

# THE SOURCE OF SIN OR «AN INSTRUMENT WHICH ELEVATES SOULS»? TOMÁS LUIS DE VICTORIA: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND SELF-RESTRAINT

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**Resumen:** (¿Fuente del pecado o instrumento que eleva las almas? Tomás Luis de Victoria: moderación y ética profesional) En este artículo se exploran los puntos de vista de Tomás Luis de Victoria sobre el arte musical, su papel en el desarrollo espiritual del humano, la responsabilidad moral del compositor, así como su propia decisión personal en su profesión que declaró en el prefacio a la colección de obras litúrgicas (*Cantica B. Virginis vulgo Magnificat*, 1581) publicado en Roma. Las creencias de Victoria se examinan en el contexto de la cultura del Renacimiento y se presta especial atención a sus correlaciones con las opiniones humanistas sobre la superación personal del hombre y el papel de las artes liberales en este proceso. También se tratará la influencia de las visiones éticas de Victoria en su práctica como compositor, a saber, su decisión de dedicar su talento exclusivamente a la iglesia. Además, el artículo aborda el método de Victoria de utilizar técnicas retóricas en su motete *Pueri hebraeorum* (1585) para profundizar el impacto intelectual y emocional de sus obras en los oyentes.

**Palabras clave:** *Tomás Luis de Victoria, polifonía renacentista, música religiosa española del siglo XVI, retórica musical, ética y arte.*

**Abstract:** This article explores Tomás Luis de Victoria's views on the art of music, its role in human spiritual development, the moral responsibility of a composer, as well as his own personal choice in the profession declared in the preface to the collection of liturgical works (*Cantica B. Virginis vulgo Magnificat*, 1581) published in Rome. Victoria's beliefs are discussed in the context of the Renaissance culture with particular attention given to their correlation with the humanistic opinions on man's self-improvement and the liberal arts' role in the process. Particular attention is given to the influence of Victoria's ethical position on his practice as a composer, namely, his decision to dedicate his talent to church genres exclusively. Additionally, the paper focuses on Victoria's method of using rhetorical techniques in his motet *Pueri hebraeorum* in order to enhance an intellectual and emotional impact of his works on listeners.

**Keywords:** *Tomás Luis de Victoria, Renaissance polyphony, Spanish religious music of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, musical rhetoric, ethics and art.*

Among many of the prefaces which Renaissance musicians wrote to the editions of their works, this one by which Tomás Luis de Victoria<sup>1</sup> introduced his collection of liturgical works printed in 1581 in Rome<sup>2</sup> is of special interest, due to its perfectly clear expression of the author's views on music, on its role in human life and on the attitude towards his personal moral mission and responsibility. Addressing it to Cardinal Michele Bonelli, who became the dedicatee of the publication, Victoria stated:

Entendemos que las razones por las que se suele elogiar a todas las artes, están todas ellas presentes en la música. Pues, si alguien buscara utilidad, nada es más útil que la música que penetrando con suavidad en los corazones a través del mensaje de los oídos, paraca servir de provecho no sólo al alma sino también al cuerpo. Pero si alguien buscara la antigüedad o el lustre, qué ocupación hay o más noble que este arte que tiene como cometido el alabar a Dios inmortal o más antigua que la que empezó a existir en aquellos felices espíritus antes de que los hombres existieran? Era sin duda justo que lo que era de gran utilidad y antigüedad para el humano linaje, esto mismo también fuera lo más honorable si se dedicara al Dios único.

Pero lo que sucede con muchas artes, que habiendo tenido un buen principio, se van a menudo desviando hacia un uso peor, esto mismo también sucedió con el modo de utilizar bien los sonidos de las cuerdas, y de los cantos vocales.

Pues algunos hombres impíos e imbuidos de malas costumbres usan la música más como un medio para meterse de lleno en el mundo y en sus mundanales placeres que como un instrumento que los eleve, llenos de gozo, a la contemplación de Dios y de cosas divinas.

Por mi parte, ya que por formación o por nacimiento me tocó en suerte poner algún cuidado y esmero en estos estudios, trabajo en este arte tan sólo para mayor beneficio de Dios, de manera que la modulación de las voces se aplique al único fin para

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<sup>1</sup> Tomás Luis de Victoria (born c. Ávila, Spain 1548 – died Aug. 27, 1611 Madrid) is one of the most prominent composers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He had spent a significant period (from 1565 to 1585) in Rome. Victoria's output includes polyphonic masses, motets, hymns, Magnificats, psalms and other sacred music.

