

APPENDIX

The Oratorian Movement and the Expansion of Christian Humanist Education

by Christina Nelson Huth

The Oratorian movement, dating back to the late Fifteenth century, was a reform current centered within the Catholic Church, which sought to rejuvenate the clergy at all levels, and to uplift the populations of Europe through the establishment of educational institutions, based on the Classical curriculum, and available to rich and poor laymen alike. Virtually all of the successful nation-building and cultural developments of modern European history can be traced, at least in part, to the success of the Oratorian teaching orders.

The philosophical roots of the Oratorian movement were explicitly Augustinian, as were those of the intellectual giants of the Brotherhood of the Common Life, the Church reformers Thomas à Kempis and Nicolaus of Cusa. Intellectual and spiritual development, for cleric and layman alike, were based on the principles of humility and charity: humility in the individual's growing desire to die to himself so as to be reborn in doing the will of God, and charity, that is recognizing and ministering to the crucified Christ in the poor, sick, and suffering of this world.

Founders of the Oratory:

St. Catherine of Genoa and St. Philip Neri

Caterinetta Fieschi Adorna (1447-1510), beatified as Saint Catherine of Genoa, is acknowledged as the founder of the Oratorians. She was born into a powerful Guelph family of this oligarchic city state in 1447. After the death of her father, her brother refused her request to enter the Augustinian convent Santa Maria Delle Grazie, and forced her into a political marriage to Giuliano Adorno. After 10 years of marriage, she was called into lay service in 1473 by a vision of Christ carrying the cross. Shortly thereafter, husband and wife began working side by side among the sick and poor of Genoa, at Pammatone Hospital, where she served as director from 1490-1496.

In early spring of 1493, the bubonic plague struck Genoa, and four-fifths of those who remained in the city died. Catherine built an open-air hospital in sailcloth tents in the backyard of Pammatone. During this crisis,

she met Ettore Vernazza, a wealthy businessman who became her spiritual son and invested his entire fortune in caring for Genoa's sick and poor, founding several institutions for the care of the destitute in various parts of Italy. In 1497, he founded the Oratory of Divine Love, a group of laymen and clerics dedicated to the reform of the Church through the spiritual reform of the individual and the care of the poor.

Catherine was steeped in writings of Augustine from her youth; her closest friends were Augustinian religious; she was close spiritual friends with her cousin, Sister Tommasa Fiesca, an Augustinian nun, who had written a devotional treatise on Dionysus the Areopagite, the Neoplatonic philosopher of the Fifth or Sixth century A.D.

Catherine became known in her lifetime for her *Spiritual Dialogue, or the Dialogue Spoken by the Soul, the Body, Self-Love, the Spirit, Natural Man, and the Lord God*, which bears a pleasant similarity to Petrarch's engaging dialogue with St. Augustine, which the Fourteenth-century poet titled *The Soul's Conflict with Passion*. It is most likely that Catherine's *Dialogue Spoken by the Body*, or one of the two other Platonic-style dialogues written by Catherine, were read by the Florentine Philip Neri as a youth, whose organizing efforts were to result in the spread of Oratorian movement internationally.

St. Philip Neri, known during his lifetime as the "Christian Socrates," was born and educated in Florence, studying with the monks at the convent of San Marco, a center of Renaissance science, art, and book-making, where the religious frescos of Fra Angelico still adorn the walls. Leaving home at age fifteen, Neri arrived in Rome as a "hermit" (begging pilgrim) in 1533. Except for a brief period of tutoring and study between 1534 and 1537, he was to remain in Rome, serving the poor and organizing young people into the Oratorian movement for more than sixty years.

Philip's "Congregation of the Oratory" movement took its name from the word for a small chapel, or private place for worship—referring to the meeting room constructed by Philip over the aisle of the church of San Girolamo in Rome in 1558. It was from this base of oper-

ations that Philip undertook an outreach to the young people of Rome, of all social classes.

Philip's attraction for the youth of the city was infectious. Hundreds flocked to the Oratory's meetings, and to his private rooms for spiritual counseling before and after the Oratory's formal activities. In spite of Philip's refusal to send out associates to other areas, by the 1570's Italy was covered with Oratories that imitated the one in Rome: a weekday afternoon Oratory with four sermons and music, and a Sunday afternoon Oratory with a larger crowd, an outing, sermons by children, musical interludes, and visits to the hospitals, churches, and prisons.

