

Text Handout:

Docta sanctorum patrum (1324/1325)

How church services should be conducted. Singers should be alert, not stumble on words, and exercise moderation in singing.

The learned authority of the Holy Fathers has decreed that in the offices of divine praise, which are offered with the obligation of due service, (1) everybody's mind should be wakeful, that (2) the recitation must not falter, and that (3) the modest sobriety of the singers should sing with gentle inflection. "For in their mouth resounded a sweet sound."

Although services are offerings to God, they also kindle devotion among the faithful.

Certainly sound resonates from the mouths of singers when they accept God in the heart. For while they speak to God with words, they also kindle devotion [among the faithful] with chants. That is why the singing of psalmody was established in the churches of God, namely, in order that it may stir the devotion of the faithful. So it is that the nighttime and daytime Office, and the celebrations of Masses, are sung (1) without ceasing by clergy and people, (2) at a mature pace, and (3) using a distinct church mode, so that they can take pleasure in that distinction, and delight in that maturity.

On those terms musical worship is to be encouraged.

But now there are adherents of a new school who occupy themselves with note-values, especially small ones.

However, several disciples of a new school, who are exercised about the measuring of time, are intent upon new notes. They prefer to make up their own rather than sing the old ones. The ecclesiastical songs are performed in semibreves and minims, pierced with tiny notes. For they cut up the sounds with hockets, render them gooey with discants, and not infrequently trample upon them with vernacular *tripla* and *moteti*—so much so that (1) sometimes they show contempt for the foundations of the Antiphonal and Gradual, (2) are oblivious of what they are building upon, (3) do not know the modes and don't distinguish them, nay rather, (4) muddle them together, smothering with swarms of notes the chaste ascending of the plainchant, and its temperate descending, by which those modes can be told apart.

With the help these notes, they create music that shows disregard and ignorance of the plainchant.

Aside from notation there is also their conduct in church, which is disorderly. If anything they arouse lasciviousness.

For they rush and do not come to rest. They intoxicate the ears, and give no healing. They mimic what they utter with gestures which ridicule the devotion one comes to find, and they flaunt the very lack of piety one is to shun. Boethius was surely right to say that a lascivious mind either

This can lead the faithful to become soft and of unsound mind..

delights in more lascivious tunes, or (after frequently hearing them) turns soft and breaks down.

This kind of singing must be completely eradicated from the church.

We and our brethren [the cardinals] have perceived for some time that this is in need of correction. To remove it, nay more, to cast it out, and to more effectively extinguish it from the same Church of God, is what we now hasten to do.

A stern prohibition.

Wherefore, by the counsel of the same brethren, we strictly enjoin that from now on, nobody should presume to try these or similar things in the said offices, especially in the canonical Hours, or when the ceremonies of Masses are celebrated.

Punishment to be imposed by ecclesiastical judges, according to the status of the culprits: monks or priests.

If anyone acts in defiance of this, then he is to be punished, either (for those who are not exempt) by the Ordinaries or Deputy-Ordinaries of the places where those things shall have been committed, or (for those who are exempt) by their Provosts or Prelates, or their deputies, to whom the correction and punishment of offenses and transgressions is otherwise known to pertain, with an eight-day suspension from office on the authority of this canon.

But there is one exception to the prohibition. Very occasionally one may sing consonances upon the plainchant, like fourth, fifth, and octave..

However, by this we do not intend to forbid that now and then, on feast days (especially in the ceremonies of Masses and in the aforesaid Divine Offices), certain consonances that have the savor of melodious sound, such as octaves, fifths, fourths and such like, may be performed upon the simple ecclesiastical chant. But this must be done in such a way that the wholeness of the chant remains unimpaired, and that no change is made in music of good moral character—especially since consonances of this kind soothe the hearing, stir devotion, and do not allow the minds of those singing to God to become sluggish.

Provided that the integrity of the chant can be maintained.

For consonances are good things.

Done and given, etc.