<sup>2</sup> Thomae Ludovici a Victoria Abulensis, *Cantica B. Virginis vulgo Magnificat quatuor vocibus. Una cum quatuor antiphonis beatae Virginis per annum: quae quidem, partim quinis, partim octonis vocibus concinuntur.* Roma, Ex typographia D. Basae / Apud Franciscum Zanettum MDLXXXI, in [http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones\\_antiguas.html#1581b](http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones_antiguas.html#1581b) [21.03.2018].

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al que en un principio se inventó, esto es, a alabar a Dios Optimo y Máximo<sup>3</sup>.

There is a reason to regard this foreword as the declaration of Victoria's professional creed which he, apparently, adhered to during all his creative life, since the composer repeated similar ideas in other prefaces to his publications, including *The Second Book of the Masses* (1583)<sup>4</sup>, *The Motets* (1583)<sup>5</sup> and *The Masses* (1592)<sup>6</sup>. The aim of this article is to consider Victoria's attitude towards the art of music, its role in human's spiritual development, the moral responsibility of the composer, as well as Victoria's own personal choice in the profession in the context of Renaissance thought and, particularly, humanistic views on the individual's self-improvement and the Liberal arts' role in the process. Special attention is given to the influence of Victoria's ethical position on his practice as a creator of sacred music as well as to his method of using rhetorical techniques in order to enhance an intellectual and emotional impact of his works on listeners.

As the cited preface shows, Music, according to Victoria's opinion, is a noble art of a divine origin and, therefore, it should serve for the glory of God and for elevating human's soul<sup>7</sup>, even though, as Victoria complains, some wicked people may use the art for the sake of mundane pleasures, thereby committing a sacrilege. As far as Victoria himself was concerned, he never betrayed his beliefs and followed his moral concept throughout all his creative life. For this purpose, he severely limited the range of his

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<sup>3</sup> This fragment was taken from the translation made by Luis González Platón. For the original Latin version and full translation see Sabe Andreu, 2008, pp. 211-213.

<sup>4</sup> *Missarum Libri duo quae partim quaternis, partim quinis, partim senis concinuntur vocibus.* Roma, Ex typographia D. Basae / Apud Alexandrum Gardanum, MDLXXXIII, in [http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones\\_antiguas.html#1583a](http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones_antiguas.html#1583a) [21.03.2018]. For the preface see *ibid.*, pp. 214-217.

<sup>5</sup> *Motecta festorum totius anni cum communi sanctorum, quae partim senis, partim quinis, partim quaternis, alia octonis vocibus concinuntur.* Roma, Ex typographia D. Basae / Apud. Alexandrum Gardanum, MDLXXXIII, in [http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones\\_antiguas.html#1583b](http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones_antiguas.html#1583b) [21.03.2018]. For the preface see *ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>6</sup> *Missae quattuor, quinque, sex et octo vocibus concinendae, una cum antiphonis Asperges et Vidi aquam totius anni. Liber secundus, Romae, Ex typographia Ascanii Donangeli / Apud Fraciscum Coattinum, MDXCII* in [http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones\\_antiguas.html#1592](http://www.uma.es/victoria/ediciones_antiguas.html#1592) [21.03.2018]. For the preface see *ibid.*, pp. 224-226.

<sup>7</sup> Victoria was not alone in such high evaluation of music. For instance, theorist Josepho Zarlino, the composer's contemporary, shared this view and deemed in his treatise *Le istituzioni harmoniche* (1558) that music dominates the Liberal Arts since it embraces all disciplines: Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Poetry, and it is also related to Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Philosophy, Medicine, and Theology. See Zarlino, 1966.

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professional interests. How strict was the censorship which Victoria applied to himself is evidenced first, by the fact that during his career as a composer he wrote religious music only, which was highly uncommon for a Renaissance composer; and secondly, by his careful avoidance of secular pieces as models for his Masses<sup>8</sup> despite the fact that it was the widespread practice among his contemporaries. To appreciate Victoria's views, it is enough to compare them with the attitudes of his famous colleagues, such as Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina and Orlando di Lasso. The former, for instance, devoted his talents to liturgical and secular works with equal pleasure<sup>9</sup>, and, moreover, created a number of masses based on madrigals—both his own and by other composers<sup>10</sup>. Lasso, for his part, not only addressed a wide variety of secular genres, but sometimes allowed himself to handle texts from the Holy Scriptures in a free manner. A good example is the *hocket*<sup>11</sup> technique motet on the text of the Psalm 137 *Super flumina Babylonis* (see measures 31-32; 42-46)<sup>12</sup> to create a comic effect. Moreover, if this piece can be classified as a musical joke, sometimes Lasso allowed himself to create satirical works on religious topics<sup>13</sup>. In view of the fact that, during the Renaissance, the message of a musical piece was defined by its text content, it may be assumed that Victoria did not approve of texts of frivolous or dubious character.

