# Tinctoris's *Magnum opus*

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The *magnum opus* that is the subject of this contribution is a treatise by Johannes Tinctoris which bears the all-encompassing title "Concerning the Origins and Practice of Music": *De inventione et usu musice*. Only a few portions of this treatise survive, but those portions suggest that the original was indeed *magnum* in conception. It consisted of no fewer than five books, and the whole treatise may have been about as big as the rest of Tinctoris's theoretical writings put together. A few years ago I came across a thirteenth-century text that sheds new light on the compilation of *De inventione*, and invites a review of what we know about this mysterious treatise.[1] Before presenting that text, let me begin with a quick summary of the state of research.

*De inventione* is the last music treatise that Tinctoris is known to have completed, and it stands apart from his other treatises in more than one respect. After he had been appointed at the court of Naples around 1472, Tinctoris spent the next five or so years publishing treatise after treatise at a rate of perhaps two or three a year—a burst of activity that culminated in his most ambitious work, the book on the art of counterpoint, dated 1477 (see Table 1). In the next five years he fell completely silent, as though he had said everything he was ever going to say about music. But then, early in the 1480s, Tinctoris published selected portions of what was said to be a recently-completed treatise named *De inventione et usu musice*.[2] And, for the first time, he published his work by having it printed, at the press of Mathias Moravus at Naples.

After the five-year gap, we encounter a Tinctoris altogether different from the man we knew before. In his earlier treatises he was a dedicated pedagogue, a stern teacher who stayed on topic, who did not waste words, and who hoped single-handedly to rid the world of error and inconsistency, setting forth the truth as he knew it. But in *De inventione*—or at least those portions that were printed—Tinctoris comes across as more relaxed, more inclined to intersperse his commentary with bits of poetry, supremely self-assured in the way he drops the names of classical authors left, right, and center, more given to telling us about his personal experiences, and more disarming in the way he reveals his private thoughts and feelings. Our scholar and schoolmaster has come to recognize, it seems, that there is a world out there that does not always conform to what seems so certain and true on paper, or in the classroom.

**1.** Rob C. Wegman, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe, 1470–1530* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 53–54 and 189–91.

**2.** Facsimile edition of the print in Karl Weinmann, ed., *Johannes Tinctoris (1445–1511) und sein unbekannter Traktat, "De inventione et usu musice"* (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 1961).

Table 1. The surviving writings on music of Johannes Tinctoris

| | |
|---|---|
| | CA. 1472: APPOINTMENT AT NAPLES |
| 1472–75 | *Expositio manus* |
| | *Proportionale musices* |
| | *Liber imperfectionum notarum musicalium* |
| | *Tractatus de regulari valore notarum* |
| | *Tractatus de notis et pausis* |
| | *Tractatus alterationum* |
| | *Super punctis musicalibus* |
| | *Terminorum musicae diffinitorium* |
| ca. 1475 | ***Complexus effectuum musices*** |
| 1476 | *Liber de natura et proprietate tonorum* |
| 1477 | *Liber de arte contrapuncti* |
| | 1477 TO 1481–83: NO KNOWN TREATISES PUBLISHED |
| 1481–83 | ***De inventione et usu musice*** |

And he likes to tell us about it, even if it means straying from his avowed purpose. We get to know a Tinctoris who has been to other parts of the world, who has heard and seen strange and sometimes inexplicable things, who knows very many outstanding musicians in many important places. And all of this in a print of which only one copy survives, in the Proske music library in Regensburg.[3]

Over twenty years ago, Ronald Woodley announced the discovery of a second source for *De inventione*.[4] Several excerpts had turned up in a manuscript that is now in the municipal library at Cambrai,[5] duly prefaced with such inscriptions as "Ex libro secundo Iohannis Tinctoris *De inuentione et usu musice*." As we can see in Table 2, there was no overlap with any of the chapters already known from the print. And the newly discovered excerpts changed the picture dramatically. The Tinctoris who emerges from the Cambrai fragments is interested mainly in the theological and metaphysical aspects of music. Although he refers once to "us musicians," one would never actually guess, from the way he writes about these things, that he was a professional musician, or even a particularly well-informed witness to fifteenth-century musical culture. He strings together scriptural and patristic quotations as though he were going through a drawer of index cards. And for all the humanist culture we know he was so eager to display, Tinctoris does not reveal much of it here. To be perfectly truthful, the Cambrai source was something of a let-down.

**3.** D-Rp, H 15.
**4.** Ronald Woodley, "The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris's Fragmentary Treatise *De inventione et usu musice*," *EMH* 5 (1985): 239–68.
**5.** F-CA, MS A16, fols. 8v–12v.

