

# Mass Appeal: A Study of Music and Theology

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Giovanni Pierluigi  
de Palestrina

Martin Luther



<http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Luther,+Martin>

Martin Luther was born in 1483. He became a priest in 1505. After his ordination, Luther was overwhelmed by the distance that he perceived between the average layperson and God. Luther's disillusionment with the established Church eventually led him to seek mass reform. The movement that resulted from Luther's beliefs was termed "the Reformation," and Luther's religious convictions quickly transformed the way he viewed corporate worship.

Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina was born in 1524 near Rome. Palestrina's life was characterized by service to the Catholic Church. He sang in the choirs of many large churches in Rome as a boy, he was employed by the Church for the majority of his adult life, and he is remembered today exclusively for his sacred music. Palestrina is recognized today as the epitome of music of the Church during the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church's response to Luther's Reformation.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni\\_Pierluigi\\_da\\_Palestrina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Pierluigi_da_Palestrina)

## Perception of the Mass

One of the pillars of Martin Luther's theology was his idea of the universal priesthood, which states that every believer has been made a priest in the service of God, and, as such, has full right to approach the throne of God individually, instead of through an ordained priest. This new perspective on man's relationship with God significantly impacted Luther's understanding of the Mass. Luther's reform of the Mass included restructuring its traditional form so that it focused exclusively on facilitating the laity's worship of God by dedicating large sections of the Mass to music sung by the entire assembly. Luther then sought congregational involvement by putting the text of the Mass in the vernacular so that the service was more accessible to the common man. Luther also encouraged the composition of chorales that reflected the theology of early Protestants. He then used these new melodies in his Masses, where he put them in the highest voice so they could clearly be heard by the congregation.

One of the major differences between Martin Luther and Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina was the underlying ideology to which they attempted to connect their audience through their music. While Luther endeavored to expose the congregation to his new theology through his music, Palestrina desired to enhance the average parishioner's worship experience by connecting them to the musical heritage of the Catholic Church. Palestrina achieved this primarily by incorporating elements of Gregorian chant into much of the music that he created, in order to connect the congregation to the significance and richness of the liturgy. His deep love for the liturgy also led him to set his text very sensitively so that it could be easily understood. Both Luther and Palestrina sought to include the congregation in the service by clarifying the text that was sung, but Palestrina achieved coherent text declamation by utilizing much less polyphony in his Masses than was standard at that time, instead favoring homophonic passages and clear textures.

My research into the theology and music of Martin Luther and Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina culminated in the composition of a work for full choir in the style of Palestrina. In this piece I utilized techniques such as careful text declamation, incorporation of Gregorian chant melody, and employment of homophonic passages that were common in the masses of Palestrina in order to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of his music.