However, despite Victoria's attitude towards music, which appears to stand out sharply against the general background<sup>14</sup>, the composer's views on music's role in ennobling human soul grew out of the Renaissance culture. It is easy to see, if one recalls the factors which affected the concept

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<sup>8</sup> Here, it should be noticed that the only exception was the *Pro Victoria Mass* (1600), which had been written on the chanson of Clement Jeanecken, but this is a case when the exception only proves the rule, because there was a very special idea on that occasion that determined the composer's choice.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, among Palestrina's *œuvres* there are approximately 150 secular madrigals.

<sup>10</sup> It is known at the moment that nine of Palestrina's masses were created on the basis of a "madrigal" source. For a more detailed study of this part of Palestrina's output, see Gordon, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Polyphonic compositional technique (its name originated from "hoquetus" or "hochetus" – a Romanized form of French word "hoquet" which means "hiccup") used mostly in the XII–XIV centuries characterized by alternating between parts, single notes or groups of notes. By using this technique in the mentioned motet, Lasso, aims to create a comic effect by syllables which sound like stuttering.

<sup>12</sup> The score of the motet can be seen here: <https://primanota.ru/orlamdo-di-lasso/super-flumina-babylonis-a5-sheet.htm> [21.01.2018].

<sup>13</sup> For an example thereof, see Lowinsky, 1992, p. 354.

<sup>14</sup> Among Renaissance musicians, there is Cristobal de Morales, another Spanish master of sacred polyphony, who wrote only a few secular works, according to recent data.

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of music art the time, as well as the sources of the concept in the past, namely in the Classical era. It is known that according to the ancient authors, it is the laws of the harmony that rule over all levels of the universe, namely heaven, earth, and the underworld. Therefore, music can soothe a savage beast, make stones move, bring people back from the dead. Moreover, they believed that, besides its metaphysical power, music may affect strongly the human soul both beneficially and destructively<sup>15</sup>. Paraphrasing the Classical conception of musical influence on man, St. Augustine, whose impact on the Renaissance thought was enormous, wrote that:

as I perceive that our minds are more devotedly and earnestly elevate into a flame of piety by the holy words themselves when they are thus sung, than they are not; and that all affections of our spirit, by their own diversity, have their appropriate measures in the voice and singing, wherewith by I know not what secret relationship they are stimulated (*Confessions* X, XXXIII, 49)<sup>16</sup>.

St. Augustine also acknowledged that music had been instrumental in his mystical experience of God, although his approval of this art was not unconditional, due to the reason that if music can lead a soul to God, it can also lead one astray because of its seductive power which may distract attention from the meanings of the sacred texts. Indeed, though in St. Augustine's era the role of musical art in man's moral perfection and piety repeatedly became the subject of careful consideration, it is during the Renaissance, marked by violent religious conflicts and dramatic changes of paradigm that the issue acquired a particular relevance. And it seems important to note that in spite of the caution that music, especially the church polyphony, was sometimes viewed with, prominent Reform ideologists such as Luther, Calvin, as well as their implacable opponents —the Counter-Reformation leaders—, expressed astonishing consensus in recognizing the great utility of Music as a mean for attracting the flock<sup>17</sup>.

Another factor that contributed to understanding Victoria's treatment of music as an instrument effective in elevating the soul was the Renaissance idea of humans as creators of their own personality and destiny. According

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<sup>15</sup> Among the most famous Classical authorities who wrote on the subject rank Plato and Boethius.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf101.vi.X.XXXIII.html> [20.08.2018].

<sup>17</sup> Among the relevant scholars considering discussions on sacred music at the time, the following should be mentioned: Lowinsky, 1992; O'Regan, 2013; Monson, 2006; Bertoglio, 2017.

