

RESPONSE OF CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS TO THE STRATEGIC REVIEW OF SACRED MUSIC IN THE MISSION OF WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

A. THANKS

1. I thank the members of the Review Panel: Robert Arnott, Leslie Ferrar, Mgr Mark Langham and Andrew Reid, together with Rebecca Goode for the meticulous work they have done in bringing together this ‘Strategic Review of Sacred Music in the Mission of Westminster Cathedral’. I thank them for the time and effort they have generously dedicated to this endeavour, in which they have spent many hours interviewing individuals and reading submissions from all who wished to offer their views, and from all who were invited to do so.
2. I also wish to thank the families of the young choristers, both present and past, who have made great sacrifices so that their boys could contribute to the sacred music which is such a significant part of the life and liturgy of Westminster Cathedral. Without these boys, and their parents and families, there would be no choir. I thank Westminster Cathedral Choir School, its governors and staff, for their tireless effort in maintaining an excellent school which provides the education, boarding and support for the choristers. Without this School there is no choir. I thank the Review Panel for the explicit praise of the leadership and achievements of the School (paras 75, 80, 82). I thank, too, the adult musicians who have, over the years, brought their expertise to bear to glorify God through music in the Cathedral.

B. CHANGED LANDSCAPE

3. I first considered commissioning this review two years ago. Since then the landscape has changed dramatically. The changes in boarding arrangements at the School have attracted attention. No one ever envisaged the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This Report has been drawn up and completed during the pandemic, which has not only shaped the manner in which the panel has had to work but also has had a hugely significant impact on the existence and prospering of the Cathedral Choir. This is recognised in the Report (para 121).

C. VISION

4. I thank the Review Panel for placing all its considerations of sacred music in the context of the mission of the Cathedral and the worship of God, the Liturgy (para 30). This is essential to a correct understanding of the Report and its implementation. Westminster Cathedral is not a concert hall. Its Music Department

is not a branch of ‘the music industry’. Sacred music is an intrinsic part of the liturgy of the Church and is to be sustained and developed according to the living tradition of the Catholic Church. This is the reason for our striving for excellence: that we offer only our best endeavours in praise of God. This excellence places sacred music as a treasured part of an enduring culture and a high point of human achievement. I therefore welcome and accept the resolution of the Review that I produce a Charter for Sacred Music in Westminster Cathedral, ‘locating it in the mission of the Cathedral’. I will produce this Charter in the coming weeks.

D. ORGANISATION

5. I gratefully appreciate the long-term perspective taken by the Review. As is stated in para ii of the Foreword, ‘Archbishops of Westminster have been preoccupied with structures and relationships concerning the Choir ever since its foundation, and this is simply the moment in which our generation’s Cardinal has found it necessary to intervene’. This Review, then, has to be taken in this long-term perspective. The structures proposed by the Review: a foundational charter, a series of clear mandates, a committee for coordination of efforts, a process of assessments and reviews are all welcome (Recs 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14). They will be implemented once a more detailed consideration has been given both to their place in the canonical structure of the Church, and of the Cathedral as a canonically erected parish, and to their place in the civil structures of two distinct yet interrelated Charities: the Diocese of Westminster and the Westminster Cathedral Choir School. I am confident that by implementing the thrust of these recommendations we will be providing a clarity of structure and a way of co-ordinating the efforts of all involved in the provision of sacred music needed for the years to come, not least because of the enhanced regulatory duties that fall now to all charitable bodies.

E. APPROPRIATE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

6. Westminster Cathedral has never been handsomely endowed. It is, in many practical respects, a parish church although its role and contribution reaches widely in this land. The funding it needs has to call upon the good will and commitment of people far beyond the circle of parishioners. Every effort will be made to develop this critical part of the Review Report. It must be remembered, however, that this appeal sits alongside many other appeals, not least for the charitable work of the Church in response to the growing hardship and poverty evident in our society. This is not a new dilemma. Cardinal Manning placed his priorities on the service of the poor rather than undertake the whole project of the Cathedral. He recognised in the poor, as does Pope Francis, those who are especially beloved of the Lord and those with whom Jesus most closely associates himself. Cardinal Vaughan took a view which included dedicating significant effort and resources to the Cathedral. Cardinal

Hume was unflinching in his efforts to secure the future of the Choir and the Choir School, radically reforming the operation of both, as well as his initiatives of the Passage and the Cardinal Hume Centre in response to homelessness and poverty. Now, in our turn, we must strive to honour the leadership of these Cardinals and maintain a balance and thoroughness to the range of our charitable work, which certainly includes the provision of sacred music.

7. The financial impact of the effects of the pandemic should not be minimised. The Cathedral provides, in round figures, £500,000 a year in support of the Music Department of the Cathedral. This is one measure of the commitment of the Cathedral to sacred music. In the course of this year, Cathedral income has decreased by roughly 50%. The funds in the endowment for Cathedral music are sufficient for no more than a further eighteen months of such funding. So it is clear that the Review's call for a significant fundraising effort in support of sacred music in Westminster Cathedral must be heeded. I therefore ask all those who profess to be fervent supporters of this precious inheritance of sacred music to become regular contributors to its financial support. It is, unquestionably, time to look ahead in order to ensure that this tradition of sacred music in Westminster Cathedral not only survives this financially turbulent period but can be put onto a firm footing for years to come.

F. MUSIC DEPARTMENT

8. I welcome the Review's observations on the role of the Music Department of Westminster Cathedral, and the leadership of the Master (or Director) of Music, in partnership with the Cathedral Precentor. This role includes the strengthening of the congregation's participation in music in the Liturgies of the Church, the role of the Choir in evangelisation, its contribution to educational outreach in schools, both Catholic and state (paras 63, 71). I welcome the observations on the contribution of the lay clerks (paras 59, 64, and 65) and on the dispositions expected of them. It is now clear that this broad remit of the Music Department, while unquestionably centred on the Choir, emphasises its critical part in the role of sacred music in the mission of the Cathedral to be shaped by the Charter.

