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In Pursuit of the Sacred: The Idealistic Alignment of Arvo Pärt and Pope Pius X

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Abstract

Grounded in the study of Gregorian chant and early polyphony, Arvo Pärt's tintinnabuli style has many commonalities with ideas presented nearly seventy-five years before its creation in Pope Pius X's 1903 *Motu Proprio*. This church document calls for composers of sacred music to return their focus to three primary qualities in music: holiness, beauty, and universality. While it is almost certain that Pärt was not directly influenced by the *Motu Proprio*, striking parallels exist between Pärt and Pius X. Confronted by questions of the integrity and purpose of music, both men sought to move away from musical trends of their times, looking to past for inspiration. In many ways, their aesthetic and spiritual ideals concerning music align closely. Pärt, however, extends the idea of universality further than Pope Pius X by writing for secular audiences and not for liturgical use. To Pärt's global audience, tintinnabuli "resonates with an essential and universal spirit," in the words of one scholar, providing listeners an introspective, prayer-like experience regardless of their religious affiliation or individual beliefs. The *Motu Proprio* provides a new lens through which to examine the appeal and purpose of Arvo Pärt's music.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Arvo Pärt: Biographical and Cultural Context.....	4
Tintinnabuli.....	13
Pope Pius X and the 1903 <i>Motu Proprio</i>	25
Idealistic Alignment: Arvo Pärt and Pius X.....	32
Bibliography.....	40

Introduction

As a modern composer, Arvo Pärt has achieved a remarkable level of success. Many scholars attribute Pärt's appeal to the accessibility of his music; the tintinnabuli style, for which he is known, effectively and beautifully pares music down into distinct yet interrelated pieces, creating an atmospheric, prayer-like effect. The genesis and compositional goals behind tintinnabuli, and their context in Pärt's life, indicate that the style has significant meaning to Pärt which is conveyed to his audience. This thesis examines the biographical context for the creation of tintinnabuli as well as its stylistic features and purpose in order to demonstrate an idealistic connection between Pärt and Pope Pius X's 1903 *Motu Proprio*.

I was drawn to this topic by a growing interest in modern choral music written by composers from the Baltic states. As a member of Trinity's choral program, I have participated in performances of music by Ēriks Ešņvalds and Cyrillus Kreek. I was curious to discover more about the diversity of styles and sources of inspiration amongst choral composers from this area of the world. My interest in Arvo Pärt before starting this thesis had only been in passing, as I had heard him mentioned in multiple contexts but only listened to his music a few times. While searching for a thesis topic, I revisited Pärt's *Seven Magnificat Antiphons*, which I first heard in a music history course. Returning to this piece gave me an immediate sense of having settled into a topic after a long period of uncertainty. The work drew me in completely. I wanted to understand the style and context in which it was written, which led me to a closer study of tintinnabuli itself. The initial connection to the 1903 *Motu Proprio* came from a conversation about the influence of early sacred music on Pärt's style with Dr. Gary Seighman, the choral director at Trinity University, who suggested that I read over the document. Having just finished reading a series of essays on Pärt that contained a large amount of quotations from the composer, I was struck by the similarities in the way that Pius X and Pärt discussed music. I

became curious as to what a closer study of the connections between tintinnabuli and the *Motu Proprio* would reveal.

While Pärt has hinted in multiple interviews that he does not consider the study of his life necessary in connection to his music, the circumstances in which he created the tintinnabuli style provide a better understanding of the purpose behind such a drastic change in compositional output. Pärt's career as a composer and his search for his compositional voice were not always easy, especially given the restrictions he faced as an artist living in Soviet Estonia. Having experimented with compositional styles and techniques ranging from neoclassical to serial collage, Pärt withdrew from the public eye in the late 1960s and emerged eight years later with the tintinnabuli style. Since the 1980s, Pärt has received a great deal of media attention, resulting in a significant number of direct quotations. In addition to a biographical overview, this thesis discusses several statements by Pärt about his music to provide a more comprehensive description of his musical values and ideals. A brief study of Pärt's life and career in composition provides context for this development in his musical style and hints at both spiritual and aesthetic connections with ideals presented in the *Motu Proprio*.

A review of scholarly analysis of the tintinnabuli style and of several exemplary pieces highlights the compositional devices behind Pärt's aesthetic. To Pärt, the tintinnabuli style was, and still is, a process of reduction. While some have described Pärt's music as minimalist, many scholars believe that this label diminishes what Pärt has accomplished in the tintinnabuli style, which has several unique and distinguishing traits from modern minimalism. The inspiration that Pärt found in early polyphony and Gregorian chant prompted him to focus his choral works on the text's meaning and intelligibility. The significance of text in understanding Pärt's choral music allows for another lens of analysis of his works, which, while written for secular audiences, contain a large amount of sacred or religious material. Pärt's ability to convey a sense of spirituality in his music while still appealing to a

diverse audience has become the topic of scholarly conversation and connects him to the writings of Pope Pius X.

The 1903 *Motu Proprio* was written in response to trends in sacred music which Pius X thought detrimental to the spiritual growth of both the clergy and congregation of the Catholic Church. The document addresses the issues which Pius X saw in music written for liturgical use and demonstrates his beliefs regarding the composition and function of sacred music. In the *Motu Proprio*, Pius X emphasized the qualities of holiness, goodness of form (or beauty), and universality. He suggested that composers draw inspiration from Gregorian chant and early polyphony in the style of Palestrina, which he viewed as the highest forms of sacred music. Written at the end of the Romantic era, the *Motu Proprio* sought to counter the use of operatic and dramatic styles in sacred music and to unite growing differences in national styles. By laying out guidelines for composers and church musicians to follow, Pius X sought to initiate reform that would draw the congregation closer to God through music.

There is no evidence to suggest that the *Motu Proprio* directly influenced Arvo Pärt in any way, yet the spiritual values behind the tintinnabuli style and the aesthetic inspiration Pärt found in chant and polyphony suggest underlying idealistic connections between Pius X and Pärt. These connections, which will be examined in this thesis, provide a new lens through which to view both Pärt's compositional goals and the tintinnabuli style itself. Many scholars who have written about Pärt note the popularity of his music and have sought to explain its appeal. These analyses, in addition to Pärt's own descriptions of tintinnabuli, suggest that this music has at its core the same tenets that Pius X called for in the *Motu Proprio*: holiness, beauty, and universality.

Arvo Pärt: Biographical and Cultural Context

Arvo Pärt developed his distinct musical style and approach to composition while living in Tallinn, Estonia. Throughout his lifetime, he lived in Estonia under four political regimes. Much of his compositional development, however, took place in the distinct cultural environment of Soviet rule and lingering Estonian culture. Both influences shaped Pärt's formative years as a composer and young adult. According to Mihkelson, Pärt's situation was unique in that Estonia experienced a slightly greater degree of artistic and ideological freedom than other more central locations of the Soviet territory.¹ Combined with many other specific conditions, the context in which Pärt developed as a composer sheds some light on his compositional ideology and purpose, as well as the creation of the tintinnabuli style.

Arvo Pärt was born in 1935 in a provincial town in the center of Estonia and grew up in Rakvere, a small town in the northern part of the country. His first experiences with music came after the founding of the Children's Musical School in 1945, where Pärt began studying piano at the age of nine. As he grew older, he became more involved in music at the school, playing oboe and percussion and singing in the choir.² He began formally composing around the age of fifteen and his first publicly performed work was at a young artist's competition when he was seventeen.³ Eventually, in 1954, he went on to continue his education in music at the Tallinn Music School, an intermediary school that would lead him to pursue studies at the Conservatory. Pärt was drafted into the army only a few weeks into his studies, and he served two years in the regiment near Tallinn. He played in the regiment's orchestra and was occasionally able to attend musical events in Tallinn.

¹ Immo Mihkelson, "A narrow path to truth: Arvo Pärt and the 1960s and 1970s in Soviet Estonia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, ed. Andrew Shenton (New York: Cambridge University Press), 11.

² Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26.

³ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 26.

In 1956, Pärt reentered the Music School, where he studied composition with Veljo Tormis. A year later, Pärt began studies at the Tallinn Conservatory under the tutelage of Hieno Eller, a violinist and the most notable of the Conservatory's three composition professors. Eller's students were an influential group among Estonia's composers and strove to support each other's musical careers. Pärt was evidently a remarkable student, the only composer to make the list of the top ten most gifted students at the Conservatory in 1958 and 1959.⁴ In later years, however, the Conservatory distanced itself from Pärt's success due to the divisive nature of many of his works.

