

Julie Henion
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**Perspectives on Music during the Counter-Reformation: *Sacerdotale* vs. Morley's
*Practical Musicke***

The sixteenth century marked a turbulent time in the history of religion, and consequently, in the history of music. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses outlining the flaws of the Catholic Church to the door of the church in Wittenburg, Germany. After watching their followers being siphoned off by the new Protestant sects, the Catholic Church began its Counter-Reformation movement in effort to clearly define proper practices of the Church. In addition to the restructuring of the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) solidified its standard musical practices.

In 2008, MIT's Lewis Music Library acquired a book published in 1576 during the Counter-Reformation called the *Sacerdotale*.¹ The book, sometimes referred to as a "rituale," outlines standard liturgical practices that every Catholic Priest of the time was expected to be familiar with. There has been limited study on this particular book, but careful study of one particular section, "Compendium Musicae" reveals the nature of post-Council of Trent music practices upheld by the Church. The Counter-Reformation is a time of conflicting musical views between groups of people, so close comparison of the *Sacerdotale* with a secular music theory book, Thomas Morley's *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*² (published 1597), sheds light on which musical elements were common to everyone, and which were most hotly debated. Morley's work

¹ Catholic Church, *Sacerdotale*. (Venitiis: Apud Guerraeos fratres, & socios, 1576), pp. 319-328.

² Thomas Morley, *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*. (London: Dent, 1952), pp. 9-203.

provides a secular perspective on music during the period, and the first two sections of the book, “Teaching to Sing” and “Treating of Descant,” are roughly comparable to the “Compendium Musicae” in the *Sacerdotale*.

The Compendium actually began its life a few decades before its inclusion in the *Sacerdotale*, in 1499 as an anonymous independent music theory treatise.³ In addition to its inclusion in the *Sacerdotale*, it was also included in a monastic chant book called the *Cantorinus* as the opening of the book. The compendium finally made its way into the *Sacerdotale* in 1523, and there are nineteen known editions of the book surviving in the world today that contain the Compendium. They have publication dates ranging from 1523 up until 1597, which also happens to be the same year that Morley’s *Practicall Musicke* was published. MIT’s Lewis music library contains two copies of the *Sacerdotale*, the most recently acquired of which is the earliest edition (published 1523) that contains the Compendium. Unfortunately, this book is missing a section of pages at the end, and the Compendium no longer survives. The 1576 edition is among the first editions to be published following the Council of Trent, and therefore it is slightly updated from the earlier Compendium to uphold the new doctrines of the church.

The Council of Trent provides an important historical backdrop to the understanding of the texts. Even among Catholics, the nature of music was thoroughly scrutinized during the Council to determine whether it aided or distracted from the word of God. The intense scrutiny was not focused as much on stylistic musical detail as it

³ David Crawford. *Anonymus Compendium Musices, Venetiis, 1499-1597*. (Neuhausen-Stuttgart, American Institute of Musicology: Hänssler-Verlag, 1985), p. 15.

was about the role that music played in the church.⁴ This excerpt from the logs of the

Council sums up the conclusion that the Church came to:

The sacred mysteries should be performed with the greatest veneration, with both internal affection towards God, and with external worship that is both fitting and decorous, so that others may be filled with devotion and moved towards religion. Therefore, when priests perform the solemnities of the Masses, they should not say the words as one running a fast course, but they should endeavor to pronounce the words fittingly, distinctly, and gravely, so that simultaneously the words may be understood and the listeners aroused to piety. It should be avoided, therefore, that the words should be said in such a low voice that no one may understand them easily. At the same time, they should not be said in such a loud voice that the noise would destroy the devotion of the hearers.⁵

In addition to this particular document, the spirit of the Council of Trent is echoed in the title page of the *Sacerdotale*.

