



An Official Condemnation of Four-part Harmony

An Encyclical of the Holy Synod
of the Ecumenical Patriarchate¹

Anthimos, by the grace of God Archbishop of Constantinople, the New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch.

Reverend priests, venerable hieromonks, pious governors, esteemed merchants, and blessed Christians, comprising the Orthodox community of Capella in Vienna; beloved children of my mediocrity, may you have grace and peace from God, and prayers, blessings, and forgiveness from us.

Some time ago, the Holy Church of Christ was informed unexpectedly with no small grief that you, the blessed Orthodox Christians dwelling there, true children of our common Mother, the Holy Eastern Church, though raised on the milk of piety by your forefathers, have fallen into a sinful mistake by rejecting from your holy church the ancient ecclesiastical music handed down by the Fathers, and have introduced in its place a foreign four-part music, which you have adapted to the holy services following some foreign lead.

¹ Translated from: «Επίσημος Καταδίκη τῆς Τετραφωνίας», *Κιβωτός*, Ἰούλιος, 1952, σελ. 302-303.) This translation is available online at:
<http://www.stanthonysonastery.org/music/encyclical.pdf>

This news troubled us and grieved us justifiably, not only because the alteration of an ancient holy tradition without ecclesiastical permission reveals arbitrary meddling in a matter regarding the Church, and having done so, it furtively leads the few Orthodox who are amongst so many heterodox to other dangerous opportunities, especially since the reform is related to other foreign customs, but also because of the nature of the matter, since it is evident that this newly appeared tetraphonic music is unbecoming to ecclesiastical propriety due to its enervating melody, and consequently its introduction into the sacred services goes against the sacred Canons of the Church, which has inherited the tradition of praising God in spiriutal odes and contrite, decorous hymns, in the manner of the hymns composed by our Holy Fathers in our ancient ecclesiastical music which are so God-pleasing and salvific.

We are at a loss to explain how it could have seemed permissable to you to estrange yourselves from their holy footsteps by pushing aside the venerable hymnody sanctified and established by these inspired men which Christians are accustomed to hearing, and which—along with other patristic traditions—characterizes all Greek Orthodox people, and how you could have followed foreign and alien examples, without realizing that in doing so, you also become guilty of sinning with reference to the Canons and the holy Church of Christ, the common Mother of the pious, which in no way tolerates any change whatsoever of the ancient Christian customs and order, and that you will thus scandalize and bring grave sorrow to the other Orthodox Christians.

For these and other substantial reasons, both we and our Holy Synod of holy hierarchs, unanimously agreeing we published in print our ecclesiastical encyclical letters proclaiming our ecclesiastical reckoning and decision regarding this matter, namely the abolition of four-part music in the sacred services of Orthodox churches everywhere and the unthwarted use of our ecclesiastical music,

which has been instituted for canonical reasons as you will be informed more precisely by what is written in these encyclicals.²

In writing you this patriarchal and synodical letter of ours, we paternally advise and ecclesiastically urge you, who by God's grace comprise the Orthodox community there, that you "remove not the eternal boundaries, which thy fathers placed"³ nor divide the unity of the Church in regards to her sacred services and prayers, nor remove the best ornament of the Greek Orthodox race, but as genuine children of our holy Church remain firm in keeping her patristic, sacred customs and venerable traditions, and put an end to the foreign melodies of

² In one such encyclical, in November of 1846 the Holy Synod wrote among other things the following:

"This sinful innovation... is a grave mistake and dangerous and will cause greater transgressions and novelties to be introduced. It grieves our heart, as it leads to other unforeseen dangers, especially since it approaches the customs of the foreigners and herodox...

Besides all this, since almost all of our Church's sacred hymns and songs were composed as a whole along with the words of this ecclesiastical music, it is evident that they cannot be sung modified and adapted in another foreign manner, without altering their melodic rhythm to something else strange, chaotic, and cold, bare of any compunction... Four part-harmony seduces the ears, charms the senses, and enfeebles the soul, and is not the music of those who pray and glorify God with piety and fear, but the music of those who are relaxing and amusing themselves, thus mixing the angelic doxologies of sacred prayers with passionate melodies, profaning the spiritual songs with foreign novelties in singing...

These sensual and unbecoming melodies are alienated from the salvific purpose of prayer done through sacred psalmody, which should be an entreaty to God to propitiate for sins, which admittedly requires both an ethos and a heart and a hearing that are entirely spiritual and compunctious, and as such, free from worldly ideas and causes...

Our holy Church tolerates no innovation or novelty regarding this sacred music of hers... and through this patriarchal and synodical letter the Church proclaims the infiltration, introduction, and use of any foreign and strange music whatsoever in church services to be unacceptable and reprehensible... If any people out of ignorance or for some other reason have introduced into their holy churches the aforementioned unsuitable tetraphonic music, they should remove it immediately."

(Taken from Παπαδόπουλος, Γεώργιος, *Ιστορική Ἐπισκόπησις τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Μουσικῆς*, Ἀθήναι, 1904, pp. 275-283.)

³ Prov. 22:28

tetraphonic music in both of the holy churches there, and in its stead bring in once again the ancestral, ancient, traditional music, and thus disagreeing in no way from the rest of the Greek Orthodox churches and avoid becoming the cause of a scandal and stumbling to the pleroma in Christ through such a novelty, but by imitating with a keen sense of honor the ever-memorable, God-loving founders of this sacred church of Capella, who were exact guardians of the sacred and ancestral ecclesiastical customs and champions of the ethnic character, so that you may leave to posterity models and examples of Christian virtues and God-pleasing zeal.

We have advised these things to you out of ecclesiastical solicitude and presented them to you, awaiting the results of our paternal exhortations from your filial and Christian eagerness, so that we may adorn you with our wholehearted synodical prayers and with well-deserved praise and commendation.

May the grace and infinite mercy of God be with you.

November 5, 1846