Pärt's works during this time were written in a period of cultural thaw which occurred following Stalin's death in 1953. Local newspapers began printing translations of articles by composers like Shostakovich, which encouraged young composers to begin experimenting more with their music. Mihkelson states:

A new generation started to take over the music, film, literary, visual arts, and other artistic communities during these years in the Soviet Union. They were curious about what was going on in the West, and they tried to take advantage of the knowledge and freedoms available and to make their mark. Among other things, these young artists were connected by the absence of extreme fear.⁵

Pärt also began looking for ways to incorporate Western ideas into his own music, which quickly earned him reprimands from the Composers' Union of the Soviet Union, an organization centered in Moscow with subdivisions across the Soviet empire. In 1958, Pärt and several other young composers were sent to Moscow to attend a meeting of the Union board, which warned against experimentation and 'modern' tendencies in music. According to Mihkelson, the meeting addressed general trends and specific pieces, including *Partita*, a neoclassical piano piece which Pärt completed earlier that year. In Tallinn, this work "was disavowed and Pärt received cautious, reserved treatment."⁶

⁴ Mihkelson, "A narrow path to truth," 12.

⁵ Mihkelson, "A narrow path to truth," 17.

⁶ Mihkelson, "A narrow path to truth," 17.

After *Partita*, Pärt composed multiple works that aligned more closely with Soviet values, which promoted music containing national folkloric themes. One such piece by Pärt is *Meie Aed* (Our Garden), a cantata for children’s choir and orchestra that premiered in 1959. A year later, however, Pärt published *Nekrolog*, the first atonal piece written in Estonia and a piece which earned him harsh reprimands from Moscow. Despite a rocky start in composition, Pärt still had many opportunities as a young composer in Estonia. In 1961, he joined the Estonian Soviet Composers’ Union in Tallinn, a subdivision of the wider Composers’ Union. This improved his work conditions by providing him with opportunities for travel, better housing, and access to concert halls for performances of his works. The following year, he was one of six Estonian composers to become finalists in a Soviet-wide composer’s competition. This achievement brought Pärt into the public eye permanently.

List of Compositions from 1958-1968⁷

Title	Year	Orchestration
Partita	1958	Piano
Sonatina No. 1	1958	Piano
Four Easy Dances	1959	Piano
Our Garden	1959	Children’s choir (SSA) and orchestra
Sonatina No. 2	1959	Piano
Five Children’s Songs	1960	Children’s choir (unison) and piano
Nekrolog	1960	Symphony orchestra
Perpetuum mobile	1963	Symphony orchestra
Solfeggio	1963	Mixed choir (SATB) a cappella
Symphony No. 1 “Polyphonic”	1963	Symphony orchestra
Collage über B-A-C-H	1964	Strings, oboe, cembalo and piano
Diagramme	1964	Piano

⁷ Not including film music. This list was taken from the Arvo Pärt Centre site. (www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/works).

Quintettino	1964	Flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn
Pro et contra	1966	Violincello and symphony orchestra
Symphony No. 2	1966	Symphony orchestra
Mommy's Kiss	1968	Piano
Credo	1968	Piano, mixed choir (SATB) and orchestra

The demographics of the Composers' Union in Tallinn allowed the voices of young composers like Pärt to be heard and considered more often than in other similar unions closer to the center of the Soviet empire. According to Mihkelson, approximately one-third of the Union's members were under the age of thirty-three. Additionally, many of the older composers in the Union were not members of the Communist Party, and while Pärt's works and others like his still sparked controversy, the Estonian Composers' Union provided "a friendlier atmosphere than other artistic unions in Estonia at that time."⁸ Though the Composers' Union in Tallinn provided Pärt with many opportunities and more support than he likely would have found elsewhere, he still faced a great deal of criticism for either the style or textual content of many of his works, of which *Credo* was perhaps the most significant.

Premiered in November 1968, *Credo* not only marks an important transition in Pärt's compositional output, it generated a great deal of problems for Pärt due to its text and the manner in which he set it. Pärt begins the work with the text: *Credo in Jesum Christum*, rather than the traditional *Credo in unum Deum*, and then transitions into Matthew 5:38-39: "You have heard it has been said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say unto you, that you resist not evil." Divided into three main sections, the work quotes material from Bach's "Prelude in C Major," moves into a section that utilizes serial and aleatory techniques to create a sense of chaos, and then returns to tonality which is

⁸ Mihkelson, "A narrow path to truth," 19.

ushered in by the recurrence of the Prelude. *Credo* sets the text in a way that vividly contrasts the idea of vengeance with those of faith and peace. The work descends into chaos while the choir repeats the phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” and slowly returns to tonality amidst repetitions of the phrase “resist not evil.”

The Estonian Composers’ Union met three months after *Credo* premiered to attempt to convince Pärt “to denounce his standpoint and purpose of the work,” which he refused to do.⁹ As a result, the Union removed the work from all official lists, and Pärt’s music was no longer performed in Tallinn’s concert halls. Local radio and newspapers also avoided entanglement in the situation, and though Pärt remained a member of the Composers’ Union, “he was pushed aside, and he himself withdrew from the public.”¹⁰ The repercussions that followed *Credo*, combined with changes in Pärt’s private life, prompted him to retreat to the study of early music and ultimately led him to develop the tintinnabuli style.

The years following *Credo* were markedly silent. Pärt composed only two published works—excluding film music—between 1968 and 1976: Symphony No. 3 and a later withdrawn cantata, *Laul Armastatule*.¹¹ During this time, Pärt began studying early polyphony and plainchant, turning to these styles of music as a lens through which to approach composition. According to Hillier,

In Eastern Europe... the impetus of (pre-Bachian) early music was much slower to acquire the cultural force it held in the West. An additional and significant factor in this state of affairs was the predominance of the sacred in most areas of extant early music repertoire, which could not have helped endear early music in general to the mentors of Communist taste.¹²

It was not until Western early music groups began to tour in Eastern Europe that interest in and access to music from the Renaissance and Baroque grew in the Soviet Union. By the early 1970s, similar

⁹ Mihkelson, “A narrow path to truth,” 26.

¹⁰ Mihkelson, “A narrow path to truth,” 26.

¹¹ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 65-66.

¹² Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 78-79.

groups were founded in Estonia and elsewhere, and Pärt immersed himself in the study of chant and composers such as Josquin, Obrecht, and Palestrina.

Another significant change in his life occurred in 1972, when Pärt became a member of the Russian Orthodox Church. While the number of churches in Estonia had dwindled significantly during the Khrushchev anti-religious drive in the early 1960s, the Soviet Union experienced a brief thaw in regard to religious policy in the early 1970s. The significant number of Russian natives residing in Estonia allowed for the continuance of the Russian Orthodox faith in a nation which to this day remains primarily Lutheran. Entering the church had a wide-spread impact in Pärt's life and influenced his compositional techniques and values. His choral and vocal works primarily utilize sacred or religious texts which come from both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions. Andrew Shenton, a leading authority on Pärt's music, discusses two important theological terms which help to frame Pärt's tintinnabuli style: the Orthodox *hesychast* tradition, which "upholds silence as the final culmination of one's salvation and ascent into the eternal fellowship of the Trinity," and *theoria*, which is a form of contemplation usually practiced through repetition.¹³ The tintinnabuli style, which will be discussed in more depth later in this thesis, centers around these ideas of silence and contemplation, both of which have clear value to Pärt: "My music has emerged only after I have been silent for quite some time, literally silent... A composer must often wait a long time for his music. This kind of sublime anticipation is exactly the kind of pause that I value so greatly."¹⁴

In 1976, after an extended period of compositional silence, he published his first tintinnabuli work, *Für Alina* for piano. Other works soon followed. These early tintinnabuli works, all published in the late 1970s, were instrumental pieces. Many of these works, including *Fratres* and *Tabula Rasa*,

¹³ Andrew Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts: Choral and Organ Music 1956-2015* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2018), 101.

