

# Acta Sanctæ Sedis

## *Musicæ Sacræ* (On Sacred Music)

Encyclical of the Servant of God, Pope Pius XII - December 25, 1955

### Part - I



**To Our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops, and other local Ordinaries in peace and communion with the Apostolic See**

#### *Health and Apostolic Benediction.*

1. The subject of sacred music has always been very close to Our heart. Hence it has seemed appropriate to us in this encyclical letter to give an orderly explanation of the topic and also to answer somewhat more completely several questions which have been raised and discussed during the past decades. We are doing so in order that this noble and distinguished art may contribute more every day to greater splendor in the celebration of divine worship and to the more effective nourishment of spiritual life among the faithful.

2. At the same time We have desired to grant what many of you, venerable brethren, have requested in Our wisdom and also what has been asked by outstanding masters of this liberal art and distinguished students of sacred music at meetings devoted to the subject. The experience of pastoral life and the advances being made in the study of this art have persuaded Us that this step is timely.

3. We hope, therefore, that what St. Pius X rightly decreed in the document which he accurately called the "legal code of sacred music" may be confirmed and inculcated anew, shown in a new light and strengthened by new proofs. We hope that the noble art of sacred music - adapted to contemporary conditions and in some way

enriched - may ever more perfectly accomplish its mission.

4. Music is among the many and great gifts of nature with which God, in Whom is the harmony of the most perfect concord and the most perfect order, has enriched men, whom He has created in His image and likeness. Together with the other liberal arts, music contributes to spiritual joy and the delight of the soul.

5. On this subject St. Augustine has accurately written: "Music, that is the science or the sense of proper modulation, is likewise given by God's generosity to mortals having rational souls in order to lead them to higher things."

6. No one, therefore, will be astonished that always and everywhere, even among pagan peoples, sacred song and the art of music have been used to ornament and decorate religious ceremonies. This is proved by many documents, both ancient and new. No one will be astonished that these arts have been used especially for the worship of the true and sovereign God from the earliest times. Miraculously preserved unharmed from the Red Sea by God's power, the people of God sang a song of victory to the Lord, and Miriam, the sister of Moses, their leader, endowed with prophetic inspiration, sang with the people while playing a tambourine.

7. Later, when the ark of God was taken from the house of Abinadab to the city of David, the king himself and "all Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of wood, on harps and lutes and timbrels and cornets and cymbals." King David himself established the order of the music and singing used for sacred worship. This order was restored after the people's return from exile and