The *Sacerdotale*: collected according to the tradition of the Holy Roman Church and of other churches from the sanctions of the apostolic library and of the laws of the holy fathers, and the writings of the church doctors, for the desired convenience of any priests: and also endorsed many times by the authority of the highest bishops: recently emended and augmented with the highest care immediately after the sanctions of the Holy Council of Trent: in which are contained the offices of all the sacraments, and solutions of all questions pertaining to them, the canons of excommunications, with the brief and absolute declaration of them collected from the holy doctors. Also added to these things are general Rubrics then the Missal then the New Breviaries, and many other things very useful and necessary to priests: which hitherto were desired in other imprints.⁶

Within this short paragraph, the Catholic Church establishes its strength and desire to standardize liturgical practice.

Both the *Sacerdotale* and Morley's *Practicall Musicke* can be broken down into outline form to examine which musical concepts in particular were important to each, and which were left out. Table 1 below displays the outline, with those elements that are common to each book expressed in bold.

⁴ Robert F. Hayburn. *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*. (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1979), p. 25.

⁵ Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*. p. 27.

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⁶ Translation by Mary Beth DiGenova, "The *Sacerdotale* 1576: An Overview," (Unpublished research paper, MIT Libraries 2009).

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Sacerdotale:

- I. **Music Basics**
 - a. Guidonian Hand
 - b. **Guidonian Scale**
 - i. Hexachords
 - ii. Notation
 - iii. Syllables
 - iv. Hard, Natural and Soft Hexachords
 - v. Switching between Hexachords
- II. **Intervals**
 - a. Whole Tone
 - b. Halftone
 - c. Major Third
 - d. Minor Third
 - e. Fourth (First consonance)
 - f. Fifth (Second consonance)
 - g. Octave (Third consonance)
- III. Modes and Modal **Cadences**
 - a. First Mode (ending on D)
 - i. Ordinary and Plagal
 - b. Second Mode (ending on E)
 - i. Ordinary and Plagal
 - c. Third Mode (ending on F)
 - i. Ordinary and Plagal
 - d. Fourth Mode (ending on G)
 - i. Ordinary and Plagal
 - e. Mixed Modes
- IV. Final Comments
 - a. Psalms and Antiphons
 - b. Chords
 - c. Conclusion

Practicall Musicke:

- I. **Teaching to Sing**
 - a. **Guidonian Scale**
 - i. Clefs
 - ii. Hexachords
 - iii. Notation
 - iv. Syllables
 - v. Hard, Natural and Soft Hexachords
 - vi. Switching between Hexachords
 - vii. Sharps and Flats
 - b. Rhythm
 - i. Strokes
 - ii. Time
 - iii. Rests
 - iv. Ligatures
 - v. Dotted notes
 - vi. Moods, Perfect and Imperfect
 - 1. Great Mood
 - 2. Lesser Mood
 - vii. Alterations
 - viii. Proportions
- II. Treating of Descant
 - a. Polyphony in Two Parts
 - i. **Intervals**
 - 1. **Consonances**
 - 2. **Dissonances**
 - ii. Voice Leading Rules
 - iii. **Cadences**
 - iv. Imitation
 - v. Rhythm in Two Parts
 - b. Polyphony in Three Parts
 - i. Voice Leading Rules
 - ii. Double Counterpoint

Table 1: Outlines of the “Compendium Musicae” of the Sacerdotale in comparison to the first two sections of Morley’s *Practicall Musicke*

The first thing taught in each of these texts is the Guidonian Scale. This scale was developed in 1030 by Guido of Arezzo in his *Micrologus*, and it is interesting that over 500 years later, his musical notation was still the standard in music notation. By its inclusion in both texts, it is fairly clear that the Guidonian Scale at this period of time was standard musical practice, and not something specific to sacred or secular music. Figure 1 below shows the diatonic scale as printed in each of the books. Note that despite minor

about which hexachord to move to if there is more than one possibility. The *Sacerdotale* says to switch to the next hexachord either on Sol or La, and it could vary depending on whether you are ascending or descending, and also which hexachords you are switching between. The difference in how to use the scale system suggests that its use was never standardized, or that over time different groups adapted its use to fit their needs.