¹⁴ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 101.

would later become some of his most well-known pieces. The majority of them were premiered by Hortus Musicus, an early music ensemble founded in 1972 in Tallinn. Pärt also wrote choral works, many of which are wordless, sung only with vowels. According to Pärt, the reception of the tintinnabuli style in Estonia, like the response to his twelve-tone music, was hesitant: “I created my tintinnabular style and was declared mad for the second time.”¹⁵ In addition to local performances, his tintinnabuli works were performed outside of the Soviet Union, resulting in a growing international interest in Pärt’s music that did not sit well in Moscow. Pärt described the situation as follows:

a great many things were happening at that time—but the decisive factor was the government’s attitude towards me. They let me know that they would find nothing amiss if my wife and I left the country. I had practically no chance anymore of surviving as a composer... In their view, the performances of my works abroad had become too frequent.¹⁶

In January of 1980, Pärt and his wife Nora left Estonia and settled in Berlin, where he began collaborating with Universal Edition to publish his works and worked closely with the Hilliard Ensemble, which performed many of his vocal pieces. Additionally, ECM records began to produce recordings of his music. These connections gave his music a much wider audience.¹⁷ Pärt’s commissions increased drastically during this time and his international acclaim grew. In 1989, Pärt received the Edison Classical Award from the Netherlands as well as his first Grammy nomination, both for *Passio*.¹⁸ Pärt and his family started visiting Estonia in 1992, shortly after the nation regained its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Upon his return, Pärt began collaborating closely with the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, which was founded in 1981 and by the early 1990s had begun to establish a reputation as a world-class ensemble.

¹⁵ Arvo Pärt, “An Interview with Arvo Pärt,” interview by Martin Elste. *Fanfare* March-April 1988, (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/an-interview-with-arvo-part/>).

¹⁶ Arvo Pärt, “I Seek a Common Denominator,” interview by Enzo Restagno. *UE Musikblätter* 2 (2012), (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/i-seek-a-common-denominator/>).

¹⁷ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt’s Resonant Texts*, 105.

¹⁸ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt’s Resonant Texts*, 125-126.

Public reaction to Pärt's music in Estonia was complex at first due to the nation's cultural climate after the fall of the Soviet Union. Shenton states:

Pärt did not fit conveniently into the cultural and political narratives of the 1990s... [his] music was not suited for mass amateur performance at Estonian song festivals, he did not write in Estonian, his religious texts were alien to many, scores and recordings of his music were prohibitively expensive, and he was perceived by some as more cosmopolitan than Estonian: successfully established in Berlin and not firmly rooted in Estonia.¹⁹

Despite Estonia's reluctance to embrace Pärt as a piece of their national identity, he still gained a growing amount of media coverage and his music was performed often. By the mid-2000s, the public attitude towards Pärt and his music had shifted substantially as the nation continued to adjust to post-Soviet life and culture. In 2010, the Pärt family moved to Estonia permanently and founded the International Arvo Pärt Centre, originally located in a private home in Laulasmaa. In 2018, the Centre's new building was completed. Today, the Centre houses an archive of Pärt's works and original manuscripts, a concert hall for lectures and performances, and a library of books from Pärt's personal collection which is open to the public.

Between the years of 2010 and 2015, Arvo Pärt was the most performed living composer in the world, and his continued influence reaches a diverse audience.²⁰ While Pärt's production of new music has slowed, he has continued to arrange some of his older works for new instrumentation and write commissioned pieces. An overview of his work up to 2019 includes approximately 114 distinct catalogued works, over half of which utilize sung text.²¹ Pärt consistently emphasizes the importance of his faith in his music, and it is this spirituality that Shenton claims is central to the music's appeal:

¹⁹ Jeffers Englehardt, "Perspectives on Pärt after 1980," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* ed. Andrew Shenton (New York: Cambridge University Press), 45.

²⁰ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 1.

²¹ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 93. Data from 2015 to 2019 taken from the Pärt Centre website (www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/works).

The tintinnabuli music of Arvo Pärt invites us to accept it as a point of departure for a new or different spiritual experience with music of such sublime simplicity that can indeed bring any of us to a condition of “serenity, stillness and reconciliation.”²²

As Pärt developed as a composer, his ideas about music and his approach to composition also developed. In his early works, the variety of style and tone indicates that Pärt was searching for something which he seems to have found in the tintinnabuli style. The widespread appeal of Pärt’s music today is evidenced by his popularity amongst a diverse audience: “Rock, house, drum’n’bass, drone-metal, post-rock, ambient-music and techno... [these] musical examples are all by artists who have credited the world-famous composer and declared that Arvo Pärt is their great favorite or a key inspiration.”²³ The tintinnabuli style has undoubtedly impacted many people around the world, and a brief study of the style itself provides insight into Pärt’s achievements in music.

²² Shenton, *Arvo Pärt’s Resonant Texts*, 104.

²³ Arvo Pärt, “Arvo Pärt: ‘I suppose we secretly love one another. It is very beautiful,’” interview by Siim Nestor. *Eesti Ekspress*, September 2010 (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/arvo-part-i-suppose-secretly-we-love-one-another-it-is-very-beautiful/>).

Tintinnabuli

In the years between *Credo* (1968) and *Für Alina* (1976), Pärt devoted his time to the study of Gregorian chant. According to Hillier, Pärt's study of chant involved

writing semi-automatically, page after page, filling book after book... to fully assimilate all that might be meant by the idea of 'monody.' Sometimes he would draw a shape... and then create a melodic line to fill that shape. Or he would quickly read a text, set it aside, and then immediately write music to mirror what he had just read. In this way he sought to steep himself in a new tradition, not artificially, but assimilating it bit by bit, pulling it gradually to the surface in such a way that it might become second nature.²⁴

As he approached chant and monody in this way, Pärt came to value the process of reduction: "I am tempted only when I experience something unknown, something new and meaningful for me. It seems, however, that this unknown territory is sooner reached by way of reduction than by growing complexity. Reduction certainly doesn't mean simplification, but it is the way – at least in an ideal scenario – to the most intense concentration on the essence of things."²⁵

Pärt also studied early polyphony written by composers such as Josquin and Palestrina, examining different ways in which composers manipulated chant-like melodies to interact with one another. While discussing polyphony in an interview with Jamie McCarthy, Pärt stated: "Naturally, there were also technical details that interested me, but this is not enough... I was affected by the spirit of the music, however; it was that side that interested me far more than the sort of things one discovers when one is taught about the mechanics of polyphony."²⁶ While Pärt was drawn to early music by its affect more than its technicalities, many aspects of these musical styles have parallels in tintinnabuli, including the use of homophony, sustained drones or pedal tones, and systematic

²⁴ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 74.

²⁵ Arvo Pärt, "Sources of Invention," interview by Geoff Smith. *The Musical Times* 140 no. 1868 (Autumn 1999): 19.

²⁶ Arvo Pärt, "An Interview with Arvo Pärt," interview by Jamie McCarthy, *The Musical Times* 130 no. 1753 (March 1989): 132.

variations of patterns in rhythm and texture. Additionally, Pärt echoes these styles in his treatment of text in his vocal works, seeking to convey the words clearly through rhythmic and melodic usage.

Pärt's emphasis on the text in his compositional process demonstrates a strong connection to chant and early polyphony. Hillier comments on the relationship between words and music in chant, describing chant as "a unique complex of melodic and verbal power, in which a self-contained musical identity reinforces the moods and images of the text, which in turn lend their identity to the music."²⁷ The importance of text in chant was noticeably impressed upon Pärt, who said: "My starting point in composing is the text. Every word of it. And that then determines all that follows on the manuscript paper."²⁸

Pärt's vocal works demonstrate care in setting the text, employing rhythm and melody to better convey the words. His works demonstrate fluidity of meter and phrase length, a technique that recalls polyphony in the way it maintains the phrasing and emphasis of the words. Pärt also uses rhythmic figures and measures of silence to punctuate the text. In many settings, he writes moving melodic lines that change direction at emphasized syllables. In other works, he structures the music to create a sense of text-painting. For example, in *De Profundis*, the basses begin singing at the lowest end of their range, reflecting the text: "out of the depths." Pärt also uses texture to emphasize important moments in the texts, layering different voices to add color and variation. Even in many of his instrumental works there is a sense that Pärt was thinking about words as he wrote because he employs similar rhythmic and melodic techniques in his instrumental music.

²⁷ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 85.

²⁸ Arvo Pärt, "The Silence and Awe of Arvo Pärt," interview by Thomas Huizenga. NPR Classical June 2, 2014. Transcription as preserved on (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/the-silence-and-awe-of-arvo-part/>).