Table 2. What is left of *De inventione et usu musice*

| book | chapters represented in 1481–83 print | chapters represented in Cambrai MS | subject matter |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | — | 5 | the twenty-seven effects of music |
| | — | 11 | musicians in scripture |
| II | — | 7 | poem *Cantores quibus ars uox* |
| | — | 12 | the Sibylline acrostic (after Aug., *Civ. dei*, 18.23) |
| | 19 | — | singers before the birth of Christ |
| | 20 | — | singers since the birth of Christ |
| III | 8 | — | *tibia*: definition and invention |
| | 9 | — | *tibia*: history and use |
| IV | 4 | — | *lyra* |
| | 5 | — | related string instruments |
| V | — | 24 | heavenly music |

After Ronald Woodley, "The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris's Fragmentary Treatise 'De inventione et usu musice'," *EMH* 5 (1985): 239–68 at 247.



But there was one major surprise in the fragments discovered by Woodley. Bk. I, chap. 5, "De effectu," was devoted to the twenty-seven effects of music, and turned out to be a thoroughly reworked version of the *Complexus effectuum musices*, the famous treatise on the effects of music, published some seven or eight years previously around 1475. Strangely enough, Tinctoris had massively condensed the treatise, from its original 2,800 words to a mere 800—less than a third. To be sure, all the twenty effects were still there, but most of the quotations and authorities cited as proof for those effects had disappeared. As if to make up for this, Tinctoris had added seven new effects, bringing the total to twenty-seven.

How extraordinary that an older treatise should have found its way, in radically revised form, into the later *De inventione*. Then again, why *not* recycle earlier materials when compiling a book whose title promises to present the very *summa* of contemporary musical knowledge? So Woodley could not resist asking a question that is as intriguing as it seems inevitable. I now quote his own words:[6]

> Is it possible…that not only the *Complexus*, but all the other known treatises were brought together between the covers of *De inuentione*, perhaps also in revised form (along with all the new material) in the early 1480s? There are certainly still enough gaps in our knowledge of the treatise's content to accommodate this…

What a tantalizing possibility: it would solve, in one stroke, the problem of what the missing parts of *De inventione* consisted of. But alas, Woodley knocked it down almost as soon as he raised it. Here is how he reasoned. If Tinctoris had indeed revised his entire existing corpus of theoretical writings, then naturally it was the new versions he would have wanted to be in circulation, not the older and now superseded ones. Not that he could ever stop the older versions from circulating, but in future he

**6.** Woodley, "The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris's Fragmentary Treatise," 253, and, for what follows, 254.

would authorize only the copying and printing of the new versions. However, it is apparent from two surviving manuscript collections of his work that Tinctoris did continue to oversee the copying of the *original* versions later in his life—with one significant exception: the "musical effects" treatise, the very one which we positively know to have been revised. So, Woodley concluded, none but the latter treatise is likely to have been revised and incorporated in *De inventione* in the early 1480s. And so we are once again left to guess what the rest of this *magnum opus* consisted of.

A few years ago I stumbled on a text that seems to reopen the whole question. At the time I was not working on Tinctoris, but was interested in the Order of Dominicans and its views on music. One study of the order had a footnote with a Latin quotation that seemed to come, word for word, out of Tinctoris.[7] It mentioned seven effects of music: music softens hardness of heart, it uplifts the earthly mind, it banishes sadness, it prepares for acceptance of divine blessing, chases off the devil, pleases God, makes the Church Militant more like the Church Triumphant, and confounds its enemies. Tantalizingly, the precise Latin formulations were identical to those I remembered from the *Complexus effectuum musices*, but the text was taken from a treatise said to be by Humbert of Romans, fifth Master-General of the Dominicans (ca. 1194–1274/77).[8]

Table 3 offers a comparison. Humbert's original text is printed in Column 1. Next to it, in Column 2, are the corresponding passages from the *Complexus effectuum musices*. What is immediately apparent is that Tinctoris has not only copied six of the seven effects described by Humbert, but that he has availed himself of many of the Scriptural and patristic quotations cited in their support. By today's standards (at least in those places where those standards are still taken seriously) this looks like an open-and-shut case of plagiarism.

Table 3. Synoptic presentation of textual parallels between (1) Humbert of Romans, *Expositio regulae Sancti Augustini*, and Johannes Tinctoris, (2) *Complexus effectuum musices*, and (3) *De inventione et usu musice* (Cambrai version)

| 1<br>Humbert of Romans, *Expositio regulae Sancti Augustini* (ca. 1263–70) | 2<br>Tinctoris, *Complexus effectuum musices* (ca. 1474–75) | 3<br>Tinctoris, *De inventione et usu musice,* I. v (Cambrai version): "De effectu" |
|---|---|---|
| LVIII. De utilitatibus cantus vocalis. Circa primum notandum est quod, licet haeretici reprehendant cantus vocales Ecclesiae, tamen Ecclesia non sine magna ratione ipsos instituit. Habet enim hujusmodi cantus sive jubilus multos utiles effectus. | | |
| Unus est quod cor liquefacit in affectum sanctum. **Unde** de beato **Augustino** patro nostro scriptum est: **Flebat** autem uberrime **in hymnis et canticis, suave sonantis Ecclesiae vocibus** vehementer affectus. | [viii. 2–4] Musica duritiam cordis resolvit. **Unde Augustinus** in libro nono Confessionum: **Flevi in hymnis et canticis** tuis, **suave sonantis ecclesiae** tuae **vocibus** commotus acriter. | [164–66] Duritiam cordis resoluit. **Augustinus**: O quantum **fleui in hymnis et canticis** tuis, **suaue sonantis ecclesie** tue **uocibus** conmotus acriter. |

