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**Jesuit & Spectacle**



# ***“Jesuita non cantat.” Evidence from the Inaugural Year of the Roman Church of the Gesù***

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Within the field of liturgical music, one still hears – even today – that Jesuits pay no particular attention to music. Comments run the gamut from statements that Jesuits have never had any use for music nor any sense of its place within Catholic liturgy to bluntly stating that *“Jesuita non cantat”*; “Jesuits do not sing<sup>1</sup>”. In this paper, I shall use primary documentary evidence to refute these statements, which, as I shall show, misrepresent the Ignatian perspective and Jesuit practice<sup>2</sup>.

Historically, music has been integral to the life of the Roman Catholic Church from its inception, yet the Jesuits often have been accused of minimising this aspect of Catholic tradition. A sixteenth-century sacristy handbook entitled *Ordine et Osservationi della nostra Chiesa per tutto l’Anno*, catalogued as *Chiesa del Gesù Busta XI Nr. 968* and held in the Jesuit Archives in Rome tests the veracity of this claim. This *Ordine* is a manual of practical instructions for the rituals held at the Church of the Gesù in Rome, mother church of the Society of Jesus. Its contents date from late 1584 through 1585, the inaugural year of the Gesù<sup>3</sup>, and demonstrate that, in fact, music permeated the liturgical practice of the early Jesuits throughout the entire liturgical year. Thus, while the *Constitutions* restricted the use of music within the Society, the public worship life at the Jesuits’ mother church was quite another matter.

The charge that St. Ignatius and his Jesuits dismissed music stems from the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. As the founder and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas CULLEY, *Jesuits and Music*, 15. Fr. Culley was the 1966 Rome Prize Fellow in Musicology, the American Academy in Rome.

<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive discussion of this topic, see Cynthia Anne CAPORELLA, “Instructions and Observations of Our Church for the Entire Year” (dissertation; Kent State University, 2006).

I would like to express my thanks to Sheila E. McGinn, Ph.D., and Nathalie Hancisse for their editorial suggestions in producing this article and to the GEMCA for inviting me to participate in this project.

<sup>3</sup> The church was consecrated on November 25, 1584.

first General of the Society, St. Ignatius (1491–1556) wrote this rule of life for Jesuit mission and ministry. In it, he specified that singing the “Liturgy of the Hours” or “Divine Office” in community (“in Choir”) would not be a requirement:

Because the occupations which are undertaken for the aid of souls are of great importance, proper to our Institute, and very frequent; and because, on the other hand, our residence in one place or another is so highly uncertain, our members will not regularly hold choir for the canonical hours or sing Masses and offices. For one who experiences devotion in listening to those chanted services will suffer no lack of places where he can find his satisfaction; and it is expedient that our members should apply their efforts to the pursuits that are more proper to our vocations, for glory to God our Lord (*Constitutions* VI.3.[586]–4).

This injunction could very well be the reason for the provocative declaration, “*Jesuita non cantat*”.

The singing of the Office in Choir had been part of the daily rule of monastic communities since the sixth century. By lifting the requirement that the Office was to be sung in community, Ignatius turned his back on the age-old practice of an order coming together for common sung prayer at regularly set times during the day. This decision created a new model for religious life, leaving behind the late-medieval emphasis on fleeing the world to find redemption. Instead, Ignatius adopted an incarnational view of the world, one of “finding God in all things,” encouraging his Society to embrace the world on a universal scale and to seek “contemplation in action.”

In reality, the Jesuits were forging new customs for a new way of mission within the world. The philosophy and mission of the Jesuits prioritised a “radical availability” for mission, promoting the world as the “theatre of God’s grace.”<sup>4</sup> The Jesuits’ way of proceeding was to focus on ministry among the people rather than cloistered from the people, and fostered by a spirituality that engaged the world rather than fleeing from it. In order to achieve this, the Jesuits needed a radical freedom of mobility. Some have asserted that the Jesuits had no time to “waste” on their inward spiritual lives or the care of the soul strengthened through the praying of the Office in Choir. That was simply not the case. Instead, it was a

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<sup>4</sup> Paul V. MURPHY, “The Ignatian Vision and the Mission of Higher Education,” Ignatian Day Lecture at John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio (13 January 2006).

matter of needing to be available at a moment's notice to respond to a pastoral need or to continue to be pastorally present, rather than worrying about returning to the community in time for the next Office (basically, every three hours)<sup>5</sup>.