Fig. 2: Switching between Hexachords in the *Sacerdotale* and *Practicall Musicke*. Blue vertical lines indicate a switch to the next hexachord. A syllable in parentheses shows the syllable that the note would have been in the previous hexachord before it switched to the new hexachord.

Observe that Morley’s concept of hexachord switching occurs on the note above la in the lower hexachord. The *Compendium* replaces either the syllable sol or la of the lower hexachord with that of the next hexachord.

A notable difference between the two texts in the treatment of teaching music is that the *Compendium* uses the Guidonian Hand as a method of sight singing and learning music, whereas there is no mention of the hand in Morley’s work. The inclusion of the Guidonian Hand in the *Sacerdotale* emphasizes the importance that it places on tradition and simplifying teaching methods. Teaching new music in the chant tradition was likely also still most effective using the hand. Morley’s text focuses most on reading music notation rather than methods of learning music by ear. At this time, most music was still learned by ear, so Morley’s treatment of learning music is more progressive and similar to our modern tradition than that of the *Sacerdotale*.

One of the more interesting differences between the two works was the treatment of intervals, consonances and dissonances. The *Compendium* goes into considerable detail discussing each of the intervals and listing all of the possible note combinations in the scale form each interval. The text makes it fairly clear that only fourths, fifths, and octaves are consonant, which, for its time, was an antiquated view of music theory. James Tenney's chart in Figure 3 displays the music theory texts written during the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance and which pitches were considered to be consonant by each. The end of the chart is very close to the publication of both the *Sacerdotale* and *Practicall Musicke*.

	1,8	5	4	M3	m3	M6	m6	M2	m7	M7	m2	T
1. <i>Musica (and Scholia) enchiriadis</i> (anonymous, 9th-10th c.)	C	C	C	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	D
2. <i>De Harmonica institutione</i> (ca. 900), Hucbald	C	C	C	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
3. <i>Micrologus</i> (1026-28), Guido d'Arezzo	C	C	C	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
4. <i>Ad organum faciendum</i> (anonymous, 11th-12th c.)	C	C	C	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
5. <i>Item de organo</i> (anonymous, 12th c.)	C	C	C	(C)	(C)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
6. <i>Montpellier organum treatise</i> (anonymous, 12th c.)	C	C	C	(C)	(C)	(C)	(C)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
7. <i>De musica libellus</i> (ca. 1220), Anon. VII (CS I)	pC	mC	mC	iC	iC	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
8. <i>De mensurabili musica</i> (ca. 1250) John of Garland	pC	mC	mC	iC	iC	iD	mD	mD	iD	pD	pD	pD
9. <i>Ars cantus mensurabilis</i> (ca. 1260), Franco of Cologne	pC	mC	mC	iC	iC	iD	pD	iD	iD	pD	pD	pD
10. <i>De mensuris et discantu</i> (ca. 1275), Anon. IV (CS I)	pC	mC	mC	iC	iC	D	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
11. <i>Tractatus de consonantibus musicalibus</i> (late 13th c.), Anon. I (CS I)	pC	mC	mC	iC	iC	iD	pD	iD	iD	pD	pD	pD
12. <i>Tractatus de discantu</i> (late 13th c.), Anon. II (CS I)	pC	mC	mC	iC	iC	D	D	(D)	(D)	D	D	D
13. <i>De speculatione musicæ</i> (ca. 1300), Walter Odington	pC	pC	ⁱ _p C	iC	iC	iC	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
14. <i>Speculum musicæ</i> (ca. 1330), Jacobus of Liège	pC	pC	ⁱ _p C	ⁱ _m C	ⁱ _m C	iC	^m _i D	^m _i C	iC	^m _i D	^m _i D	^m _i D _p
15. <i>Tractatus de cantu perfecto et imperfecto</i> (14th c.), Henrici de Zelandia (CS III)	pC	mC	D	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D	D
16. <i>Quatuor principalia musicæ</i> (1351), pseudo-Tunstede (CS IV)	pC	pC	iD	iC	iC	iC	iD	iD	pD	pD	pD	pD
17. <i>Ars contrapuncti</i> (late 14th c.), "secundum" Johannes de Muris (CS III)	pC	pC	(D)	iC	iC	iC	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
18. <i>Ars discantus</i> (late 14th c.), "secundum" Johannes de Muris (CS III)	pC	pC	(D)	iC	iC	iC	iC	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
19. <i>Tractatus de discantu</i> (late 14th c.), Anon. XIII (CS III)	pC	pC	D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
20. <i>Ars contrapunctus</i> (late 14th c.), "secundum" Philippe de Vitry (CS III)	pC	pC	D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
21. <i>Tractatus de contrapuncto</i> (1412), Prodocimus de Beldemandis	pC	pC	(i)D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
22. <i>Compendium cantus figurati</i> (15th c.), Anon. XII (CS III)	pC	pC	(iC?)	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	(D?)
23. <i>Regilæ supra contrapunctum</i> , Johannes Hothby (d. 1487)	pC	pC	(D)	iC	iC	iC	iC	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)	(D)
24. <i>Liber de arte contrapuncti</i> (1477), Johannes Tinctoris	pC	pC	pC/D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
25. <i>De præceptis artis musicæ...</i> (1480-90), Guillelmus Monachus	pC	pC	(D)	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
26. <i>Practica musicæ</i> (1496), Franchinus Gafurius	pC	pC	(i)D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
27. <i>Tetrachordum musices</i> (1511), Johannes Cochlaeus	pC	pC	D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
28. <i>Isagoge in musicen</i> (1516), Henry Glarean	pC	pC	(D)	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
29. <i>Toscanello in musica</i> (1523), Pietro Aaron	pC	pC	C/D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D
30. <i>Le istituzioni harmoniche</i> (1558), Gioseffe Zarlino	pC	pC	pC/D	iC	iC	iC	iC	D	D	D	D	D