**7.** P. Antolín González Fuente, *La vida litúrgica en la orden de predicadores: estudio en su legislación, 1216–1980* (Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1981), 256n53.
**8.** Humbert de Romans, *Opera de vita regulari*, ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier, 2 vols. (Turin: Marietti, 1956), 1:187–88.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Item, mentem elevat. Bernardus: Oculos cordis attollit jubilus laudis**, unde multi rapiuntur in extasim in hujusmodi jubilatione. Et ideo postquam dictum est in Ps. 67: In ecclesiis benedicite Deo Domino, sequitur: **Ibi Benjamin adolescentulus in mentis excessu**. | [xi. 2–3] **Musica** terrenam **mentem elevat**. Unde **Bernardus** Super cantica: **Oculos cordis attollit iubilus laudis**.<br><br>[x. 6] Et paulo post subdidit: **Ibi Beniamin adolescentulus in mentis excessu**. | [140–42] Terrenam **mentem eleuat**. **Bernardus: Oculos cordis attolit iubilus laudis**.<br><br>[161–62] paulo post subdidit: **Ibi Beniamin in mentis excessu**. |
| Item, **tristitiam** malam **depellit**. Glossa super illo verbo **Jac. 5: Tristatur aliquis vestri**, etc.: Crebra psalmodiae dulcedo nocivae tristitiae pestem depellit; ideo dicit David, Ps. 70: Exultabunt labia mea, ed est, ita replebor gaudio quod in labiis apparebit, cum cantavero tibi. | [vii. 2–4] Musica **tristitiam depellit**. Unde Jacobi capitulo **quinto: Tristatur aliquis vestrum**? oret. Aequo animo? psallat. | [166–67] **Tristitiam depellit. Iacobus: Tristatur aliquis uestrum**; oret equo animo et psallat. |
| Item, **praeparat** viam cordis Domino ad infusionem multiformium gratiarum. Gregorius, Super Ezech.: Cum vox psalmodiae per intentionem cordis agitur, omnipotenti Domino iter ad cor praeparatur. Ps. 67: Psalmum dicite nomine ejus, et sic iter facite ei. Et, **4 Reg. 3**: **Cum caneret psaltes, facta est super Elisaeum manus Domini**. Et isti sunt quatuor effectus in anima. | [v. 2–4] Musica ad susceptionem benedictionis Domini **praeparat**. Unde **quarti Regum**, **tertio** capitulo: **Dum caneret psaltes, facta est super Heliseum manus Domini.** | [132–34] Ad susceptionem benedictionis diuine **preparat**. In **quarto** enim libro **regum** legitur quod **quom caneret psaltes, facta est super heliseum manus Domini**. |
| Item, **diabolum fugat. 1 Reg. 16: David tollebat citharam, et psallebat manu sua, et refocillabatur Saul, et melius habebat: recedebat enim ab eo spiritus malus**. | [ix. 2–3] Musica **diabolum fugat**. Unde **primi Regum**, capitulo **160: David tollebat cytharam et psallebat manu sua; refocillabaturque Saul et levius habebat, recedebatque ab eo spiritus malus**. | [176–78] Demonem **fugat**. Enimuero (ut in **primo regum** legitur) quom **Dauid citharam** percutiebat, **spiritus malus a Saul recedebat**. |
| Item, **Deum delectat**, unde in Canticis dicit Ecclesiae, **Cant. 2: Sonet vox tua in auribus meis**. | [i. 2, 6] Musica **Deum delectat**…Quippe per Salomonem, **Canticorum secundo** capitulo, sic illam alloquitur: **Sonet vox tua dulcis in auribus meis**. | [119–21] Musice usus **Deum delectat**. Vnde ad sponsam eius ecclesiam in canticis canticorum ait: **Sonet uox tua in auribus meis**; uox enim tua dulcis. |
| Item, **militantem Ecclesiam** vertit in similitudinem **triumphantis** quae semper jubilat. **Bernardus, Super Cant.: Nihil in terris ita proprie repraesentant quemdam coelestis habitationis statum, sicut alacritas laudantium Deum**. Item, inimicos Ecclesiae conturbat. 2 Paral. 20: Cumque coepissent laudes canere, vertit Dominus insidias inimicorum in semetipsos, et percussi sunt. | [iv. 2–3] Musica **ecclesiam militantem triumphanti** assimilat. Unde **Bernardus Super cantica: Nihil in terris ita repraesentat quendam caelestis habitationis statum, sicut alacritas laudantium Deum**. | [129–32] **Eclesiam militantem triumphanti** assimilat, dicente **Bernardo: Nichil in terris ita representat quendam celestis habitationis statum, quam alacritas laudantium Deum**. |
| Felices effectus isti, et felix illa jubilatio quae **duritiam cordis resolvit**, quae **terrenam mentem elevat**, quae **tristitiam** saeculi **depellit**, quae **ad susceptionem** divinae **benedictionis** viam **praeparat**, quae **diabolum fugat**, **Deum delectat, militantem Ecclesiam triumphanti assimilat**, hostesque ipsius confundit! | [viii. 2] Musica **duritiam cordis resolvit**. [xi. 2] Musica **terrenam mentem elevat**. [vii. 2] Musica **tristitiam depellit**. [v. 2] Musica **ad susceptionem benedictionis** Domini **praeparat**. [ix. 2] Musica **diabolum fugat**. [i. 2] Musica **Deum delectat**. [iv. 2] Musica **ecclesiam militantem triumphanti assimilat**. | [164–66] **Duritiam cordis resoluit**. [140–41] **Terrenam mentem eleuat**. [166–67] **Tristitiam depellit**. [132–33] **Ad susceptionem benedictionis diuine preparat**. [176] Demonem **fugat**. [119] Musice usus **Deum delectat**. [129–30] **Eclesiam militantem triumphanti assimilat**. |
| Humbert de Romans, *Opera de vita regulari*, ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier, 2 vols. (Turin: Marietti, 1956), 1:187–88. | Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols., CSM 22 ([Rome]: AIM, 1975–78), 2:165–77. | Ronald Woodley, "The Printing and Scope of Tinctoris's Fragmentary Treatise 'De inventione et usu musice'," *EMH* 5 (1985): 239–68 at 263–66. |

