

Music of the Reformation Era

October 4, 2020

The Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation

As the Protestant Reformation spread throughout Europe, The Roman Catholic Church answered with a series of initiatives, now called the Counter-Reformation. Pope Paul III and his successors brought austerity and asceticism to the church hierarchy. In other words, devout Roman Catholics and clerics held strong to their faith and responded with an iron fist.



Italian composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina has been called “the Prince of Music.” He had a long-lasting influence on the development of church and secular music in Europe, especially on the development of counterpoint¹. His work is considered the culmination of Renaissance polyphony².

Originally written by Saint Venantius Honorius Clementianus Fortunatus as part of a larger work called *Pange lingua* (*Sing, my tongue*), this setting of *Crux Fidelis* (*Faithful Cross*) was written by Palestrina as a motet³ for a choir of men and boys. As the text suggests (see reverse), this hymn is used on Good Friday during the Adoration of the Cross and in the Liturgy of the Hours during Holy Week and on feasts of the Cross.

-
1. Counterpoint - the relationship between two or more musical lines (or voices) which are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and melodic contour.
 2. Polyphony - a type of musical texture consisting of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody, as opposed to a musical texture with just one voice, monophony, or a texture with one dominant melodic voice accompanied by chords, homophony.
 3. Motet - a mainly vocal musical composition, of highly diverse form and style, from the late medieval era to the present.

A Note from Clay

Palestrina never intended for *Crux Fidelis* to be performed on the organ, nor was his intention for the organ to accompany the choir. In my own interpretation, I try to create a vocal timbre and bring out Palestrina’s “plainsong” quality in the verse with the use of principal and flute pipes.

ORIGINAL LATIN

*Crux fidelis, inter omnes
arbor una nobilis:
nulla silva talem profert,
fronde, flore, germine.
Dulce lignum, dulces clavos,
dulce pondus sustinet.*

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Faithful cross, above all other,
One and only noble tree:
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be.
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee!

NEXT WEEK’S PRELUDE METRIC PSALMS OF CALVINISM

Or sus, serviteurs du Seigneur
by Loys Bourgeois