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to the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola<sup>18</sup>, God endowed man with free will, which gives him the capacity for self-transformation. The individual who decided to put the divine gift into practice became a master able to re-create themselves with special tools. As it is known, Pico della Mirandola himself believed that it was Philosophy that could serve as such an instrument, while Erasmus of Rotterdam considered thus the Liberal Arts. Tomás Luis de Victoria, for his part, claimed that man was able to renounce passions and worldly temptations in order to ascend to the divine curia with the help of Music.

Thus, according to the composer, music is an effective way whereby the truth of the Christian doctrine can be brought to the listeners, due to its capacity to influence people's feelings and minds. To this effect, it should be pointed out that there is another important aspect of Victoria's views on the method to increase music's impact on humans, which connected him with the Renaissance thought. As is known, humanists considered Rhetoric as the formative core of the Renaissance culture<sup>19</sup>. In their opinion, liberal arts were to be re-endowed with eloquence through the imitation of the classical models and in that form they would become a basis of general education. Humanists believed that the primary goal of upbringing is not so much to communicate a certain truth, but, above all, to inspire a person to follow it, because, according to Petrarch "It is better to desire good than to know the truth"<sup>20</sup>. They thought that only the Masters of Rhetoric, similar to the greatest Roman ones like Cicero, Seneca and Horace, could accomplish this task, as Petrarch puts it:

...they stamp and drive the deepest in the heart of the sharpest and most ardent sting of speech, by which the lazy are startled, the ailing are the kindled, and the sleepy aroused, the sick stick to the ground lifted up to the highest thoughts and to the honest desire<sup>21</sup>.

This position had opened a wide way for Rhetoric into diverse areas of «liberal» and «applied» arts. Among the most important consequences of this process in the musical sphere were a number of tendencies that indicated the merger of Music with Rhetoric, which in turn contributed to strengthening the positions of some theoreticians and musicians (including

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<sup>18</sup> Pico della Mirandola, [1486]2012.

<sup>19</sup> Gray, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Petrarch, [1368]1948, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> Petrarch, [1368]1948, p. 105.

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G. Zarlino, N. Vicentino, A. Willaert, J. Bermudo and, of course, T. L. de Victoria) who believed that in the vocal work primacy should belong to the word while the musical matter had to serve to the embodiment of the semantic and figurative content of text.

Although this idea attracted many of Victoria's colleagues<sup>22</sup>, and there was a range of treatises which generalized the basic principles of application of rethorical techniques in music at the time —including *Scintille di musica* (1533) by Lanfranco, *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (1555) by Vicentino, *Le Institutioni harmoniche* (1558) by Zarlino, *De Musica Verballi Libri Duo* by Stokerus or *The Musical Poetics* (1606) by J. Burmeister)—, Victoria's works provide an illustrative example of taking the idea into practice. The composer not only subordinated the musical matter to the word, but, moreover, it seems to be correct to assume that he also consciously strived to transform music into a special type of speech. To achieve this aim, he used in his compositions a range of means developed by Rhetoric, in order to transmute his works into an ardent sermon, while acting himself as an orator whose opus should not only convey the matters of faith, but, above all, affect feelings. Technically, this meant, firstly, the need to obtain a clear, grammatically correct, expressive articulation of the Latin text; and secondly, the gain of the use of special techniques which are known today as rhetorical *decoration* or *rhetorical figures*<sup>23</sup>.

The analysis of Victoria's works has shown that in the majority of cases he sought to make the texts sound perfectly clear. In particular, it was found that “it is the first of the editions of his works that demonstrate the composer's desire to write with the great concern about clear articulation of texts”<sup>24</sup>. In the cases when Victoria departed from the recommendations given by certain theoreticians, he did it in order to achieve some special effects. As an illustration, there is the composer's using one of the Stoquerus' discretionary rules (namely the fourth) in the motet *Pueri hebraeorum*, published in his *Officium Hebdomadae Sanctae* (1585) collection<sup>25</sup>. So, this discretionary rule reads:

It is necessary to avoid repetition of the text – more words than phrases<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> The use of Rhetorical technics in musical compositions became a widespread practice in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. See McCreless, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Recently, some works by Tomás Luis de Victoria were analyzed from the point of view of using rhetorical figures. See Giardina, 2009; Suárez García, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Riznychenko, 2017, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Victoria, 1585. For a more detailed examination of the issue, see Riznychenko, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Stoquerus, [1570]1988, p. 239.