Yet whatever the case, a debt of this magnitude, and to a thirteenth-century author at that, would surely have been an embarrassment for a humanist with Tinctoris's ambitions. So perhaps it is not hard to understand why he would have wanted to rework the treatise, quite possibly after someone had made him aware of the textual debt. Maybe this is what explains the drastically revised version in the Cambrai manuscript?

But no, that is not what happened at all, as we can tell from the Cambrai version in Column 3. It is true that this version represents a massive condensation, as I said, but by a curious coincidence, *all* the borrowings from Humbert have been retained. In fact, in a chapter that is now only one-third the size of the original treatise, they have become proportionally all the more prominent.

Why would Tinctoris have found these particular passages worth retaining? To answer that question, we should probably consider what other material he was prepared to jettison. Table 4 shows the authorities cited in the *Complexus* and the Cambrai chapter. There is considerable overlap between the two texts, and the citations copied from Humbert (underlined in the table) are all in this shared area. The Cambrai chapter adds a few citations not found in the *Complexus*, in the area to the right of the overlap, and it dispenses with a large number of citations from the original treatise, to the left of the overlap.

What can we conclude from this table? First of all, it is apparent that Tinctoris retained about half of the quotations from the Bible and the Christian tradition—including, as we have seen, all those that had been taken over from Humbert. A little strange, for a musician who had degrees in canon and civil law, is his decision to delete the two quotations from the Decretals, a central source for canon law.