The term ‘tintinnabuli’ comes from the Latin for “little bell,” *tintinnabulum*.²⁹ During the development of the tintinnabuli style, Pärt often cited bells as a metaphor for his music. Of his work, he says: “I build with the most primitive materials – with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of the triad are like bells.”³⁰ While Pärt’s music shares commonalities with the qualities of bells, the relationship between the two is more figurative than literal. Pärt does not attempt to recreate the sound of bells in his music, but he uses the idea of bells to convey the aesthetic of his style. Marguerite Bostonia describes the term ‘tintinnabuli’ as “a metonym: a figure of speech in which the name of an entity is borrowed to define another, where both share innate characteristics, musical and spiritual.”³¹ Bostonia also discusses the Russian Orthodox tradition of bell-ringing, which uses untuned bells to create a unique, inharmonic soundscape that relies on rhythm and texture over functional melodies or harmonies. Similarly, Pärt’s focus is not on conventional relationships between harmony and melody. In tintinnabulation, seemingly disparate and often dissonant lines combine to create unique sonorities designed for effect. The tintinnabuli style focuses “on the union of pure neutral elements, on the image of the journey, and hidden meanings; all of which remain symbolized by the character of a bell.”³²

Broken down into its simplest parts, the tintinnabuli style consists of two interrelated pieces: a line moving mostly by step and another line that arpeggiates notes from the tonic triad. Respectively, these are referred to in an analytical system developed by Paul Hillier as the melodic voice (M-voice) and tintinnabuli voice (T-voice).³³ The majority of Pärt’s early tintinnabuli music maintains harmonic

²⁹ As the tintinnabuli style developed, Pärt and scholars who write about his music all used variations of the term’s spelling. Common variants include “tintinnabular” and “tintinnabulation.” In this thesis I will use the more common “tintinnabuli.”

³⁰ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*. 87.

³¹ Marguerite Bostonia, “Bells as Inspiration for Tintinnabulation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* ed. Andrew Shenton (New York: Cambridge University Press), 130.

³² Bostonia, “Bells as Inspiration,” 137.

³³ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 92-93.

stasis, with the T-voice arpeggiating a single chord for the entirety of the work. Meanwhile, the M-voice moves stepwise in and out of dissonance with that tonic chord. Hillier describes the style in this way:

The tintinnabuli style is based on a simple system for relating the horizontal and vertical manifestations of pitch—melody and harmony (scales and triads). In medieval and early Renaissance polyphony, the harmony is formed by the confluence of the constituent voices to such an extent that harmonic analysis becomes at best secondary. Similarly, in tintinnabuli music, where the harmony does not ‘move,’ the harmonic framework has been tilted sideways to form a musical line... What we hear might be described as a moment spread out in time.³⁴

Pärt himself believes that “harmony relates to melody in a very direct way. The vertical and horizontal aspects are inseparable. They are not abstract entities. There is a reason for relating them both together.”³⁵ In his early tintinnabuli works, Pärt sets and adheres to a series of guidelines for both voices, establishing a relationship between them that frames the piece. For example, in *Für Alina*, the T-voice consistently sounds whichever note in the B-minor triad is the closest below the note sounded by the M-voice, written in the top line.

Arvo Pärt, *Für Alina*, mm. 4-6

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is two sharps (D major/B minor). The top two staves show the M-voice (top line) and T-voice (middle line) moving stepwise. The bottom staff is empty.

Hillier outlines five possible relationships between the M- and T-voices, referring to them based on their proximity to one another. As seen in the figure below, the T-voice can be placed above

³⁴ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 90.

³⁵ Pärt, “Sources of Invention,” 24.

(superior), below (inferior), or alternating between the two in relation to the M-voice. The distance from the M-voice is referred to by position, first position being the closest note of the tintinnabuli triad to the M-voice (excluding unisons).

Diagram of Voice Positions³⁶

The diagram illustrates three voice positions for the T-voice and M-voice on a single treble clef staff. The M-voice is represented by the lower notes of a triad, and the T-voice by the upper notes. The positions are as follows:

- first position, superior (+1):** The T-voice is one note above the M-voice.
- second position, superior (+2):** The T-voice is two notes above the M-voice.
- first position, inferior (-1):** The T-voice is one note below the M-voice.
- second position, inferior (-2):** The T-voice is two notes below the M-voice.
- first position, alternating (+1/-1):** The T-voice alternates between being one note above and one note below the M-voice.

In addition to the structure of the M- and T-voices, Pärt also structures the rhythmic figuration of his tintinnabuli works. In some pieces, he focuses on rhythmic ratios, creating what Brauneiss describes as “proportional canons” in which a set ratio is given to all voices in different rhythmic values.³⁷ For example, if the ratio was 2:1, where violins might play a series of half and quarter notes, the violas might play whole and half notes, doubling the value of the notes but maintaining the same ratio. In other works, Pärt allows the text to dictate rhythm, either assigning longer rhythmic values to emphasized syllables or building a rhythmic structure based on the grammatical structure of the

³⁶ Leopold Brauneiss, “Musical Archetypes: The Basic Elements of Tintinnabuli Style” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* ed. Andrew Shenton (New York: Cambridge University Press), 56.

³⁷ Brauneiss, “Musical Archetypes,” 69.

text. For example, in *Passio*, Pärt created a system using three generalized note values (short, medium, and long). Hillier describes the system as such:

1. In the last word of a phrase ending with a comma, the stressed syllable would be medium.
2. In the last word of a phrase ending with a colon or a full stop, each syllable would be long.
3. In the first word of a new sentence (or phrase beginning after a colon), the stressed syllable would be medium.
4. In the last word in a phrase ending with a question mark, each syllable would be medium.
5. Otherwise all syllables are short.³⁸

Pärt also structures many of his works using texture, often beginning simply with only one or two voices and expanding throughout the piece. For example, in *De Profundis*, written for four-part tenor and bass chorus accompanied by the organ, the work begins with text sung by individual voice parts, starting with the Bass II line. Pärt then writes the vocal lines in pairs and groups of three, alternating combinations of tenors and basses to manipulate the color of the lines. Only in the last few pages of the work are all four voice parts heard together, starting at the dynamic level of *forte*. The four lines and organ diminish in volume together, ending at *mezzo-piano*. Many of his works are structured similarly in a gradual crescendo and decrescendo, adding instruments or voices to create contrast between phrases. Other works follow a call-and-response framework that recalls certain styles of chant. In *Magnificat*, for example, Pärt uses combinations of voices to create that effect, alternating without a set pattern between sections of only one or two voices and a fuller texture with three or more voice parts.

In other works, Pärt structures the piece to follow the emotion and flow of the text, even if the text itself is not sung. For example, the organ work *Annum per Annum*, commissioned for the 900th anniversary of the Speyer Dome Church in Speyer, Germany, is a piece in five movements with an introduction and coda. The movements of the work reference the five parts of the mass ordinary, each

³⁸ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 127-128.

section a variation on a single *cantus firmus*.³⁹ The work begins with an introduction of open fifths spanning multiple octaves in a repetitive rhythmic pattern. The introduction fades away into the first movement, which contains the melodic material of the *cantus firmus*. Beginning in D minor, the work transitions into D major halfway through the “Credo” movement, which is the most highly embellished iteration of the melody. Each movement has a distinct character, suggesting that Pärt wrote them with the text in mind. For example, the “Agnus Dei” is a tender iteration of the *cantus firmus* which reflects the text’s prayer for mercy and peace. The work ends with a coda, a repetition of the introductory material with the major third, F sharp, filling in the perfect fifths. The coda starts at *pianissimo* and gradually crescendos to *fortissimo*, which Pärt describes as an expression of “joy, just joy in the celebration.”⁴⁰ According to Andrew Shenton, this work is unique in that it does not directly align with the rules of the tintinnabuli style and instead is an adaptation of organum, a style developed in the Middle Ages. Shenton compares *Annum per Annum* to the final, florid stage of this medieval style, which places several melismatic pitches in the upper voice over sustained notes in the lower voice.⁴¹ He analyzes this piece as both a musical expression of the theological and emotional implications of the texts and a precursor to compositional developments in the tintinnabuli style.

Through the study of Pärt’s works from 1956 to 2015, Shenton identifies five phases in Pärt’s compositional style, summarized below:

Pärt’s Compositional Phases

Phase 1: Pre-tintinnabulation (1956-1968)	Compositional development and exploration.
Phase 2: Tintinnabulation (1976-1982)	Development of tintinnabuli and strict adherence to stylistic rules.

³⁹ Thomas Daniel Schlee, “Preface,” in *Annum per Annum*, ed. Martin Haselböck and Thomas Daniel Schlee (Universal Edition, 1980).

⁴⁰ Bostonia, “Bells as Inspiration,” 138.

⁴¹ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt’s Resonant Texts*, 71-72.

Phase 3: Expanded Tintinnabulation (1984-1997)	Application of tintinnabuli rules is less strict; works from this period show evidence of experimentation with form and timbre.
Phase 4: Synthesized tintinnabulation (1997-2002)	Tintinnabulation is still evident in these works but is combined with other compositional techniques.
Phase 5: Freedom (2003-2015)	These works demonstrate little to no compositional restraint.