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Considering this recommendation in Chapter XXX of his treatise, Stoquerus compared the repetition of the same syllables or words in a musical work with the speech of a stutterer or chatterbox that causes only irritation or fatigue. On the other hand, the theoretician allows repetition of meaningful semantic phrases with a view to deepen impact on the listener, just as the speaker uses speech figures for this<sup>27</sup>.

The following table shows the composer's method of using Stoquerus' Fourth discretionary rule along with a mode of application of rhetorical figures mentioned in J. Burmeister's treatise *Musica Poetica*<sup>28</sup> in the said motet.

(Table 1. Rhetorical figures<sup>29</sup> in the motet *Pueri hebraeorum*)

Part	Measures	Текст	Harmonic Figures <sup>30</sup>	Melodic Figures <sup>31</sup> / Parts
<b>Exordium</b>	1-5	Pueri hebraeorum	Fuga realis	
	4-11	Ibid.	Fuga realis Syncopa	Palilogia (C)
	8-17	Ibid.	Fuga realis Syncopa	Palilogia (C) Climax (B), Hyperbola (B)
<b>Medium</b>	17-20	Vestimenta Prosternebant	Noema	Hypotyposis (C, A, T, B)
	20-22	in via	Noema	Hypobola (T)
	22-25	Ibid.	Mimesis	
	24-31	Et clamabant Dicentes	Fuga realis	Exclamatio (C, A, B) Climax (T), Hyperbola (B)
	29-34	Ibid.	Fuga realis Syncopa Pathopoeia	Exclamatio (C, T, B) Climax (C, B)
	34-35	Osanna	Noema	
	35-38	Osanna filio David	Mimesis	

<sup>27</sup> “Interdum tamen sententiae graviores, ut animis magis imprimantur, repiti solent, sicut et figurate ab oratoribus repetitions fieri solent; sed hoc, ut si rato fiat, virtuti ascribe potest, ita si frequenter et sine delectu fiat, in vitium incidit” (Stoquerus, [1570]1988, pp. 252-253).

<sup>28</sup> Burmeister, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> The names of the rhetorical figures are given according to the Burmeister's treatise.

<sup>30</sup> It refers to figures which need a polyphonic texture.

<sup>31</sup> It refers to figures which can be applied within a single voice texture.

<b>Finis</b>	38-43	Benedictus Qui venit	Noema	
	41-46	In nomine Domini	Apocope	Palilogia (T, B) Hyperbole (T)
	46-51	Benedictus Qui venit	Noema	Parrhesia (A) Hyperbole (T)
	51-52	in nomine	Noema	
	52-55	in nomine Domini	Mimesis	Climax (C, A, T, B) Hyperbole (T)
	55-59	Ibid.	Anadiplosis	Palilogia (A, B) Climax (T) Hyperbole (T)

As the table shows, Victoria quite often utilized repetition of phrases as well as single words. However, he did it in order to strengthen the text's impact on listeners just as with rhetorical figures. Moreover, Victoria updates each subsequent repetition of the text segment with the range of the rhetorical figures increasing, simultaneously, their number. Thus occurs, for example, in measures 1-17: if the exposure of the initial segment of the first text line *Pueri hebraeorum* accompanies only *Fuga realis*, for the second time it is repeated with *Syncopa* and *Palilogia*, and for the third time the composer also added a *Climax* and a *Hyperbole*. Sometimes, instead of the quantitative principle of developing shown in the example, Victoria utilized a qualitative method, choosing figures that represent the idea of a rhetorical repetition between themselves: see measures 20-25, where after a *Noema*, a *Mimesis* follows. On the other hand, the composer used textual repetitions and means of the rhetorical *decoratio* as a method of creating musical forms which were based on the principle of rhetorical tripartite, namely, *exordium – medium – finis*. In the motet *Pueri hebraeorum* the functional feature of the final section is created by adding to the already used figure of *Apocope* (measures 41-46 and at the very end (measures 55-59) – the *Anadiplosis*. And, it should be noticed, the meanings of the figures correspond to the tasks of the finale: to present the shortened repetition of the previous materials.

The obtained results indicate that Tomás Luis de Victoria widely applied the techniques of Musical Rhetoric, in order to achieve a clear text comprehension in the case of a polyphonic texture. Taken together, these techniques served to increase the impact of devotional texts on the listeners and, thereby, to implement the composer's aspirations to create music able to elevate the human spirit. As a result, a special musical style emerged which

became a consequent manifestation of Victoria's both ethical and professional creed.

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