G. CHORISTERS AND WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR SCHOOL

9. I am grateful to the Review for emphasising the outstanding achievements of the Westminster Cathedral Choir School (paras 75, 80) and the support given to it by the Diocese over many years (para 78). The Review has also highlighted the importance of the Choir, with the full support of the School, undertaking concerts and tours. The Review has addressed three specific issues directly regarding the life of the school and its relationship with the Music Department:

- a) Safeguarding. The Review's Recommendations in this regard (Rec 8; paras 55, 56, 57) will require further study and professional advice in order to become effective in the civic and legal structures of the School and the Cathedral. Robust policy and processes will be developed to complement the existing secure arrangements.
- b) Recruitment. The Review noted the difficulties that have been facing the school in recent years in the recruitment of choristers. Indeed, in 2019 the prospect was that only one probationer chorister would enter the school, when six were required. This constituted an existential threat to the continuation of the Choir and remedial action was taken. The Review recommends greater cooperation between the School, the Music Department and the Diocese in this task of recruitment. While accepting the thrust of this recommendation, I remain convinced that the leadership in recruitment must remain with the School.
- c) Boarding.
 - i) The recent change in the boarding arrangements for Westminster Cathedral Choir School has been a matter of contention for some. The Report concludes: 'We reject as misguided the highly polarised debate about boarding patterns.' It continues: 'what is crucial is to ensure that choristers achieve the right amount of rehearsal and performance time and can capitalise on that through being happy and sufficiently rested, focussed on working together well as a team.' Consequently, Recommendation 17 states: 'adjustments should be made to the boarding arrangements so as to find a different balance between the number of times the choristers sing at Mass, the amount of rehearsal time available and the benefits gained from weekly time in the family home.' This I accept.
 - ii) However, the specific adjustments put forward by the Review (paras 110 and 111) and expressed in Recommendation 17 fail to achieve an acceptable 'different balance' for the following reasons:
 - (1) The proposal removes the 'day of rest' each week that young voices need. It involves the choristers singing seven days a week. In the traditions of the Cathedral Choir, there has consistently been a day of rest from singing. It has to be maintained.
 - (2) The Report makes clear that its proposed timetable has been formed on the basis of musical opinion (para 108, 111, 112 and 113). In my judgement insufficient weight has been given to the parental and educational points of view which stress the importance of family time in the life of young boys. No consultation took place with the parents or the

School in the fashioning of this proposed timetable. The evidence is that the School has had a happier and more relaxed atmosphere since these changes to boarding arrangements were made. Current parents express their satisfaction.

(3) The proposal gives too little weight to the reality of recruitment. A recent public comment by a current parent is revealing: 'The change to weekly boarding was necessary for recruitment. Most parents (us included) will not consider full boarding for their eight-year-old sons: a significantly larger number will consider weekly boarding'. I am sure that the minimal home visit of less than 24 hours that has been proposed will not meet these family expectations.

iii) However, in order to achieve the expressed intention of Recommendation 17, as the Cathedral timetable returns to its more normal pattern, I intend to introduce the following change:

- (1) Choristers will sing additionally at the 5.30pm Mass on Wednesday.
- (2) The senior choristers will sing at the 5.30pm Mass on Friday evening prior to going home.
- (3) The Solemn Mass on Sunday will be celebrated at 12.00pm.
- (4) The Solemn Vespers on Sunday will be celebrated at 4.30pm.

iv) The consequences of these changes will be:

- (1) The choristers will have extended time for rehearsal prior to singing at the 12.00pm Mass after returning on Sunday morning.
- (2) The choristers will continue to benefit from the extra time at home with their families.
- (3) The choristers will continue to benefit from an entire day of rest from singing.
- (4) The changing patterns of Sunday morning living will be responded to: the largest Sunday congregation is at the 12.00pm Mass.

v) This arrangement will mean that the 'different balance' recommended by the Review will be achieved. The choristers will sing at seven services over six days of the week, as they did before the changes to boarding arrangements; there will be a longer time available for rehearsals than before the boarding arrangements were first changed; and the choristers will benefit from adequate time at home and the rest it brings. This arrangement, then, restores the rhythm of chorister singing that was in place before the change in boarding arrangements, when the boys rested from singing from Tuesday evening until Thursday morning. The rest period will now be from Friday evening until Sunday morning.

- vi) These new arrangements will be brought into effect in the coming months, as these exceptional circumstances permit, and following discussion with those directly involved.

H. CONCLUSION

10. There is no doubt that this Report creates a substantial challenge to all who are contributors to the role of sacred music in the mission of Westminster Cathedral. It is a challenge that I willingly embrace as the way forward for the survival, development and flourishing of this music in the liturgy and mission of the Cathedral. There are critical months and years ahead as every sector in society and every dimension of the life of the Church struggles for stability, a renewed sense of purpose in changed times, and for financial support. The musical endeavour of our Cathedral is not excused these realities. I therefore thank all those who have worked so hard, in the Cathedral, in its Music Department, in the Choir School and in the Diocesan Administration, in sustaining the life of the Cathedral during the months of 'lockdown' and these continuing months of considerable restrictions. It is a tribute to their hard work that on Sunday 4 October the full choir will again sing at the Solemn Sunday Mass, the first time it has done so since March 2020. This will indeed be a moment of thanksgiving to God, expressed in the beauty and solemnity of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster

25 September 2020