Part 1

Part 2

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In the previous installment, we examined the history of Catholic sacred music from the beginning of the Church to the end of the 13th Century in search of a tradition giving Gregorian chant priority to the virtual exclusion of polyphonic sacred music. *No evidence* was found in papal legislative documents (or for that matter, in ANY form of legislative ecclesiastical communication), that supported any legal Church-wide suppression of sacred polyphony, either as a directive, or as a precept. In the early 14th Century, we also saw that John XXII's bull *Docta Sanctorum Patrum* was NOT a suppression of polyphonic sacred music but instead, a set of precepts designed to purify sacred polyphony of abuses that appeared in the second half of the 13th Century. Pope John makes it very clear that polyphonic sacred music is to be ***retained*** in the liturgy of the Church, particularly in the Mass and the Divine Offices. The precepts of John XXII's legislation would remain in effect until the Council of Trent. In this installment, we **will** continue with this historical examination, beginning with the Council of Trent, and continuing to the eve of the Second Vatican Council.

**II. Chant vs. Sacred Polyphony: A Brief History of Catholic Sacred**

**Polyphony (continued)**

**d) The Council of Trent**

The onset of the Protestant Reformation begins in 1517, when Martin Luther nails his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the collegiate church in Wittenburg, Germany. Along with Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and later, Henry VIII of England, Luther and his revolutionaries form the forefront of a great revolt against the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, in the wake of this revolt, large parts of certain European countries, especially northern parts of Germany, fall to the reformers.

In direct response to this attack on the Church, the Popes and upper hierarchy of the time respond by convoking the Council of Trent. This Council becomes the chief force in the new Counter Reformation. Begun in 1545, the Council will meet on and off, for eighteen years between 1545 and 1563. The Council will address three primary topics: first, it will be occupied with a doctrinal defense of Catholic teaching against the heresies of the Reformation; second, it will be concerned with the eradication of internal abuses and

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problems; and third, it will deal with the liturgy, particularly the reform of sacred music. We, of course, will be concerned with this last aspect – the reform of **sacred music.**

The Council of Trent, in its treatment of sacred music, is primarily concerned with five principal abuses: first, the problem of many singers who are untrained (and unskilled) in the art of music and voice, and who teach through substitute assistants to cover their own lack of competence; second, the use of poorly edited music books by these same untrained and incompetent singers; third, poor execution and interpretation of sacred music, along with deliberately omitting important liturgical texts and songs from the prescribed music books; fourth, a lack of reverence and proper interpretation of the chant at the Divine Offices; and fifth, the use in the liturgy of songs and organ music that lack piety and the sense of the sacred, as well as the use of vernacular texts not taken from Sacred Scripture, and even the use of texts that are opposed to Scripture.[i]

As the Council attempts to find solutions to these problems, during the September 1563 meetings Pope Pius IV sends two cardinals, Giovanni Marone and Bernardo Navagero,[ii] to preside at the Council.[iii] Among the many issues discussed at the twenty fourth session (November 11, 1663), Cardinals Marone and Navagero reviewed the question of the use of sacred music at Mass. Both Cardinals suggested that *only* Gregorian chant should be used at Mass, and much stronger prohibitions be made for sacred polyphonic music in liturgies other than the Mass. This "suggestion" was, of course, unprecedented in the entire history of the Church. Fortunately for sacred polyphony, saner heads would prevail. When the King of Spain, Ferdinand I, heard news of this, he wrote to the Council Fathers defending the **retention** of sacred polyphony:

"We will not approve removing ornate chants (polyphony) completely from our services, be cause we believe that so divine a gift as music can frequently stir to devotion the souls of men who are especially sensitive to music. This music must *never be banned* from our churches."[iv]*[My emphasis]*

Notice that unlike Cardinals Morone and Navagero, Ferdinand I is in ***complete conformity*** to the over fifteen-hundred years of Catholic sacred music tradition by stressing, first, the divine gift that *"can frequently stir to devotion the souls of men …,"* as well as the admonition that this genre of music must ***never be banned*** from Catholic churches.