All of these remarks underscore that, for spiritual and mission-driven reasons, the Jesuit tradition deliberately limited the use of music within the prayer life of the members of the Society of Jesus. This being said, one must remember that the governing directives in the *Constitutions* were laid out for the *internal* life of the Society. However, the ministerial life and prayer life of the Jesuits also had a *public* focus. *Chiesa del Gesù 968* gives us a glimpse into the public liturgy, worship, and actual use of music by the Society of Jesus at their principal church.

Then, I would like to say a word about the description, date and specifics of the *Ordine*. Two versions of the *Ordine* are housed in the Archives of the Jesuit Curia in Rome, catalogued as *Chiesa del Gesù Busta XI Nr. 968* and *Chiesa del Gesù 2007*. After transcribing and translating the entire manuscript of *Chiesa del Gesù 968*, and comparing it with *Chiesa del Gesù 2007*, I concluded that the manuscripts date from 1592 and 1593, respectively, and are copies of an *Ordine* dating from 1584-1585. The autograph appears to have been lost, most likely during the suppression of the Society in 1773. Added notes at the beginning and end of both documents serve as clues to the chronology of the two copies. I chose to transcribe and translate the earlier of the two versions, and the information presented in this paper is the result of that project.

The small, approximately 7x9-inch, leather-bound document contains 68 numbered vellum pages. The 16th-century Italian language appears in a longhand script. Most of the script in the document flows in a very florid hand. In several places, a later hand has written marginal comments. Within the text, other scribes or editors, most likely fellow Jesuits, deleted some lines of the text by crossing them out; at other times, they added in new text. In addition, editorial comments appear in the left and right margins.

All of these added citations seem to derive from a date later than the original. They appear in another hand and change or expand upon the original instruction. It appears that these comments came

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas CULLEY, "The German College in Rome: A Center for Baroque Music", in *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution*, Rudolf WITTKOWER and Irma B. JAFFE (eds.), New York, Fordham University Press, 1972, p. 111.

from individuals from the community of priests and brothers living, working, and worshipping at the Gesù in the years following the writing and copying of the original 1584 document. Dating the original material for this *Ordine* to 1584-1585 reveals its proximity to the years of the Council of Trent. The Jesuits were avid followers of the Pope and supporters of the Council, some actually attending its sessions. The Jesuits' use of music in their public worship, detailed in this sacristy manual, remains consistent with the teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. The Council of Trent, in its third session ending in 1563, twenty-one years before the writing of *Ordine et Osservationi della nostra Chiesa per tutto l'Anno* in 1584, upheld the importance of music in the life of the Church. The document demonstrates that the public liturgical and musical practice of the Jesuits maintained a strong congruency with the teaching of the Council of Trent. Since one of the major strengths of the Society of Jesus was its focus on defending the teaching and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, it follows that the Jesuits would have continued to use the musical tradition of the Church.

The beauty of this document is that, in addition to being a primary source, it is a practical, working document from the late sixteenth century. Handwritten notes are found in the margins and above the original citations, suggesting that it was a manual housed in the sacristy and revised as time went on and practical details and/or preferences changed or morphed. When trying to picture the liturgical events that are described in the *Ordine*, one is struck by the sights, smells, and sounds of sixteenth-century liturgical practice.

Page after page of this *Ordine* illustrates the way music enhanced and unified the public worship at the Church of the Gesù. The citations document that music complemented the soul of Jesuit spirituality, even though Ignatius and his early followers did not make it as central to their mission as other religious orders had done. And so, even with their focus on active public ministry, and in spite of Ignatius' concerns in the *Constitutions*, this *Ordine* from the Church of the Gesù demonstrates the importance of music in the early communal worship of the Society of Jesus.

A close look at this primary-source document reveals the specifics of the noteworthy place of music at the Gesù. The document has forty-two sections of notated directives, with a total of five hundred and seventy-five citations. Of these, one hundred and forty-seven are musical citations. Thus, nearly one quarter of the document's

contents refer to a musical directive of some kind. Attesting to this musical attentiveness, two words resound throughout these musical references: "is sung." Citations and phrases abound throughout the text such as:

*\*\*Tutte le Domeniche et feste, nelle quali si predica si suol cantar la Messa. (6:1)*

*\*\*The Mass is usually sung on all the Sundays and Feasts on which there is preaching.*

*\*\*Si canta il Mattutino la notte di Natale. (7:1)*

*\*\*Matins is sung on the night of Christmas.*

*\*\*In questo mezzo si canta un mottetto... (19:24)*

*\*\*In this part a motet is sung...*

These references and many more like them clearly demonstrate that music was integral to Jesuit public rituals and played a substantial role in the public liturgies offered at the Church of the Gesù throughout the entire liturgical year.