One prominent example of Pärt's first compositional phase of experimentation and development is *Credo*. The work is the last of Pärt's collage pieces, a style which he used in an attempt to move away from serialism. Through the quotation of Bach's "Prelude in C major" and the contrast of tonality and atonality, Pärt seems to confront his compositional dilemma in this work. The combination of multiple compositional techniques and the unusual religious text enhance this idea of experimentation, as if Pärt was looking to find something in this music. Of *Credo*, he says: "The Collages are a kind of transplantation; when you feel like you have lost your skin, you try to take strips of skin from anywhere you can find them and use them to cover yourself... Yet it is not possible to carry on indefinitely with the transplantation technique; it reached its limits in *Credo*."⁴²

Pärt's second compositional phase began with the creation of the tintinnabuli style. These works follow the predetermined rules of tintinnabuli closely, helping to establish the basic features of the style. In *Fratres*, for example, a work originally written for three parts without fixed instrumentation, two voices follow a strict melodic pattern while the third functions as the T-voice. The piece, first published in 1977, was revised multiple times for different instrumentation. The version for string orchestra and percussion demonstrates Pärt's strict adherence to the tintinnabuli

⁴² Arvo Pärt, "I Seek a Common Denominator," (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/i-seek-a-common-denominator/>).

rules. Over an open-fifth drone, two melodic lines written in thirds (not accounting for octave displacement) appear in multiple combinations of instrument pairs and gradually descend throughout the piece with each iteration of the melody, which are separated by repeated percussion motifs. The T-voice, outlining an A minor triad, appears in different positions relative to the paired M-voices, sometimes fitting between them and sometimes below. Pärt uses an unchanging formula, alternating between meters in a strict pattern. As the texture of the work gets fuller and the dynamics louder, Pärt doubles the upper M-voice and the T-voice to create a richer sound. This work, one of Pärt's most well-known, demonstrates a systemic method of composition that is characteristic of all of Pärt's early tintinnabuli pieces.

In the third compositional phase, Pärt begins to loosen these systematic rules. For example, in *Te Deum* (1984), Pärt begins making use of more melismatic vocal lines, including “two-note melismatic slurs, which more closely resemble plainsong than the earliest tintinnabulation.”⁴³ *Te Deum* experiments with changing modes, alternating between major and minor. It also makes use of a tonic-dominant drone rather than harmonic stasis, which Pärt intended to function as a form of punctuation: “there is a difference between semi-colon and colon and comma, that is all. Every author uses these tools, but it is different each time and meaning also plays a role.”⁴⁴

In the fourth of Shenton's phases, Pärt employs a wider range of compositional techniques, using functional harmonies, moving freely within a single line between T- and M-voice motives, and creating more punctuated rhythmic effects. For example, in *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem* (2002), a work dedicated to the Estonian TV Girls Choir, Pärt layers the four-part texture using different rhythmic

⁴³ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 119.

⁴⁴ Stuart Greenbaum, “Arvo Pärt's *Te Deum*: A Compositional Watershed” (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 1999), 119.

figures to emphasize important text. In measures 52-56, for example, he writes echoes of words in the phrase: “for there are set the thrones of judgement.”

Arvo Pärt, *Peace Upon You, Jerusalem* mm. 52-56

52 *f alla marcia*

I
; For there are set the thrones judge - ment,

II *f alla marcia*
For there are set the thrones of judge - ment, the

I
A there are set the thrones of judge - ment, the

II
there are set the thrones judge - ment,

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This work balances sections of homorhythmic declarations, echoed words and phrases like the example shown above, and more fluid, peaceful passages. Pärt’s setting prioritizes the text of Psalm 122 (121) and conveys a sense of joy and a hope for peace which are evident in the text.

One of the strongest examples of what Shenton describes as Pärt’s fifth phase of “compositional freedom” is *Adam’s Lament* (2010), a twenty-four-minute work for mixed chorus and string orchestra. The text was written by St. Silouan, an important Russian Orthodox figure, and expresses Adam’s sorrow at being driven from the Garden of Eden. Shenton provides a brief overview of the work, which displays a wide variety of compositional techniques that indicate the freedom with which it was composed. Pärt explores multiple loosely related keys, utilizing both common-tone and chromatic modulation. He writes multiple string techniques and colors, using the orchestration to illustrate his interpretation of the text. Due to the work’s wide range of compositional styles and

techniques, Shenton describes *Adam's Lament* as more similar to the Baroque style than the Medieval, identifying moments of musical symbolism which recall Bach.⁴⁵ As an example of Pärt's musical symbolism in this work, Shenton notes how both the key and the register of the music gradually sink in a descent that may represent Adam's fall and expulsion from the Garden. The work concludes with a cappella chorus, which Shenton suggests "represents the perception of the abandonment of God, with the strings absent and the lower voices of the choir at some of their lowest pitches."⁴⁶ *Adam's Lament* is a complex work that conveys the wide range of emotion found in the text, from the joy and peace of paradise to the suffering and grief found outside of the Garden. Pärt's setting of the text maintains some of the style and tone of tintinnabuli while expanding his compositional language to more powerfully express these emotions.

Since the creation of tintinnabuli in 1976, Pärt has continued to develop and reinterpret the style. His music has drawn a wide audience from around the world, such that many scholars who write about tintinnabuli strive to explain its broad appeal. Brauneiss analyzes Pärt's music as capitalizing on musical "archetypes," or universally recognizable musical elements. He claims that the appeal of tintinnabuli stems from the way Pärt reduces music to these elements without stripping them of beauty, defining the style as "a quest for the universal in the archetypal."⁴⁷ Similarly, Shenton discusses the sparse aesthetic of tintinnabuli as an important reason for its broad impact:

What is remarkable about Pärt's music is the level of sympathy in the general populace. The sparse tintinnabuli style resonates with an essential and universal spirit because it is not colored by national or personal identity.... It is successful because the interpretation comes more at the level of the listener than at the level of the composer or performer, and the degree of interpretation is often profound. As Pärt's style developed and tintinnabuli became diluted the music does not lose its sympathetic resonance, but it does change as the music accommodates itself uniquely to each listener.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 252.

⁴⁶ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 252.

⁴⁷ Brauneiss, "Musical Archetypes," 52.

⁴⁸ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt's Resonant Texts*, 265.

When asked to explain the success of his music, Pärt also emphasizes the idea of universality, saying:

Perhaps it is that people who follow my work with interest hope to find something in it. Or perhaps they are people who, like me, are seeking something and feel they are moving in the same direction when they hear my music. Also, there is the fact that I work with simple numbers which are agreeable to see and hear; I seek a common denominator. I strive toward a music which I could call universal, in which many dialects intermingle.⁴⁹

Clearly, one of the main goals of *tintinnabuli* is to reach people, to provide a means to connect audiences with that “essential and universal spirit” in a way that is impactful to many regardless of their individual beliefs.

⁴⁹ Pärt, “I Seek a Common Denominator,” (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/i-seek-a-common-denominator/>).

Pope Pius X and the 1903 *Motu Proprio*

Arvo Pärt's desire to create music which is impactful and aligns with his personal ideals is not unprecedented. Especially in sacred music, composers have tried to synthesize their own musical goals with the needs of the church. Throughout history the style and functionality of sacred music has undergone many transformations as composers sought to combine ever-changing musical techniques with sacred texts and liturgical necessities. In the Baroque era, for example, composers like Monteverdi and Schütz moved away from unaccompanied Renaissance polyphony and began to write sacred music which used a wide range of instrumentation and ornaments.

By the late nineteenth century, sacred music in the Catholic church like that of Mozart and Haydn contained elements of opera and other secular dramatic works of the Romantic era. Many composers wrote large symphonic masses, edited the liturgical texts, and quoted or imitated musical elements of secular music, including opera. Masses written in this time often included full instrumentation and embellishments that some of the clergy considered a distraction from the liturgical texts. One example is Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, which was written for full orchestra, four soloists, and chorus in an operatic style. Shortly after its first performance at the Church of San Marco, the work made its way to opera stages around Italy.⁵⁰ Though individual members of the Catholic Church sought reform and wrote edicts designed to address specific 'problems' in sacred music, widespread change did not begin until the start of the twentieth century, when Giuseppe Sarto was elected Pope Pius X in 1903.