In the discussions of music at Trent, there appeared to be two main opinions: one, those who called for the near total suppression of polyphonic

music from the liturgy; second, those who called for a reform of music and who desired to preserve both chant and sacred polyphony in the liturgy of the Church. Finally, according to

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Hayburn, the Council Fathers decided that ***both*** chant and polyphony were to be RETAINED in the liturgy of the Church:

"On December 3, 1563, it was made known to those present at the council that music would be accepted by the Church. At the same time all profane and worldly forms of music must be excluded permanently from the house of God."[v]

As further proof of the Church's desire to preserve not only Gregorian chant, but also sacred polyphony, Pope Paul IV, in his *Motu Proprio: Alias Nullas Constitutiones,* which was promulgated on August 2, 1564, forms a congregation of eight Cardinals to oversee the implementation of the decrees of the Council of Trent. This *Motu Proprio* is divided into several jurisdictional sections. The one dealing with music falls under the jurisdiction of the *Camera Apostolica*. One of the earliest issues that the congregation takes up is the promotion of the Papal Choir as a model of the principles of the new reform, in order to give an excellent example to the entire Catholic world of what sacred music should be.[vi]

The two leading Cardinals of the commission most involved with musical matters were Cardinal Carolus Borromeus (today known as St. Charles Borromeo), and Cardinal V. Vitellozi. In addition to the disciplinary aspects of the Papal Choir, these Cardinals were concerned with establishing a style of polyphonic music that would reflect the teachings of the Council of Trent on sacred music. One plan of these Cardinals was to commission certain sacred music compositions to be performed in the presence of an assembly of Cardinals in order to receive their comments as to how the music followed the principles of clear textual enunciation, and profane-free Latin texts. Cardinals Borromeo and Vitellozi invited the Papal Choir to sing at the home of Cardinal Vitellozi on April 28, 1563, in order to sing some Masses, and to determine if the words could be clearly understood.[vii] It is not known with certitude what Masses were performed that day, but there is some documentary evidence to show that three Masses by Palestrina were perhaps performed.[viii] Furthermore, according to Hayburn, Cardinal Borromeo invited the well-known composer Vincenzo Ruffo to compose a Mass that would demonstrate the clarity of the text, as desired by the Council. This fact, along with Cardinal Borromeo's deep involvement in the fight against banning sacred polyphony from the Church, certainly shows a Church Father who had a clear understanding of the sacred music traditions of the Catholic Church, and who was willing to contend with persons ignorant of these musical traditions. Finally, according to Hayburn:

"On June 19, 1563, Palestrina was requested to perform a Mass in the Sistine Chapel, where a number of Cardinals had gathered with the Pope [i.e., Pope Pius IV – P.B.]. When the group admired the work, the Pope declared that such music be *kept in the services of the Church* on the condition that its use be disciplined."[ix] *[My emphasis]*

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Although this "battle" may seem to have been hard fought, the truth is that the anti-polyphony curmudgeons were never much of a threat to the sacred polyphony of the Church. In fact, according to Lewis Lockwood, there is no substantial evidence that during the Council of Trent the idea of banning polyphony altogether ever went beyond that of a preliminary proposal.[x] In other words, the anti-polyphony cranks were no match for the solid musical traditions of the Church, defended consistently by Popes, as well as such illustrious Churchmen as St. Charles Borromeo, and the *vast majority* of the Fathers of the Council of Trent.

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[i] . Robert F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation* on *Sacred Music. 95 A.D. to 1977 A.D.* Collegeville, **MN:** The Liturgical Press, 1979, pp. 26-27. Hereafter, PLSM.

[ii] *The New Grove High Renaissance Masters,* Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina," by Lewis Lockwood and Jessie Ann Owens. New York: Norton, 1984, p. 105. In 1538, then Bishop Marone actually banned all polyphonic music from the·churches of his diocese. This, of course, was a local action undertaken by a local authority, and does not prove my thesis wrong, since this is not an act of a Pope for the universal Church. Morone's foolish actions were later overturned.

[iii] *PLSM,* p. 28.

[iv] *Ibid.,* p. 28. Ferdinand I was very likely familiar with the music of the great polyphonic masters of Spain, such as Morales, Guerrero, Ortiz, and particularly Victoria.

[v] *Ibid.,* p. 29.

[vi] *Ibid.,* p. 29.

[vii] Franz Xavier Haberl, *"Die Cardinalskomission van 1564 und Palestrina's Missa Papae Marcelli," Kirchenmusicalisches Jahrbuch* 1892, p. 86.

[viii] Andre Pons, *Droit ecc/esiastique et musique sacr8e,* 4 vols. St. Maurice, Switzerland: Editions de l'Oeuvre St. Augustin, 1959-1961, 3:114.

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[ix] *PLSM,* p. 30.

[x] *The New Grove High Renaissance Masters,* "Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina," by Lewis Lockwood and Jessie Ann Owens. New York: Norton, 1984, pp. 104-108.

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