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USA  
May 6, 2008

Dario Cardinal Castrillon Hoyos  
Ecclesia Dei Commission  
Palazzo della Congr. Per la Dottrina della Fede  
Piazza del S. Uffizio #11  
00193, Rome, Italy

Your Eminence:

My questions concern the singers for the Extraordinary Form/Tridentine rite of Holy Mass. Below, I quote paragraphs from Papal Legislation/Church Documents which have heretofore governed the singing at this Mass. With the more widespread availability of the Extraordinary Form since Pope Benedict XVI issued his Motu Proprio of 2007, one hears many different applications of music and singers for this rite, some of which are not in accord with these documents. It is understood that the music of the Mass be Gregorian chant, and sacred polyphony where applicable. I submit my questions following the quoted paragraphs. (In the following documents, italics are mine for emphasis.)

The Motu Proprio of 1903, Tra le sollecitudini, requires that there *not be soloists* at the Tridentine Mass, except occasionally, and then *only within a choral presentation*, and the singers are to be males:

**V. The Singers.** 12. Except the chant of the celebrant and the sacred ministers at the altar, which must always be sung in Gregorian chant without any accompaniment, the rest of the liturgical singing belongs properly to the choir of clerics: wherefore singers in church, if they are laymen, are the substitutes of the ecclesiastical choir. Hence, their music, at any rate for the greater part, must keep the nature of choir music.

*This does not entirely exclude solos. But those must never take the chief place in a service, they should never absorb the greater part of the liturgical text; they must be rather points of musical emphasis and accent bound up closely with the rest of the composition which should remain strictly choral.*

Musicae Sacrae, 1955, permitted women to sing *with* the men:.

74. Where it is impossible to have schools of singers or where there are not enough choir boys, it is allowed that "a *group of men and women or girls*, located in a place outside the sanctuary set apart for the exclusive use of this group, can sing the liturgical texts at Solemn Mass, as long as the men are completely separated from the women and girls and everything unbecoming is avoided. The Ordinary is bound in conscience in this matter."<sup>[26]</sup> (In this footnote, Pope Pius XII cited Decrees of the Sacred Congr. Of Rites, Numbers 3964, 4231, and 4231.)

De musica sacrae et sacra liturgia, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Rites in September 1958, loosened the regulations a bit more, saying:

99. It is highly desirable that a *choir or schola cantorum* be established in all cathedral churches, in parish churches, and all other churches of importance where the liturgical functions can be carried out as described in paragraph 93a, and c.

100. Wherever such a choir *cannot be organized*, a choir of the faithful, either mixed or *consisting only* of women or girls, can be permitted.

1. **Are these rules still in effect?** If there have been changes, would you please cite the documents so that I may read them?
2. The Church has always frowned on featuring or exalting an individual voice. **Should a parish church allow a soloist for the entire High Mass, or even a part of the Mass?**
3. **If indeed a soloist is permitted, should it be a male voice in preference to a female voice?**
4. **If a men's schola is available, should a women's schola be permitted to sing the Mass in preference to the men's group? Or should a soloist be preferred over a schola?**
5. **Do these rules about singers apply also to Low Mass, for the singing of hymns during Mass, as well as High Mass for the singing of Ordinaries and Propers?**

Thank you for your consideration of these matters. I look forward to hearing from you.

In Christ,





PONTIFICIA COMMISSIO  
« ECCLESIA DEI »

N. 129/2008

Rome, 16 July 2008

[REDACTED]  
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U.S.A.

Dear Ms. [REDACTED]

We wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 6 May 2008 addressed to His Eminence Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos. We will respond to your questions in the order in which you have raised them.

1. Your questions are of a rather technical nature. Without entering into great detail we would say that custom and usage in the course of more recent decades have modified some of the strict requirements in the documents which you have cited. We suggest that, if you are not familiar with it, you might find the website [musicasacra.com](http://musicasacra.com) of value with regard to your questions and would further refer you to the book mentioned there, *Psallite Sapienter: A Musician's Guide to the 1962 Missal* by B. Andrew Mills, organist and choirmaster at St. Agnes Church in New York City.

2. Certainly, solo singing should not be the ideal, but we could well imagine that a soloist could render the proper parts of a sung Mass for which the full choir would not be prepared or could even function without a choir where the people are capable of singing the ordinary.

3. If a *schola cantorum* is available to sing the propers, this should certainly be preferred over a solo voice. If a parish is so well provided for as to have both a men's and women's *schola cantorum*, that would seem to be a true "embarrassment of riches" and surely some way could be found for them both to contribute to the singing of the sacred liturgy.

4. Obviously, the singing of hymns during the Low Mass is less regulated, but appropriate choices should be guided by the parts of the Mass in which hymns are sung and by the liturgical season. We could imagine that the singing of hymns during the Low Mass may simply be done by the congregation without a choir.

With prayerful best wishes I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Msgr. Camille Perl  
Vice President