Born in 1835, Giuseppe Sarto studied at the Seminary of Padua and was ordained as a priest in 1858. During his first assignment, he taught Gregorian chants to his congregation at Tombolo. Over the next twenty-six years, Sarto rose in the Church and remained engaged in promoting chant

⁵⁰ Laura Basini, "Verdi and Sacred Revivalism in Post-Unification Italy," *19th-Century Music* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 133.

amongst both the clergy and congregations with whom he was affiliated. When he was appointed Bishop of Mantua in 1884, Sarto taught courses in theology and led chant rehearsals with the students at the Seminary. He was known throughout his life to be a very active leader in the Church, and his eleven-year papacy resulted in several reforms. According to Robert Skeris, “as pastor, Bishop and Cardinal, indeed also as Supreme Pontiff, Sarto’s lifestyle always remained extremely modest,” and Sarto was “praised [for] his untiring devotion to duty in his episcopal office, his energetic approach to work and his organizational talents, combined with great friendliness and graciousness.”⁵¹ Sarto was Pope from 1903 until his death in 1914. Considered a ‘conservative reformer’ by many scholars, his leadership in the Catholic Church brought about change designed to promote “the deepening of religious life amongst priests and people.”⁵²

In a *Motu Proprio* issued only a few months following his election as Pope, Sarto prescribes the proper types of instrumentation, styles, and texts which composers should utilize when writing sacred music. He calls for sacred music to focus on three main “qualities proper to the liturgy... sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality.”⁵³ Sanctity, or holiness, referred not only to the text which composers set, but to each work’s style and method of performance. Pius X stated that music written for secular purposes should not be included in church services. This pronouncement evidently resonated with members of the church:

There are, objectively, certain kinds of musical ideas or expressions which are clearly “secular,” such as dance music, military or march music, “sentimental” music... and all such music as is intended vividly to express, in musical forms, the swelling tides of any human passion. All of these are unfitted for sacred uses, either because of their intrinsically worldly suggestiveness or because of their purely accidental or conventional relationships.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Robert A. Skeris, “Sarto, the ‘Conservative Reformer’: 100 Years of the *Motu Proprio* of Pope St. Pius X,” in *Sacred Music* 130 no. 4 (Winter 2003): 5.

⁵² Skeris, “Sarto, the ‘Conservative Reformer,’” 6.

⁵³ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” English translation from Liturgy Office Resources, UK (<http://liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Music/PiusX-Tra-le-sollecitudini.pdf>).

⁵⁴ H.T. Henry, “Music-Reform in the Catholic Church,” in *The Musical Quarterly* (1915): 108.

Additionally, Pius X stipulated that the way in which sacred music is presented should also be holy. To him, this meant that composers should limit their instrumentation to organ or small groups of wind instruments, prioritizing the vocal lines. He also stated that women should not be allowed to participate in the performance of sacred music. According to Kilgore, this was because at that time women's voices were correlated with ornamentation "in the form of dramatic motions and vocal flare."⁵⁵ (Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, for example, features soprano and mezzo-soprano soloists singing aria-like settings of the liturgical text.) In his discussion of the *Motu Proprio*, H.T. Henry describes women in church music "so coloring sacred melodies and sacred texts with their own sentiment as to suggest again a prima donna interpreting some operatic selection."⁵⁶ The reasoning behind Pius X's prohibition of women singers in sacred music was to promote simplicity in sacred music as an expression of worship, which he felt was threatened by women's voices. While the exclusion of women from sacred music sparked controversy, Pius X suggested that composers work around this limitation by writing for young boys rather than women.

Pius X also called composers to strive for "goodness of form," or beauty, in their works, saying that "[Sacred music] must be true art, for otherwise it will be impossible for it to exercise on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the Church aims at obtaining in admitting into her liturgy the art of musical sounds."⁵⁷ The idea of "goodness of form" refers primarily to compositional style and was meant to circumvent growing trends of producing large quantities of sacred music at the expense of the music's quality.⁵⁸ As an example, Kilgore discusses the St. Cecilia Society, which was founded in 1868 in an attempt to increase the production of liturgical music in Austria, Germany, and

⁵⁵ Jonathan Kilgore, "Four Twentieth-Century Mass Ordinary Settings Surveyed Using the Dictates of the 1903 *Motu Proprio* as a Stylistic Guide," (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2008), 14.

⁵⁶ Henry, "Music-Reform in the Catholic Church," 108-109.

⁵⁷ Pope Pius X, "Tra le Sollecitudini," 2.

⁵⁸ Kilgore, "Four Twentieth-Century," 14.

Switzerland and produced works of a wide range of musical quality.⁵⁹ William Mahrt expands the idea of beauty in music as discussed in the *Motu Proprio* further, stating that “beauty is that which synthesizes diverse elements into a unity, and that is the general function of music in the liturgy, to draw together a diverse succession of actions into a coherent whole.”⁶⁰ Similarly, Pius X believed that beauty, or goodness of form, aided the impact of liturgical and sacred texts by elevating the words. Such music, he said, “places the liturgy in the context of the transcendent and the eternal.”⁶¹

By calling for emphasis on the qualities of holiness and beauty, Pius X believed that the result would be universality in sacred music: a greater sense of unity between national musical styles. H.T. Henry elaborates on the idea of universality, saying that if the prescriptions of the *Motu Proprio* are followed, sacred music will not cater to national tastes but to the broader, global congregation of the Church.⁶² Pius X sought to provide a common ground for sacred music in order to unify the music of the church. He states that “the Church has paid constant attention to the universal character of the music prescribed by her, in virtue of the traditional principle that as the law of belief is one, so also the form of prayer, and as far as possible the rule of chant, should be one.”⁶³ While he valued and endorsed individual national styles, Pius X wanted sacred music to have a universal impact on listeners regardless of their nationality, stating that “these forms must be subordinated in such a manner to the general characteristics of sacred music that nobody of any nation may receive an impression other than good on hearing them.”⁶⁴ Partly in service of this goal, he emphasized that sacred music should set only Latin texts, not vernacular texts, so that the works would be better suited for use in churches

⁵⁹ The Cecilian movement was grounded in similar principles as the *Motu Proprio*, following a line of thought about sacred music which traces back to the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. Composers in the Cecilian movement shunned contemporary styles to recreate the simplicity of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century polyphony, resulting in music which most scholars deem artistically unremarkable. See Siegfried Gmeinwieser, “Cecilian Movement,” *Oxford Music Online*, accessed April 26, 2020.

⁶⁰ William Mahrt, “Gregorian Chant as a Paradigm of Sacred Music,” in *Sacred Music* 133 no. 1 (Spring 2006): 6.

⁶¹ Mahrt, “Gregorian Chant,” 13.

⁶² Henry, “Music Reform in the Catholic Church,” 112.

⁶³ Skeris, “Sarto the ‘Conservative Reformer,’” 7.

⁶⁴ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” 3.

all over the world. Additionally, he expected composers to set the texts “in a manner intelligible to the faithful who listen,” emphasizing the idea that the text ought to be the primary focus of sacred music.⁶⁵

In the *Motu Proprio*, Pius X discussed a few different styles of sacred music that he viewed as particularly good examples from which composers could draw inspiration. He focused on Gregorian chant as the “supreme model for sacred music,” stating that the closer a work came to emulating chant, the more worthy it was for sacred use, and vice versa.⁶⁶ Additionally, he pointed out that Gregorian chant was an opportunity to include the congregation: “Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part in the ecclesiastical offices, as was the case in ancient times.”⁶⁷

Pius X then emphasized the value of “Classic Polyphony,” citing Palestrina as its highest composer and praising the way that this style utilized chant. He did not discount ‘modern’ music, recognizing the value of the church’s support of musical progress, yet he cautioned composers against the ‘profane’ in modern music:

The Church has always recognized and favored the progress of the arts, admitting to the service of religion everything good and beautiful discovered by genius in the course of ages — always, however, with due regard to the liturgical laws. Consequently, modern music is also admitted to the Church, since it, too, furnishes compositions of such excellence, sobriety and gravity, that they are in no way unworthy of the liturgical functions.

Still, since modern music has risen mainly to serve profane uses, greater care must be taken with regard to it, in order that the musical compositions of modern style which are admitted in the Church may contain nothing profane, be free from reminiscences of motifs adopted in the theaters, and be not fashioned even in their external forms after the manner of profane pieces.⁶⁸

Clearly, Pius X wanted sacred music to be inspired by the past. While he gave composers the option of incorporating compositional techniques of the time, he sought to draw their attention to the

⁶⁵ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” 4.

⁶⁶ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” 3.

⁶⁷ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” 3.