The general references to what was sung span the following genres: the Mass, Matins, Vespers, Compline, Lauds, Benediction, the Epistle, the Gospel, the Passion, Tenebrae, the Divine Office, the Gloria, Psalmody, the Prophets, the Intercessions, the Prayers, the Blessing of the Pascal Candle, Litanies, and the Responsory. While, for the most part, specific musical details, such as titles and composers, are lacking in the pages of *Chiesa del Gesù 968*, the one-hundred and forty-seven references to music and sung liturgy do offer us more than just the words "is sung." In general, the citations of *Chiesa del Gesù 968* reveal the following musical details in greater or lesser degree:

- what was sung;
- when it was sung;
- who sang it;
- in what style it was sung;
- what titles were sung;
- special directives concerning environment, arrangement of the liturgical space, decor, movement or vesting for these sung liturgies (including times when the Cantor and/or choir sing while in procession and the reminder to darn one's socks in order to appear "proper" for the Good Friday service... one of my personal favorites!)

Several examples of these diverse citations are as follows. As you read them, I encourage you to imagine yourselves seated within the church and to engage your senses in the descriptions contained in these wonderful directives.

## **I. Examples of what was sung with special environmental directives**

### *Section 6, Notes on the Sung Mass, Citation 6*

On the principal Feasts of The Lord and of the Madonna, as well as on some other solemn days, two other brothers, in addition to the two brothers named above, vested in surpluses and with candlesticks and lit candles, accompany the Priest who sings the mass to go to the altar and to return to the sacristy at the end of the Mass. They also stand behind the Priest when he sings the Gospel.

### *Section 7, Notes on Matins, Citation 1*

Matins is sung on the night of Christmas.

### *Section 15, Notes on the Office of Holy Week, Citation 3*

Music stands are prepared with violet cloths at the side of the Gospel, for those who sing the Passion.

## **II. Examples of who sang it, again with special environmental directives**

### *Section 22, Notes on the Day of Christmas, Citations 4 and 5*

As the doors of the church are opened, two Brothers go to call the Cantors, and they carry two torches in order that they come with light.

They prepare three candlesticks with three white torches in the Choir, so that the Cantors are able to see well when they are singing Matins.

### *Section 21, Notes on the Matins for the Dead, Citation 6*

At the end of the Gospel of the High Mass, the Acolytes take from the Celebrant his chasuble and maniple, and at this point the Cantors, with the Choir, begin to sing the Responsory.

Though sparse, there are some musical styles and titles referenced within the manual. The use of both plainsong and motet styles are delineated in the citations. Cantors are specifically referenced as singing a motet. In addition, there are a total of six specific titles mentioned in the manual citations from both the sung Mass and Office: the *Pange Lingua*, *Panne de Coelo*, *Benedicamus Domino*, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, *Te Deum Laudamus*, and *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*. These titles are mentioned in the sections on the Procession of Corpus Christi, the Feast of St. Mark, the Election of the General, Christmas Day, and the Sounding of the Bells.

### III. Examples of musical titles found in the manuscript include the following citations

*Section 23, Notes on the Election of a General, Citations 22, 23, and 24*

The bells ring immediately at the end of the election, and in the same order that it entered (after the Priest has placed the incense in the thurible) the new General is led into the Church singing the song *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel* and any other psalm of rejoicing, if the song is not long enough for them to arrive in the Church.

As they arrive in the Church, the bells stop ringing. As the General arrives at the high altar, he enters inside of the balustrade with the electors, and all of them kneel down, singing the hymn *Te Deum Laudamus*.

At the end of the *Te Deum Laudamus*, the above-mentioned Priest sings the following prayers. First, that of the Blessed Trinity. Second, the Thanksgiving. Third, that of the Day of the Madonna. When those are finished, two Cantors sing the *Benedicamus Domino*.

The *Ordine et Osservationi della nostra Chiesa per tutto l'Anno* also provides a unique window into sixteenth-century liturgical tradition. Considering its contemporaneity with the reforms of the Council of Trent, the establishment of the Jesuit community, and the year of consecration of one of the most important churches in Rome, it truly is an historical gemstone illuminating the integral role of music in the public liturgy at the Church of the Gesù. Although the Jesuit *Constitutions* limited the use of music, both the people and the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church expected sacred music in their public services. This *Ordine* demonstrates that the Jesuits responded to this need. In the inaugural year of their mother church,

in 1584, liturgical music played a major role in the public worship of the Society of Jesus. *Jesuita non cantat?* On the contrary, music was alive and well within the walls of the Mother Church of the Society in the earliest years of the Jesuit tradition.

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