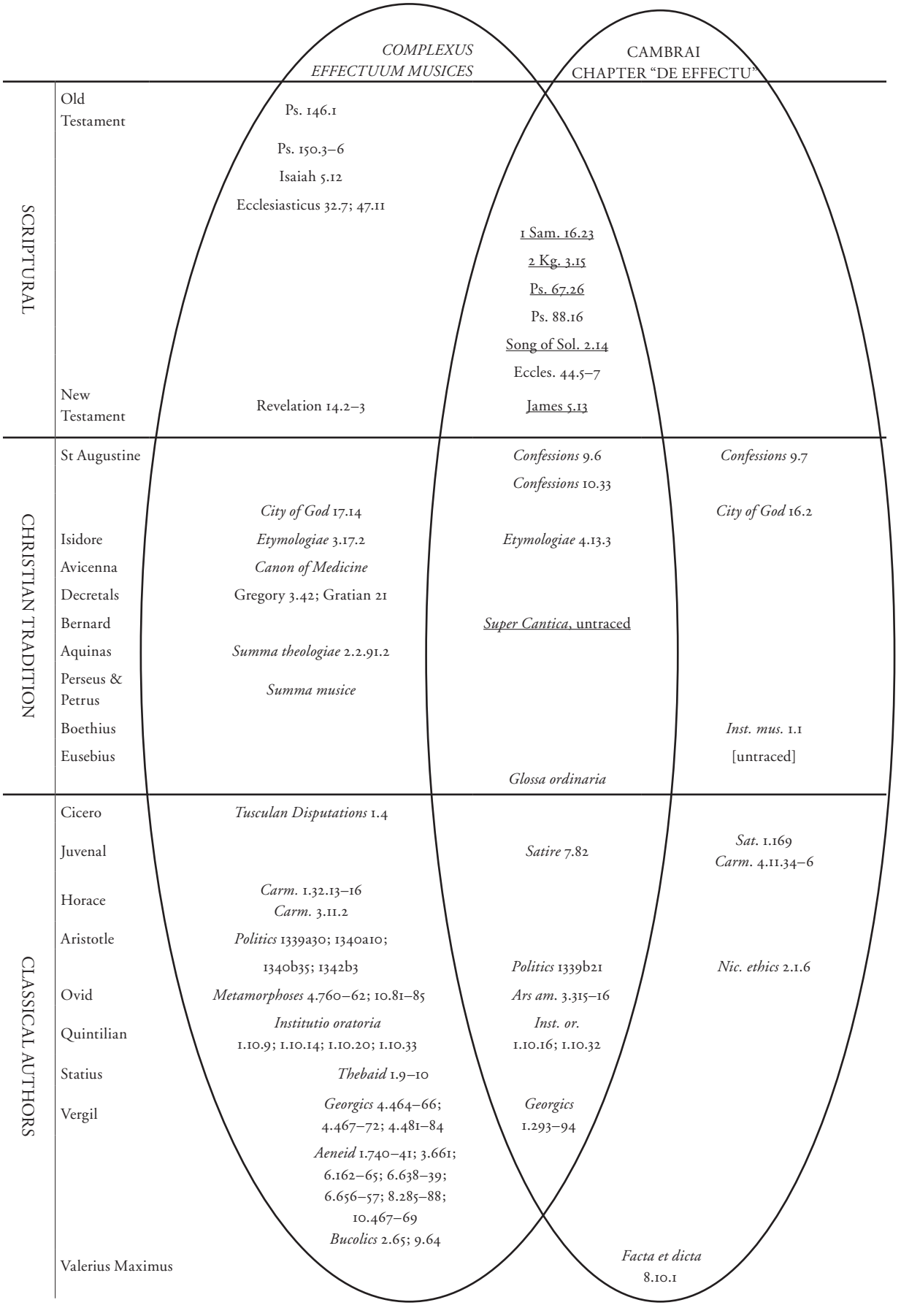
But that is nothing compared to what happened with authors from Classical Antiquity. Here, we see a dramatic reduction in the number of citations that were deemed worth retaining: not one-half but less than one-fifth. The heaviest casualties are in Vergil: there is no longer any trace of the *Aeneid* or the *Bucolics* in the Cambrai chapter. No less puzzling, for a self-respecting humanist like Tinctoris, is the one reference he had made to Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. It has disappeared in Cambrai, even though we know from other writings that this was a favorite text of Tinctoris.[9]

Why was Tinctoris prepared to cut all these citations, and yet at pains to keep every word from Humbert of Romans? Was he perhaps reacting against his own humanist aspirations, turning back to traditional Christian roots? No, that is out of the question. Let's go back once more to Table 2. One column shows the six chapters of *De inventione* that were printed in the early 1480s. In those chapters, few as they are, we do find a reference to the *Tusculan Disputations*, and no fewer than five quotations from Vergil's *Aeneid*. And there is a long, long list of other authors whose opinions or statements Tinctoris is only too eager to invoke here: Livy, Gellius, Seneca, Servius, Acro, Appian, Pliny, Eratosthenes, Porphyry, Diodorus Siculus, Statius, Marcus Manilius, and countless others. Clearly Tinctoris was anything but reacting against humanism in the early 1480s.

And yet, when we turn to the second column, the chapters represented in the Cambrai manuscript, the picture changes dramatically. Even outside the chapter on

**9.** Rob C. Wegman, "Johannes Tinctoris and the 'New Art'," *ML* 84 (2003): 171–88, esp. 183–85.

Table 4. Authorities cited in the *Complexus effectuum musices* and the Cambrai chapter "De effectu"



musical effects, there is not a trace of Vergil or Cicero, let alone the long list of authors I enumerated a moment ago. In the rest of the Cambrai excerpts, in fact, all citations are either from the Bible or the Church Fathers. It is hard to imagine that their author knew much if anything about humanism.

How is this possible? Do the chapters in the second column even belong to the same treatise as the chapters in the first column? I think there can be only one possible solution to the problem, and it is provided by the chapter on musical effects. Let us return one last time to Table 4. Yes, there was a reworking all right, but we probably shouldn't read the table from left to right, but *from right to left*. It is the Cambrai version that must have come first. The quotations from Cicero and Vergil, and other Classical authors, were not so much taken out as *inserted*. This may sound paradoxical, for it would mean that the Cambrai chapter predated the *Complexus*, and hence must have been written some time before ca. 1475. But the Cambrai manuscript clearly says that it belonged to *De inventione*, and we know that this treatise was not finished until the early 1480s.

The only way to solve that difficulty is to posit that *De inventione* was a long-term project. In that case, we would have some of the earliest drafts in the Cambrai manuscript, and some of the finished portions in the 1480s print. What happened in between is difficult to say, but let me sketch an outline of Tinctoris's career in which this scenario could be seen to make sense.

First of all, there is no difficulty in assuming that the Cambrai texts date from very early in Tinctoris's life. It could well have been as early as the 1450s, when he had barely received the degree of master of arts, and probably had little knowledge of, or interest in, humanism. Ovid, Horace, and Juvenal he may have read in school, and Boethius and Quintilian in the liberal arts curriculum. But intimate familiarity with Vergil, and with Cicero's philosophical writings, he was yet to acquire, and his studies in canon law may have been a thing of the future. Then again, Tinctoris must have been quite adept at using florilegia. Perhaps he even compiled his own florilegium of quotations relevant to music, and conceivably this is how Humbert's text found its way into his papers.