⁶⁸ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” 3.

styles and intentions of older music. To him, chant and classic polyphony demonstrated the values which he found most vital in sacred music: those of beauty, holiness, and universality. By encouraging composers to simplify their music to better exhibit those values, Pius X hoped to improve the quality and effectiveness of sacred music as part of the liturgy.

The effects of the *Motu Proprio* in subsequent decades became amplified by the neoclassical movement of the twentieth century. Many composers, including Vaughan Williams and Stravinsky, wrote sacred works that aligned with the guidelines of the *Motu Proprio*, whether or not they were attempting to do so.⁶⁹ Kilgore states that “composers of sacred music, while looking to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century masters for inspiration, were shaping works that were still ‘modern’ in nature” by combining compositional styles from the past with the harmonic language and developments of the twentieth century.⁷⁰ One such example is the sacred music written by Maurice Duruflé, including his four motets, which Frazier describes as “twentieth-century works in Renaissance dress.”⁷¹ Other scholars have tied the influence of the *Motu Proprio* to Vaughan Williams’ Mass in G Minor and Poulenc’s Mass in G Major.⁷² Sacred works such as these provide examples of music that aligns with the *Motu Proprio*, which remained in effect until the Second Vatican Council altered the requirements for sacred music again in 1962.

Several unifying themes are present in the *Motu Proprio*, but the idea that sacred music is most effective in simpler forms is of particular significance. Pius X advocated for composers to reduce their instrumentation, focus on the intelligibility of the text, and strive for universality in the appeal and function of their music.

⁶⁹ Kilgore, “Four Twentieth-Century,” 1.

⁷⁰ Kilgore, “Four Twentieth-Century,” 2.

⁷¹ James E. Frazier, “Duruflé’s Role in the Plainsong Revival” in *Maurice Duruflé: The Man and his Music* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2007): 152.

⁷² Kilgore, “Four Twentieth-Century,” ii.

Sacred music... contributes to the decorum and the splendor of the ecclesiastical ceremonies, and... its proper aim is to add greater efficacy to the text, in order that through it the faithful may be more easily moved to devotion and better disposed for the reception of the fruits of grace belonging to the celebration of the most holy mysteries.⁷³

The values presented in the *Motu Proprio* promote the synthesis of creativity and accessibility in sacred music so that its impact is greater while enhancing the experience of the congregation. Pius X believed that music had the unique ability to elevate the liturgy and bring the congregation closer to the divine. By writing the *Motu Proprio*, he sought to impress these ideas upon others in the Church and bring about musical reform.

⁷³ Kilgore, "Four Twentieth-Century," 2.

Idealistic Alignment: Arvo Pärt and Pius X

There is no evidence to suggest that Arvo Pärt was directly influenced by the *Motu Proprio*, yet the majority of his choral works function as an extension of the ideas and values presented by Pius X. The tintinnabuli style has for its inspiration the same sources as those that Pius X valued: chant and early polyphony. The compositional devices that Pärt uses in his music align with many of the guidelines in the *Motu Proprio*. While Pärt's choral music is intended for secular performance, most of the texts he has set are sacred and some of these works have been performed in religious services. Pärt has stated that his main purpose in creating the tintinnabuli style was a spiritual one, and he regards music as an expression of his faith. As demonstrated earlier in this thesis, tintinnabuli works resound with their audience by providing an opportunity for individual interpretation and contemplation. The tintinnabuli style, therefore, demonstrates both a spiritual and aesthetic alignment with ideals presented in the *Motu Proprio*.

As a member of the Russian Orthodox Church, Pärt has often emphasized the importance of his faith to his music while also noting the influence of the music of the Roman Catholic Church: “my musical education has formed mostly on the basis of Roman Catholic music. The Orthodox faith came to me later, and not so much through the music of the church but through the teachings.”⁷⁴ While Pärt states that the musical styles of the Roman Catholic Church no longer directly influence his compositional process, both he and scholars who write about him note the spirituality of the content and tone of his works. According to Shenton, an analysis of Pärt's choral works up to 2015 (excluding those without words and those written for children's chorus) reveals that only four do not

⁷⁴ Pärt, “The Silence and Awe of Arvo Pärt,” (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/the-silence-and-awe-of-arvo-part/>).

utilize sacred or religious texts.⁷⁵ The tintinnabuli style itself has spiritual implications to Pärt, who describes the relationship between the M- and T-voices as symbolic of the “egoistic life of sin and suffering” and the “objective realm of forgiveness,” respectively.⁷⁶ Marguerite Bostonia describes tintinnabuli as “a new paradigm, seemingly inimitable, which is capable of depth, complexity, and large formal evolution without compromising simplicity and spirituality, in that place where ‘everything that is unimportant falls away.’”⁷⁷ While Pärt’s music was not written for liturgical use, it is heavily influenced by his faith and spirituality. The tintinnabuli style demonstrates both the synthesis and expression of his views about the divine through music.

In many ways, some subtle and some more obvious, the aesthetic of the choral tintinnabuli style aligns with the basic tenets of the *Motu Proprio*. Pärt drew his initial inspiration from the study of Gregorian chant and early polyphony, which led him to emphasize the intelligibility of the text and focus on reducing music into its essential parts. Brauneiss’s analysis of the tintinnabuli style focuses on the idea of musical archetypes, or recognizable patterns in music, such as a scale or triad. He states that “the aesthetic of the archetypal is, most of all, the aesthetic of the universal.”⁷⁸ Through the process of reduction Pärt achieves “a humble overcoming of the personal ego... to be born again in various contexts and relationships to fellow human beings and to God.”⁷⁹ Tintinnabuli is a process of reduction that focuses on the qualities which Pius X emphasizes in the *Motu Proprio*. This style of choral music sets primarily sacred texts and draws its inspiration from works which Pius X regarded as the highest and most beautiful forms of sacred music. While Pärt does not imitate chant or polyphony in the same way as did composers directly influenced by the *Motu Proprio*, nor does he

⁷⁵ Shenton, *Arvo Pärt’s Resonant Texts*, 93-94.

⁷⁶ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 96.

⁷⁷ Bostonia, “Bells as Inspiration,” 131.

⁷⁸ Brauneiss, “Basic Elements of the Tintinnabuli Style,” 52.

⁷⁹ Brauneiss, “Basic Elements of the Tintinnabuli Style,” 53.

follow Pius X's rules for instrumentation, his music connects the aesthetic of these styles with a modern audience.

In addition to the ways that tintinnabuli music aligns with the *Motu Proprio*, Pärt's discussion of his music recalls the themes of holiness, beauty, and universality. Below is a collection of quotations from Pärt ranging in date from before the creation of the tintinnabuli style to the tintinnabuli phase which Shenton identifies as 'compositional freedom.' I have highlighted in bold some statements that demonstrate how Pärt has refined his compositional goals and ideals over time.

I am not sure there could be progress in art. Progress as such is present in science... Art presents a more complex situation... Finding a solution is a long process and requires intense concentration; but **wisdom resides in reduction**... Art has to deal with eternal questions, not just sorting out the issues of today.

In any case, if we want to reach to the core of a musical work, no matter what kind, we cannot forgo the process of reduction. **In other words, we have to throw out our ballast—eras, styles forms, orchestration, harmony, polyphony—and so to reach to one voice, to its 'intonations.'** Only there are we eye to eye [with the question]: "Is it truth or falsehood?"⁸⁰

This quotation, from a 1968 interview on Estonian Radio, demonstrates Pärt's ideas about what is valuable in music. Here, he emphasizes the importance of reduction, of laying aside the notion of 'progress' in music and focusing on the core of the music itself, which resounds with Pius X's statements about sacred music. The following statement from the sleeve of Pärt's debut ECM recording (released in 1984) further emphasizes the idea of reduction as Pärt suggests that he has found 'unity' in a single note beautifully played.

Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers—in my life, my music, my work. In my darkest hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning. The complex and many-faceted only confuses me, and I must search for unity. What is it, this one thing, and how do I find my way to it? Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises – and everything that is unimportant falls away. Tintinnabulation is like this. Here I am alone with silence. **I have discovered that it**

⁸⁰ Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, 65.

is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me.⁸¹

In the following excerpt from a 1988 interview with Leo Normet, Pärt emphasizes the importance of silence to him and to his compositional process. He states that silence is a sacred thing from which his music stems, further emphasizing that composition is a spiritual process to Pärt.

