

Editor's Notes for ¡Oh, Admirable Sacramento!

This short manuscript composition by Eslava is preceded by the indication: “*Reserva completa O! Admirable Sacramento Alavado á solo de Tiple ó Tenor con acomp^{to}. de piano ú órgano. Compuesto para los niños de coro de la Real Capilla de S.M. P. M.H.E.*” (sic) (transl. “Complete reserve Oh, Admirable Sacrament Praised, for soprano or tenor solo with piano or organ accompaniment. Composed for the boy choir of Her Majesty’s Royal Chapel (by) M.H.E. [Miguel Hilarión Eslava].” This music—a brief motet, would thus appear to be intended to accompany the ritual setting aside and adoration of the reserved Blessed Sacrament after Communion in a Roman Catholic Mass, and in certain other liturgical practices associated with the Eucharist (for example as an *alabado*, or song of praise sung during some of the ceremonies around the Feast of Corpus Christi). The reference to Eslava as Master of the Royal Chapel means that this work was composed after 1844.

During the Catholic liturgy of consecration, the elements of bread and wine are considered to have been changed into the veritable Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, a process called “transubstantiation”. A portion of the consecrated hosts is set aside and reserved after the reception of Communion and is referred to as the “Reserved Sacrament”. The Reserved Sacrament is usually stored in a “tabernacle” (“sagrario” in Spanish), a small, ornate locked cabinet that is usually located on, above, or near the high altar.

The reasons for the reservation of the Sacrament vary by tradition. Initially, its main purpose was to allow the ill, the homebound, or dying to receive Holy Communion. Over the ages, it has been also used for devotional and other purposes. For instance, on Maundy (Holy) Thursday, the sacrament is reserved for the Communion Rite on Good Friday, since the Eucharistic Prayer and consecration are omitted in the Good Friday service. Reservation of the Sacrament is also used in the Catholic tradition to allow the private or public exposition and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

The precise origin of the words in this composition is unknown. They appear in a number of 17th century Spanish and colonial Baroque-era compositions, including a motet by Francisco López Capillas (1614-1674), a Mexican-born composer and organist and Master of the Chapel of the metropolitan Cathedral of Mexico City.

The source document for this piece, provided by Eresbil, consisted of two versions of the piano or organ accompaniment, and a separate *particella* for the solo voice. Neither of the accompaniment versions fully matched the solo part, so I ended up making some minor adjustments in both the solo and the accompaniment to render a viable performance piece. Since the work is so short and fairly simple, I decided to add in an English translation for the lyrics, so the piece can be performed and understood by a wider audience.

Lyrics and Translation

<p>Oh, admirable Sacramento, de la gloria dulce prenda, tu nombre sea alabado en los cielos y en la tierra. Amén.</p> <p>Y la pura Concepción, María, de gracia llena, sin pecado original, por siempre alabada sea. Amén.</p>	<p>O admirable Sacrament, sweet promise of glory, praised be your name in heaven and on earth. Amen.</p> <p>And the immaculate Conception, Mary, full of grace, devoid of original sin, be forever praised. Amen.</p>
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