Philip's biographers describe the activities of the larger circle around Oratory: "On Sundays and feast days, the sermons at the Oratory lasted until the hour of vespers. These, which were sung in the church of San Girolamo, were attended by the company, after which they went out for a walk. . . . We can see them setting out through the streets, led by the Father, freely gesticulating, and always odd. Each is astonished at the companion he is rubbing shoulders with, velvet doublet and the jerkin of the artisan; some prelate who is intrigued, or has nothing better to do, joins the party. A Cardinal, whose retinue they pass, salutes them courteously.

"Their objective varied a great deal: the Campagna, the Janiculum, the Baths of Diocletian [S]itting on the grass in the open or sheltered from the heat within some great building . . . they held a kind of 'gala Oratory,' devoted to literary and musical enjoyment. Some of the musicians in the company, professionals from the Papal chapels and the basilicas, performed beautiful motets, and one of the party, decided on beforehand, very often a child whom Philip had coached, recited a sermon full of literary niceties and flowery phrases. It sometimes happened that on the way they went into a hospital to cheer the sick."

Afternoon meetings, held every weekday, included prayer, discourses, and music. Principal texts were Colombini and St. Catherine's favorite, Jacopone da Todi, who, similar to Dante, used poetry to make crude dialects into literate languages. At night, the inner circle returned to the Oratory for prayers, and also visits to the hospitals, where they cleaned, made beds, and comforted the sick. Philip's young men did all the particularly dangerous and repulsive hospital work for which it was very difficult to hire workers.

Music at the Oratory

Music flourished at the Oratory: the composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina was a regular visitor. Giovanni Animuccia joined the Oratory in 1556, the same year he

succeeded Palestrina as choirmaster of St. Peter's Cathedral. He brought many colleagues with him, writes Ponelle, "from that time onwards, every day at the Oratory, without a single exception, there were to be found a number of singers to bring the meetings to an end with some polyphonic motet." Animuccia directed and composed.

Philip Anerio, another talented musician associated with the Vatican, also wrote, directed, and sang in Oratory meetings. Anerio was a close associate of Palestrina in the Confraternity of Music (Confraternita dei Musici), which later became the Academy of St. Cecilia. Both composers wrote spiritual madrigals for these academies.

Palestrina was embroiled in one of history's most important debates about music, which took place at the Council of Trent in 1563. Palestrina fought for the use of polyphonic music in the Church, by composing his *Missa Papae Marcelli*, to demonstrate to the assembled churchmen that the use of musical polyphony did not render biblical or religious texts incomprehensible, but actually could add to their clarity. The performance of this mass at the council convinced the Pope to open his mind to the use of polyphony.

Less well-known is the fact that Palestrina's organizing around music was part of a larger conspiracy, steered by Neri's associate, the Oratorian leader Charles Borromeo, to institutionalize the use of musical counterpoint in the Church. Borromeo, a Franciscan, was Secretary of State for the Vatican during the XXIIInd session of the Council of Trent; he was also in charge of the council's music commission. He based his organizing efforts on the work of the most important musical theorist of the period, Gioseffo Zarlino, also a Franciscan. In a 1558 treatise titled *Institutioni Armoniche*, Zarlino presented mathematical, historical, and theological proofs that counterpoint and the well-tempered musical system conform to natural law and the geometry of the universe, and refuted Aristotle's Pythagorean derivation of the musical scale.

Zarlino provided Borromeo with the theoretical evidence and Palestrina provided the empirical proof. In January 1565, Cardinal Borromeo and Vitellozzo Vitelli conducted a crucial experiment for Pope Pius IV—the performance of three masses by Palestrina by an eight-voice chorus. The result was so positive that Pius IV abandoned plans to organize against the use of contrapuntal music in the liturgy.

Philip's organizing had a marked effect on the internal life of the Catholic Church. The Oratory had so many requests for seminarians from the religious orders that they could not keep up. Soon, Philip's friends and

students were rising within the hierarchy of the Church. Among the late-sixteenth century cardinals who were followers or converts of Neri were Francesco Maria Tarugi, the nephew of Pope Julius II and archbishop of Avignon; Cardinal Marco Altieri; Ottavio Paravicini; Cesare Baronius, the author of an official multi-volume Church history; Charles Borromeo, archbishop of Milan; and Pierdonato, Cardinal of Cesi.