Before one says anything, perhaps it is better to say nothing. My music has emerged only after I have been silent for quite some time, literally silent. For me, ‘silent’ means the ‘nothing’ from which God created the world. **Ideally, a silent pause is something sacred... If someone approaches silence with love, then this might give birth to music.** A composer must often wait a long time for his music. This kind of sublime anticipation is exactly the kind of pause that I value so greatly.⁸²

The statement below, taken from an interview with Jamie McCarthy in 1989, hints at Pärt’s goals in composition and in his reasoning behind the process of reduction. Pärt emphasizes that by reducing music into something that is “simple and clear,” he is leaving space for something greater than the music itself. Pärt states that when his music is performed, it becomes a bridge between him and others, and the music takes on a life and impact of its own.

There are definite rules everywhere—it has to be so. But my principle is that they must not be the most important part of the music. They must be simple—they fall away and are only a skeleton. Life arises from other things. When things are simple and clear, then they are also clean. **They are empty; there is room for everything.** It is more important than these principles of construction...

Everything that is readable with the eyes is still not everything. One never knows what lies behind those notes. That’s always how it is. Then suddenly an interpreter comes along, who plays something out of this empty space in such a way that you feel within yourself that this is really no longer your music. **In fact, it isn’t my music. The music is simply a bridge between us...**⁸³

In the following quotation, Pärt illustrates the process of tintinnabuli using the example of a microscope, emphasizing the idea of universality.

⁸¹ Bostonia, “Bells as Inspiration,” 128.

⁸² Englehardt, “Perspectives on Pärt,” 35.

⁸³ Pärt, “An Interview with Arvo Pärt,” 133.

In the compositional process **I always have to find this nucleus first from which the work will eventually emerge...** Everything depends on which nucleus, or which part of the nucleus, I choose (or am able to choose at a given time) and on the profundity of consequences. Imagine, for example, you look at a substance or an object through an electron microscope. A thousand-fold enlargement will obviously look different from a million-fold enlargement. Moving through the different stages of enlargement you can see incredible landscapes. Somewhere, though, there is a limit... The landscapes then will have disappeared. What you can see now is a cool geometry: very particular and very clear. Most importantly, however, this geometry will be similar for most substances or objects.⁸⁴

In his acceptance speech for the 2007 International Bridge Prize, Pärt expands upon the metaphor of the microscope to suggest that humanity has more in common with one another than is immediately apparent. Pärt also says that *tintinnabuli* has provided him with a space in which “a dialogue with God might occur,” stressing the idea that he sees music as a spiritual endeavor.

Back then, when what is today considered my music was just coming into being... I had to get to a state where I could find a musical language that I wanted to live with. **I was searching for a small island of sound, for a ‘place’ inside me where—let’s call it—a dialogue with God might occur.** To find this place was a vital task for me. I am sure that this kind of desire is a part of every human being, whether consciously or unconsciously...

Let us dream a little bit. Let us try to quasi-observe the human soul under [a microscope] and gradually increase the degree of enlargement... It will be an endless process of shortening that will lead us towards the essential. On this ‘trip inside,’ we will also leave behind all social, cultural, political, and religious contexts... **In this depth we are all so similar, that we could recognize ourselves in every other person.** And it could be that this level is the only one on which a truly functional bridge (of peace) could be imagined, where all our problems—if they still exist then—would be solvable.⁸⁵

The final quotation below is an excerpt from an interview with Thomas Huizenga in 2014. Here, Pärt revisits the idea of silence and discusses the difference between internal and external silence. He seems to suggest that his music is meant to promote the “silence of the soul,” once again emphasizing the spiritual significance of music to Pärt.

Silence for a composer is like a clean canvas for a painter or a clean white sheet of paper for a poet...

⁸⁴ Pärt, “Sources of Invention,” 19-20.

⁸⁵ Andrew Shenton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012), 200.

On the one hand, silence is like fertile soil, which, as it were, awaits our creative act, our seed. But on the other hand, silence must be approached with the feeling of awe.

And when we speak about silence, we must keep in mind that it has two different wings, so to speak—silence can be both that which is outside of us and that which is inside a person. **The silence of our soul, which isn't even affected by external distractions, is actually more crucial but more difficult to achieve.**⁸⁶

These quotations reveal the purpose of the tintinnabuli style through multiple lenses. Pärt seems to focus on the idea of reducing music to the “nucleus” of each work in order to find beauty. To him, music is holy in that it fosters the “silence of the soul” and allows for “dialogue with God.” Many of Pärt’s conversations about his music over the past fifty years suggest that the process of reduction allows for music to be more universal by leaving room for a diverse range of people to connect to his music. This is perhaps best summarized in the statement “when things are simple and clear... there is room for everything.” Pärt has undoubtedly come to his own conclusions about what constitutes true art in music, and these conclusions echo those stated by Pius X in 1903.

The contexts of tintinnabuli and the sacred music which Pius X sought to promote in the Catholic Church are by no means identical, of course. Pärt and Pius X approach music differently in their roles as composer and religious leader, and they belonged, moreover, to different branches of the Christian faith, one Orthodox and one Catholic. Pärt does not seek to write music strictly for liturgical use, and his music is not for an exclusively religious audience. He does not follow each of the rules outlined in the *Motu Proprio*, nor does he strive to. Pius X wrote the *Motu Proprio* in order to initiate reform in sacred music on a broad scale. He aspired to bring the Catholic Church closer to God and saw music as an important part of that goal, so he set about making conservative changes to liturgical music. Pärt, on the other hand, indicates that he did not create tintinnabuli in an effort to

⁸⁶ Pärt, “The Silence and Awe of Arvo Pärt,” (<https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/the-silence-and-awe-of-arvo-part/>).

start a large-scale musical reform. His wife Nora recalled the creation of tintinnabuli as follows: “I do not think that Arvo wanted to solve any problems of Western music... His strong interest in monody must be seen as a personal attempt to overcome his own avant-garde phase.”⁸⁷ Additionally, where Pius X sought universality to unify divided national styles in music, Pärt seeks universality in a broader sense, looking to find common ground between humanity by “[leaving] behind all social, cultural, political, and religious contexts.”⁸⁸

Despite the inherent differences between Pope Pius X and Arvo Pärt, then, the connections between the tintinnabuli style and the *Motu Proprio* are significant. Both came about as a response to trends in music at the time as a result of personal convictions about what constitutes ‘true art’ in music. Driven away from elaborate, heavily orchestrated music, and Pius X and Pärt sought music that held greater significance to them and looked to the past for inspiration. That inspiration came from Gregorian chant and early polyphony, in which both men found a musical aesthetic that they valued. These styles prompted them towards the process of reduction. Pius X promoted the use of fewer instruments, ornaments, and virtuosic performances in order to make sacred music more accessible to the congregation. Likewise, the majority of Pärt’s tintinnabuli music features reduced instrumentation, a cappella singing, and unembellished lines. Both Pius X and Pärt emphasized the importance of the intelligibility of the text and thought of music as a method through which to convey meaning.

In addition to their similar beliefs about the aesthetic qualities of music, Pärt and Pius X both seem to approach music in a spiritual sense, seeing it as a method through which humanity can connect with the divine. Pius X stated that “sacred music... participates in the general scope of the liturgy,

⁸⁷ Nora Pärt, “Sources of Invention,” 24.

⁸⁸ Shenton, *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt*, 200.

which is the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful.”⁸⁹ He believed that music was an invaluable method through which the congregation could grow closer to God. Similarly, Pärt believes that music is an important aspect of his spiritual life and his music has elicited responses from his audience due to its spiritual nature. Robert Sholl states that “the significant popularity of Pärt’s music may be attributed to its intimation that life with, or knowledge of, the divine is not only for the unspecified future, but is a pathway for the here and now.”⁹⁰ Not only is tintinnabuli a way for Pärt to experience and express his faith, it provides his audience with the sense of having participated in a spiritual experience as well.

Viewed through the lens of the *Motu Proprio*, the reasons for the widespread appeal of the tintinnabuli style—which many scholars have attributed to its aesthetic and spiritual qualities—come into greater focus. The values for music which Pius X outlines in the *Motu Proprio* are present in tintinnabuli, and Pärt has combined these traits in his music to great success. Where Pius X sought a large-scale musical reform, Pärt pursued reform in his individual musical style and created tintinnabuli, which adapts the prescriptions of the *Motu Proprio* to create works that reach a modern audience. Both Arvo Pärt and Pope Pius X made distinctive impacts in the musical communities of their respective times, led by the values of holiness, beauty, and universality in their pursuit of the sacred through music.

⁸⁹ Pope Pius X, “Tra le Sollecitudini,” 2.

⁹⁰ Robert Sholl, “Arvo Pärt and Spirituality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2012), 157.

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