the last two, however, "popular religious song," and "religious music," are definitely *not* included in Pius X's document of 1903. Let us examine these last two, beginning with "religious music," as defined by the authors of the *Instruction:*

10. By 'religious music' is meant any music which, either because of the intention of the composer or because of the subject and purpose of the composition, is likely to express and arouse pious and religious sentiments and is therefore 'most helpful to religion' *(Musicae sacrae disciplina:* A.A.S. 48 [- 1956-] 13-14). But, since it is not meant for sacred worship and is expressed in a rather free form, it is not permitted in liturgical functions.[13]

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By the term "religious music," the authors of the *Instruction* seem to be referring to such genres as oratorios, passions, and other music that dramatizes religious subjects.[14] Examples of oratorios would be Handel's *Messiah,* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah.* An example of a passion would be J.S. Bach's *Passion According to St. Matthew.* It also seems to be including pious hymns and songs. Although these examples appear to be correct, notice that due to the many ambiguities in the document, we are not sure what other musical genres might apply. Note also that the last sentence of this paragraph indicates that "religious music" is not allowed in liturgical functions.

Now in the *Motu Proprio* of 1903, when Pius X uses the term "sacred music," he is *only referring to liturgical music.* Therefore, the use of the term "religious music" as a type of sacred music that the *Instruction* indicates is forbidden in the liturgy, clearly implies that the term "sacred music" is being used in a wider (i.e., more universal) sense than that found in the *Motu Proprio* of 1903. This is definitely a deviation from the proper understanding of a key term used in the *Motu Proprio,* and is therefore questionable as to its conformity to Pius X's reform.

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Footnotes:

1. Robert F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music 95A.D. to 1977*

A.O. Collegeville, **MN:** The Liturgical Press, 1979, p. 357. Hereafter abbreviated PLSM.

Moreover, Pope Pius XII died on October 9, 1958, and Pope John **XXIII** was elected on October 28, 1958. The full title of the document in Latin **is *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia*. The official English translation is**

Instruction* on *Sacred Music and Sacred Liturgy.

2. Patrick J. Brill, "Pope St. Pius X's *Motu Proprio: Tra le sollecitudini:* An Introduction to the Great Milestone of Catholic Sacred Music." *Catholic Family News,* 2005. This article appeared in eight installments in *CFN* beginning with the March 2005 issue and ending in the October 2005 issue. Hereafter abbreviated MBrill, Pope St. Pius X, *Motu Proprio of 1903, *CFN,* 2005."

3. Brill, "Pope St. Pius **X's** *Motu Proprio of 1903," CFN,* 2005. I have shortened the reference to Pius X's great work to *Motu Propn·o* of 1903 for convenience, as well as to distinguish it from Pius X's other great *motu proprio:* Col *Nostro* of 1904 that promulgated

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the official Vatican edition of the Gregorian chant. Moreover, in Latin, the term *motu proprio* is not usually capitalized, but I am following the standard English stylistic practice of capitalizing foreign language titles.

4. On this issue, please see "Mang'e State Zitt'- Eat and Be Quiet," by Brian McCall in *The Remnant,* August 31, 2008.

5. *Instruction* of 1958 as quoted in PLSM, p. 358. The *Instruction* actually begins with a brief summary and outline of the contents of the document.

6. Although the *Instruction* calls the Mass "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," it defines the Mass as: "*… an act of public worship offered to God in the name of Christ and the Church, wherever* or *in whatever manner it is celebrated.n* This is a very curious definition since it omits any reference (in the definition) to the sacrificial nature of the Mass: it also fails to indicate how this sacrament differs from the other seven sacraments of the Church. Apparently, the authors presumed that by calling it uThe Holy Sacrifice of the Mass," no one would question the omission of the word "sacrifice" in the definition. This passage also contains the very disturbing clause that *states:"wherever* or *in whatever manner it is celebrated."* This is utterly astonishing! Is this an adumbration of the soon-to-come *Nevus* Ordo Mass, which certainly is celebrated today "wherever and in whatever manner"??!!

7. Pope St. Pius X, *Motu Proprio* of 1903 **as** quoted in PLSM, pp. 223-

224.

8. Brill, "Pope St. Pius X's *Motu Proprio of 1903, CFN,* 2005. See my commentary on the proximate goals of Catholic sacred music according to the mind of Pius X.

9. *Instruction* of 1958, PLSM, p. 358.

10. Pius X, *Motu Proprio* of 1903, PLSM, p. 224.

11. Brill, "Pope St. Pius X, *Motu Proprio of 1903, CFN,* 2005. Again, see my commentary on these three marks of authentic Catholic sacred music as defined by Pope St. Pius X.

12. By the term "commensurately universal," I mean a logical subject and predicate of the same "distribution"; e.g., in the proposition "all men are rational animals," the subject and predicate are of equal extension, and thus the proposition can be validly converted to "all rational animals are men," and remain true. On the other hand, the proposition "all men are animals" is not commensurately universal because the genus "animal" is of wider extension than the species "man," since not all animals are men. Thus, this last proposition does not

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convert and therefore produces a false proposition. Now according to Pius X, all [Catholic] sacred music is liturgical music, and all liturgical music is sacred music. However, as I will show, according to the authors of the *Instruction* of 1958, some sacred music is not liturgical. Therefore, according to the authors of the *Instruction,* sacred music is of wider extension than Pius X's concept of liturgical music.

13. *Instruction* of 1958, PLSM, p. 359.