The idea to write a treatise with the ambitious title *De inventione et usu musice* must have occurred to him at this stage of his career. Maybe it was around 1460 (when he is known to have spent a short while at Cambrai)[10] that he allowed some of the first fruits to be copied by others, not realizing how unripe they really were. But then, later in the 1460s, two things happened. One is that he became a succentor at Orléans, and later a choirmaster at Chartres, and was thus responsible for the musical education of choirboys.[11] His formidable intellect got pulled away from abstract metaphysical speculation, and became exercised, perhaps in an all-consuming way, with the very basics of music theory—and especially with having them taught correctly.

Here we might perhaps discern the historical roots for one of the central paradoxes about Tinctoris. As a writer on music, he was to make his mark by codifying the most

**10.** Ronald Woodley, "Iohannes Tinctoris: A Review of the Documentary Biographical Evidence," *JAMS* 34 (1981): 217–48 at 224; Alejandro Enrique Planchart, "The Early Career of Guillaume Du Fay," *JAMS* 46 (1993): 341–68 at 367–68.

**11.** Woodley, "Iohannes Tinctoris: A Review," 225–31.

elementary theoretical stuff—notes, dots, rests, intervals, solmization—as if taking his readers back to grade school. Yet what made him different from other writers is that he *cared* so deeply about that stuff. For him, it was precisely the most elementary issues that were all-important, and fully deserving of the humanist gift-wrapping in which he was to present them. Even so, the treatises he published after his appointment at Naples were not the work of a solitary scholar dwelling in an Arcadian paradise—as the famous illumination from the Valencia manuscript[12] might lead us to assume. They would have been inconceivable without years of work as a dedicated teacher of choirboys. As texts they very probably had taken shape during those years, early in the 1460s. In fact, Tinctoris says explicitly that one of the treatises, the *Proportionale*, had been brewing inside him for a long time before he published it.[13]

It is also as choirmaster, I think, that he developed his more pedantic side. It is easy to imagine Tinctoris's frustration when the notation of some piece by Du Fay or Ockeghem contradicted his teachings, and the choirboys or his fellow-singers triumphantly seized on the contradiction to challenge his authority. There was no way he could ignore those pieces in his treatises, or could avoid having to explain, with manifest exasperation, what was wrong about them—otherwise he might get the same examples thrown at him long after his treatises came out. It is interesting to note, by the way, that most of his musical examples are quite old, dating from the 1450s or early 1460s: Binchois, Domarto, Cousin, Du Fay, Pulloys, Barbingant, Le Rouge, Eloy d'Amerval—hardly the rising stars of the early 1470s. The only exception, as far as I can tell, is Busnoys, whose *L'homme armé* mass probably dates from the later 1460s. But there is no indication that Tinctoris has taken account of the works of, say, Weerbeke, Martini, Vincenet, Basiron, or any other up-and-coming figures of the 1470s.

By the mid-1460s, many of Tinctoris's treatises may have existed in versions close to those we have today. All they probably lacked was a title and a prologue, and perhaps a decision as to what to do with them in the first place. It is possible that some of the texts were no more than bundles of chapters, earmarked for inclusion in some bigger project. Perhaps, to reopen Woodley's suggestion, that project was the unfinished *magnum opus* entitled *De inventione*. This treatise, too, I think, must have been evolving during the 1460s as Tinctoris's thinking developed. And this brings us to the second thing that must have happened in that decade.

It has long been known from the matriculation registers of the University of Orléans that Tinctoris, as a university student, displayed his intellectual pretensions in a manner so ostentatious that it was bound to arouse the derision of his fellow students.[14] This was about 1462. If things like this were going on, then at some point it must have become painfully clear to Tinctoris himself, perhaps in a way that he experienced as humiliating, what a schoolboy he had shown himself in the early drafts of *De inventione*. At some point he must have determined for himself a course



**12.** E-VAu, MS 835.

**13.** Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, 1:66: "Hercle! et antequam et postquam hoc *Proportionale* edidissem, considerationi eius contenti operosissime vacavi."

**14.** Woodley, "Iohannes Tinctoris: A Review," 226–29 and 243. I am grateful to Professor Woodley for pointing out that the marginal commentaries to Tinctoris's entry in the *Liber procuratorum* are much later than the entry itself, and cannot be taken as proof that Tinctoris was being ridiculed by his fellow-students—although this is of course highly likely.

of study in the *studia humanitatis*, probably in dialogue or in correspondence with an established humanist. All theoretical writings in progress were suspended, until Tinctoris was ready to return to them once he had thoroughly immersed himself into the culture of humanism.