Fig. 3: Evolution of Consonance during the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance

M = major, m = minor, T = tritone (in entry #14 two sizes of tritone are distinguished); CS = as named by Coussemaker in the specified volume of the *Scriptorum...*; C = ‘consonance’, D = ‘dissonance’, p = perfect, m = intermediate, I = imperfect (when two of these lower-case letters are used in a single entry, the upper one refers to the first octave-compound of the primary interval classified by the lower one). Entries in parentheses are implied or presumed classifications, not explicitly named as such in the source.⁷

Note that according to this chart, the last text that claimed the third was dissonant was *Ad Organum Faciendum*, written in the 11th or 12th century. This places the *Sacerdotale*'s views on consonance at least 400 years behind the times. The Council of Trent emphasized tradition and simplifying and clarifying everything used in the church, and this is exactly what can be taken away from the *Sacerdotale*'s treatment of consonance. There is a possibility that other pitches such as thirds may have been considered imperfect consonances in practice by the Catholic Church, since there is not actually mention of whether seconds and thirds were consonant or dissonant. However, in the description of the interval of the fourth, it is described as the “First Consonance,” suggesting that all seconds and thirds were considered dissonances rather than imperfect consonances as described in other music theory treatises of the time. In contrast, Morley claims in his book that thirds, fifths, sixths and octaves are consonances, while all other intervals, including fourths, are dissonant. According to Tenney's chart, that matches the views of other music theory texts of the time, and it more closely approximates classical music theory that we study today.

One topic discussed by the *Sacerdotale*, but not by *Practicall Musicke* is the use of medieval modes. Several pages are spent outlining the characteristics of each of the eight modes and providing a short example of music in each mode. The eight modes listed are known today as Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian, each of which has a

⁷ James Tenney. *A History of ‘Consonance’ and ‘Dissonance.’* (New York: Excelsior, 1988.), p. 109.

