

Editor's Notes For "Marcha Real" ("Tantum Ergo")

There are times when Eslava's music betrays a subtle streak of rebellion against the religious strictures of 19th century Spain, which was certainly noticed by the Catholic authorities to the point where despite its popularity at the time, most of his music was later actively suppressed. This piece seems to me to be an excellent example of my theory.

"Tantum ergo" is the incipit (first words) of the last two verses of Pange lingua, a Medieval Latin hymn written by St Thomas Aquinas c. 1264. The singing of the Tantum ergo occurs during veneration and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the Catholic Church and other denominations that have this devotion. It is usually sung, though solemn recitation is sometimes done. One of the lines of this ancient and sacred song translates to, "Let the old practice give way to the new rite."

So here Eslava has taken the "Tantum Ergo" and set it to a rollicking 3:4 time version of the Spanish national anthem ("Marcha Real"). This certainly would seem to be in keeping with the literal lyrics, but I suspect Eslava's religious superiors were rather less than amused.

I originally transcribed this score from Eslava's (probably) original manuscript, obtained from the Biblioteca Nacional de España. However, I discovered that I also had a very similar printed version obtained from Eresbil that was published posthumously. The main differences are that the published piece includes an alto part absent from the handwritten original (it mostly mirrors soprano and tenor parts), only organ accompaniment (essentially identical to the handwritten keyboard), and the lyrics at the end of the second verse for tenors have been changed to "Amens" matching the other singing parts. Also, the various musical errors that I had corrected in my transcription of the handwritten version were corrected the same way in the published version, which gives me some confidence that I am doing the right thing by routinely correcting such errors.

In this version, I have done my best to combine the two versions and highlight the differences at the same time.

LATIN LYRICS

Tantum ergo Sacramentum
Veneremur cernui:
Et antiquum documentum
Novo cedat ritui:
Præstet fides supplementum
Sensuum defectui.

Genitori, Genitoque
Laus et iubilatio,
Salus, honor, virtus quoque
Sit et benedictio:
Procedenti ab utroque

Compar sit laudatio.
Amen.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Therefore so great a Sacrament
Let us venerate with heads bowed
And let the old practice
Give way to the new rite;
Let faith provide a supplement
For the failure of the senses.

To the Begetter and the Begotten
Be praise and jubilation,
Hail, honour, virtue also,
And blessing too:
To the One proceeding from Both
Let there be equal praise.
Amen.