Where, when, and with whom, did he study during those years? In the absence of documentary evidence we can only rely on clues in his writings. Tinctoris never tells us anything about his teachers: if anything, he likes to imply that he was self-taught, that he had learned everything from studying works that he deemed worthy of imitation. But when it comes to his humanist erudition it is hard to believe that the theorist owed it all to self-study alone. At the very least, he must have been part of a circle of like-minded scholars. It is not impossible that he spent the late 1460s earning his living as a musician in proximity to French humanist circles. But neither should we rule out the possibility that he moved to Italy much sooner than previously thought, perhaps already by the mid-1460s. There is in fact some evidence to support that possibility.

Woodley has shown that by about 1476–77, Tinctoris was sufficiently fluent in the Italian language to provide a complete Italian translation of the statutes of the Order of the Golden Fleece for his employer, King Ferdinand.[15] For someone who is thought to have moved to Naples only five or six years previously, around 1471 or 1472, that was an extraordinary achievement. True, many northern musicians must have acquired a working knowledge of Italian while living there. But such literary proficiency as Tinctoris possessed, to the point of taking on the work of a professional translator, presupposes more than that: hard work, continuous study, and a determination to perfect his knowledge of Italian—a language which he could just as well have dismissed as inferior to the Latin of humanists, or to the French of *rhétoriqueurs*, and vastly less important for him to acquire than Greek (which would at least have given him access to ancient music theory). Yet acquire it he clearly did. What is more, there is evidence in the *Proportionale musices* that his endeavor to learn Italian had already been well under way by the time he composed its Prologue, about 1472–73.

When speaking in the Prologue of contemporary princes, and their generous support of music, Tinctoris weaves in a passing remark about liberality that has the ring of a proverbial saying, and sounds as though it had been quoted from somewhere else. Here is the full sentence, with the passing remark in italics: "And since the singers of princes (if their masters be endowed with *the liberality that makes men famous*) are rewarded with honor, glory, and wealth, many are kindled with a most fervent zeal for this kind of study."[16] *Liberalitas claros homines facit*: in the age of electronic text searching it should not be a problem to find the source for a phrase like this, but nothing resembling it ever showed up in my own searches—until very recently. The source turned out to be an unexpected one indeed: Tinctoris quoted the phrase from a collection of marginal glosses to Dante's *Divina Commedia* compiled at Florence some

**15.** Ronald Woodley, "Tinctoris's Italian Translation of the Golden Fleece Statutes: A Text and a (Possible) Context," *EMH* 8 (1988): 173–205.

**16.** "Et quoniam cantores principum *si liberalitate, quae claros homines facit* praedicti sint, honore, gloria, divitiis afficiuntur, ad hoc genus studii ferventissime multi incenduntur." Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, 2a:10.

time in the early fifteenth century: *liberalitas facit homines claros…et auaritia facit homines obscuros et infames*.[17]

The ramifications of this identification are too numerous to explore here; suffice it to say that Tinctoris is unlikely to have come across the phrase, at least in this particular wording, in a florilegium. There is thus a distinct possibility that by about 1472, Tinctoris himself had been reading Dante's *Commedia* with Latin marginal glosses, and had in fact progressed as far as the *Purgatorio*. The most likely scenario, I suspect, is that he attended public lectures on Dante's *Divina Commedia* some time in the late 1460s, presumably in the context of humanistic studies, perhaps at a university, perhaps in the household of a patron, or perhaps in his private time while employed as a musician or legal clerk. Whatever the case, Tinctoris can only have become acquainted with Dante in Italy, and that means he may have settled there much sooner than previously thought.

Not long after his appointment at Naples around 1472, Tinctoris was ready to show the world the first fruits of his humanist education. The Prologue to the *Proportionale musices*—perhaps the only part of the treatise that was newly-conceived at the time—is nothing if not an ambitious literary composition. Its first half presents a capsule history of music—numbingly boring, and mostly recycled, I suspect, from his early drafts for *De inventione*, though with a dash of Cicero thrown in. Then, in the second part that has justly become famous—about the English and the French and the "new art"—his text is saturated with intertextual allusions, and richly overflowing in intellectual implications.[18] This treatise, he seems to want to show, is going to be worthy to be dedicated to a king: Ferdinand of Aragon, his new employer. True, the rest of the text is still a little plain, and in his conclusion Tinctoris apologizes for the absence of such rhetorical flourishes as he added in the Prologue. [19] But at least his royal appointment gives him the status and the connections to publish, and thus preserve, his old teaching texts for posterity: who would have taken notice of an obscure choirmaster writing in some provincial town up in northern France?