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plagal and authentic version, though the modes are simply numbered First through Fourth in the *Sacerdotale*. The Compendium uses more pages describing the properties of the modes than it does to describe anything else. The modes were developed around the year 1100 by John of St. Gall in his treatise *De Musica*, so again this emphasizes the antiquated nature of the music theory in the *Sacerdotale*.

Both texts discuss the use of cadences in music, but the discussion in the *Sacerdotale* is far more limited than Morley's discussion. For one thing, cadences are only discussed in Morley's work in the context of polyphony. Except for the discussion of intervals, the Compendium barely mentions polyphony. The cadences discussed in the Compendium are brought up with respect to the medieval modes, and the musical examples for each mode are all examples of cadences, since each mode has a very distinctive cadence. In addition to examining the eight modes individually, the Compendium explores the possibility of using mixed modes, in which the music might sound to be in an authentic mode at the beginning, but then transition to a plagal mode for the end of the line.

There are a few concepts discussed in the Morley's work that are not in the *Sacerdotale*, rhythm being one of the big ones. It is not discussed at all in the Compendium, while it is one of the most important topics in *Practicall Musicke*. Historically, Gregorian chant as a tradition had no rhythmic indications, which may explain why the Compendium makes no reference to rhythm at all. It is odd though, that the chants printed in the remainder of the *Sacerdotale* do contain rhythmic information, with different shapes of note heads and bar lines. One explanation could be that rhythmic information at the time was common knowledge to priests, but perhaps a simpler

logistical explanation is that the Compendium simply didn't contain the information to begin with before its inclusion in the *Sacerdotale*, so nobody felt the need to edit it to include a section on rhythm.

Another extensive subject discussed in *Practicall Musicke* that is avoided in the *Sacerdotale* is polyphony and all related topics. The exclusion from the Compendium of voice leading, imitation, and counterpoint implies that they are subjects that were considered unnecessary knowledge for priests. A final concept excluded from the Compendium that is present in Morley's work is the discussion of sharps and flats other than on B. The *Sacerdotale* does not acknowledge the possibility that there are notes that lie "outside the hand," while Morley does mention that all notes can be either sharp or flat, and one sharp note could be the same note as another flat note, though his book primarily deals with those notes that are within the Guidonian scale. This is another example of Morley's work being a lot closer to modern day music than that of the *Sacerdotale*.

The final paragraph of the Compendium re-establishes the purpose of music in the church which was seen earlier in the logs of the Council of Trent and the title page of the *Sacerdotale*. The translated text reads, "Priest song is not lenient, doesn't dishearten, is not loose, but is honest, serious, uniform, and in all respects, humble. Psalm singing is very sweet of mind, with humility and devotion, without showing off." These lines serve as a fitting reminder to both the modern day reader and the priests of the time that music was expected to be a servant of the word of God, rather than the centerpiece of the Mass.

It is worth noting that the treatment of music in the *Sacerdotale* is a limited view of music as understood by the Catholic Church of the time. The Church had seen highly

complicated polyphonic Masses in the preceding centuries, so its musical knowledge clearly exceeded those concepts laid out in the *Sacerdotale*. Also, priests in general were not the leaders of musical elements of the Mass, so the Compendium does not need to thoroughly describe all musical knowledge. Despite being short, the Compendium is an excellent depiction of which musical concepts were considered key to the fundamental understanding of music. Also, priests in general were not the leaders of musical elements of the service, which is another reason that the Compendium is not more extensive.

Overall, the musical concepts within the *Sacerdotale*'s Musical Compendium align as expected with the logs of the Council of Trent, in that they emphasized simplicity and tradition. Morley's *Plain and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* studies many of the same elements as the *Sacerdotale*, but its treatment of such things as rhythms, consonance and polyphony suggest that secular music of the time developed more quickly without constraints from the Council of Trent. Further study on the subject could involve a comprehensive translation of the *Compendium Musicae* or a detailed study into the significance of the musical examples provided to describe each of the modes and types of cadences. In addition, most of the *Sacerdotale* has yet to be studied, and there are many examples of music sung at Mass and the Canonical hours that could be analyzed.

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