Cardinal Bérulle and the Nation of France

At or about the time of Philip Neri's 1595 death in Rome at the age of eighty, the Congregation of the Oratory hosted the visit to Italy of a young priest, Pierre de Bérulle, whose founding of the Oratorian movement in France was to aid that nation's emergence as a modern industrial power.

Bérulle, born in 1575, was educated by the Jesuits at the Sorbonne, and ordained in 1599. In 1602, he completed the Ignatian exercises, but decided against entering the Jesuit order; one biographer says he rebelled against "abstract forms of mysticism that ignore Jesus's humanity." Instead, he immersed himself in the study of St. Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, and his Oratorian predecessor, St. Catherine of Genoa.

By that time, Bérulle had entered the service of France's ecumenical King Henry IV, a Protestant who had returned to the Roman Catholic Church in 1593. Bérulle rose rapidly at court, and served as the honorary almoner of the king. But Bérulle's main work was the reform of France's religious communities, and a general effort to reform education in France, along the lines of a plan developed by a royal commission for Henry IV, so much so that he turned down offer to become tutor to the dauphin, the future King Louis XIII. To this end, he founded the Congregation of the Oratory of Our Lord Jesus Christ, modeled on Neri's Oratory, in 1605. By 1631, the Oratory had seventy-one houses producing seminarians. Bérulle also founded the first Oratorian school at Dieppe in 1616; there were seventeen colleges of the Oratory in France by 1623, and twenty-three in 1645. Bérulle died in 1629, two years after being named to the College of Cardinals.

Educational method was a point of bitter contention between the Jesuits and the followers of Bérulle, who were trying to reach the masses by a movement within the priesthood. The Oratorian schools introduced the use of French, the vernacular language, instead of Latin, and also the teaching of history to younger children. The subjects taught were Greek, Latin, philosophy (logic,

morals, physics, and metaphysics). Their educational method differed from the Jesuits, who taught Latin in Latin, whereas the Oratorians taught Latin in French, and argued that one must begin with what is known and then proceed to the unknown. Bérulle and the early Oratorians in France were, at the same time, among the most implacable enemies of Descartes and his school of irrationalism in science.

The Oratorian educators taught according to the Platonic theory of knowledge: Education is not the process of collecting and digesting bits of knowledge, but a developing of the power for creative thought that lies within every human being. Père Lamy, an Oratorian leader of the next generation, wrote: "It is necessary to have a great deal of patience and gentleness with children. The first years of life are like winter: as farmers we are not discouraged when sowing in a time when the ground can produce no fruit, so in working upon the education of children, one ought not to rebuke oneself about the little progress which one sees them make: '*abunt fructum in tempore opportuno*' ['they will bear fruit in all good time']. . . . Thus understood, pleasanter work never was than being a schoolmaster, for is it not as agreeable to sow the truth in a soul, as seeds in a garden, or to cultivate minds as flowers?"

Lamy is best known as the author of a book, *Dialogues in Science*, on the Oratorian teaching method. Lamy dismissed the drill and grill memorization approach, proposing instead that both science and philosophy are best learned through the study of the history of ideas—the most significant experiments and discoveries in the fields of physics, chemistry, anatomy, etc., by reading aloud original texts on these developments. "Our mind is not made for erudition," Lamy wrote, "but erudition is made for our mind; that is to say, we must use erudition as a way to order our mind and perfect it. . . . Studies must become our substance; one must attain not the knowledge of men, but that of the universal man."

The Oratorians' educational innovations included the so-called "public exercise," in which students carried out experiments in physics and other scientific fields in public, with their families, friends, and townspeople in attendance. The Order's schools also organized older students to take responsibility for teaching the younger students, as part of a system of "regents." Gaspard Monge, the intellectual giant who founded the Ecole Polytechnique, and whose scientific breakthroughs catapulted France into the modern age, was educated at the Oratorian College at Beaune, where he was a regent, and absorbed the teaching method upon which the Ecole Polytechnique, with its student brigades, would be built.