**17.** The phrase goes back to an anonymous set of marginal glosses to Dante's *Divina Commedia* written in the early fifteenth century and surviving in the Codex Caetani (Rome, Archivio Caetani, *Misc*. 1243/1267). For this source and the glosses contained therein, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino as a Man of Letters and the Glosses Attributed to Him in the Caetani Codex of Dante," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36 (1983): 1–47. The gloss in question refers to *Purgatorio*, Canto XX, ll. 97–102, where Hugh Capet explains that the souls in purgatory spend the day praising shining examples of generosity, but remember the evil examples of avarice and greed during the night. The anonymous glossator adds: "De die canunt actus liberalitatis et ita eis respondetur ut patet in textu de Uirgine Maria, de Sancto Nicholao et de Fabritio, et de nocte canunt actus auaritie et cupiditatis. Ad notandum quod *liberalitas facit homines claros*, ideo de die canuntur eius actus, et *auaritia facit homines obscuros et infames*, ideo de nocte etc." See Gelasio Caetani, ed., *Comedia Dantis Aldigherii Poetae Florentini* (Sancasciano Val di Pesa: Stabilimento tipografico Fratelli Stianti, 1930), 264. The glossator is well known to have made extensive use of Benvenuto da Imola's Commentary on the *Divina Commedia*, written ca. 1379, and the passage in question was among the borrowings. See Benevenutus de Rambaldis de Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, eds. William Warren Vernon and Giacomo Filippo Lacaita, 5 vols. (Florence: Typis G. Barbèra, 1887), 3:538. Benvenuto in turn was alluding to Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, II, Prose 5, 4: "Atqui haec effundendo magis quam coaceruando melius nitent, si quidem *auaritia semper odiosos, claros largitas facit*." Boethius's original version circulated in such medieval florilegia as the *Liber proverbiorum* by pseudo-Bede and Othlo of St Emmeram, but it was clearly not the version whose verbal resonance can be heard in Tinctoris.

**18.** Ronald Woodley, "Renaissance Music Theory as Literature: On Reading the *Proportionale Musices* of Iohannes Tinctoris," *Renaissance Studies* 1 (1987): 209–20; Wegman, "Tinctoris and the 'New Art'," 181–85.

**19.** Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, 2a:60: "Haec equidem, clementissime rex, de proportionibus musicis specialiter et generaliter, licet eas *non summis rhethoricae coloribus tinxerit praeter causas in prohemio positas*, tuus Tinctoris tractavit."

Within five years, of course, the well of teaching texts will dry up, and he needs to find new things to write about if he is to realize his aspirations to fame as an author. But by then, Tinctoris has already embarked on revising, and appropriately updating, his projected *magnum opus*. He expands one of its chapters into the *Complexus*, loading it to the brim with new citations, not least from Vergil's *Aeneid*, and taking out seven effects that do not add much to its central thrust. Then, for five silent years, he keeps working and reading, day and night, maturing as a scholar, but also losing much of the pedantic certainty that he had brought with him to Naples as a former choirmaster. He mellows. Doubt creeps in. The world is changing. When he publishes six chapters in the early 1480s, we can tell that there are cracks in the intellectual surface—most notably in his story about the blind viol players of Bruges.[20]

Perhaps Tinctoris managed to publish more and we happen not to have it. To judge from the biographical sketch by Abbot Trithemius, printed in 1495, Tinctoris may have published the entire first book of *De inventione*, for the abbot claims to have seen a treatise entitled "*De origine…musice*" comprising one book.[21] Trithemius also reports that Tinctoris fashioned a table listing all the most ancient musicians, culminating in Jesus Christ as the greatest singer—this must correspond to chap. 11 of bk. 1, or perhaps chaps. 19 and 20 of bk. 2—and either of these may later have been condensed into the Prologue to the *Proportionale*, whose first half does in fact enumerate ancient musicians, from Jubal to "that greatest musician, Jesus Christ."

Other than these portions, now lost, the whole project seems to have run aground. When we encounter Tinctoris one last time, in a literary epistle written in the 1490s, he is a man who professes to have lost all faith in worldly things except virtue.[22] The unstated implication of his letter is that Fortune has not been especially kind to him. He even implies some disenchantment with his employer, King Ferdinand, when he suggests that princes have not always deserved the trust of their servants: "let all creatures of this world cease, therefore, to seek happiness from mortal princes, in whom the trust of so many has been confounded."[23] Compare this to what Tinctoris had written in the Prologue to his *Proportionale musices*, some twenty-five years previously: "since the singers of princes…are rewarded with honor, glory, and wealth, many are kindled with a most fervent zeal for this kind of study." Was it the absence of appropriate rewards that had extinguished his once fervent zeal for the study of music? Or was there nothing worthy of publication left in what remained of *De inventione*? Was the *magnum opus* doomed to remain forever unfinished? For now we can only guess at the answers, and hope that further clues will emerge in the future.

**20.** This story is subjected to a closer analysis in my article "Johannes Tinctoris and the Art of Listening," *Studies on Renaissance Music in Honour of Ignace Bossuyt*, ed. Pieter Bergé and Marc Delaere (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008), 279–96.

**21.** Woodley, "Iohannes Tinctoris: A Review," 247.

**22.** Woodley, "Tinctoris's Italian Translation," 236–44.

**23.** Ibid., 242: "Desinant igitur terrena animalia a principibus mortalibus, quibus plerique *confisi* fuere *confusi*, felicitatem querere, quam solus ipse Deus rector ac princeps omnium optimus maximus bonis dare potest." The word-play on *confisi* and *confusi* is an allusion to Ps. 21:5–6.