

CHAPTER THIRTY

SACRED MUSIC IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: A MEANS OF UPLIFTING THE SPIRIT OF THE FAITHFUL

Rev. Sr. Prof. Cordis-Mariae Achikeh & Rev Sr. Mary Beth Anumba

Abstract

Liturgy in the Catholic Church is an outstanding means through which the faithful express their beliefs and manifest the mystery of Christ in the real nature of the true church openly. Sacred music plays a very important role in Catholic liturgical worship. Catholic Church upholds sacred music as a means of facilitating active participation at liturgy. It is the solemn nature of the Catholic liturgy that makes it unique so, demands that the type of music that must be used during liturgy must maintain that standard. Efforts have been made by Catholic Liturgical Commission to maintain the uniqueness of liturgical music but the contemporary choristers and music directors are seemingly shifting away from the established standard through their choice of songs and instrumentation resulting in many Catholics not knowing the real nature of sacred music. This paper uses analytically research method, approached from survey, and descriptive angles, to ascertain the position of the catholic liturgical commission as regards sacred music and active participation of the faithful during liturgical assembly. It concludes by recommending that music directors and composers of Catholic liturgical music should sit up and compose songs that meet with the needs of the liturgical celebration for the sanctification of the faithful and to the glory of God.

Keywords: Sacred music, Liturgical worship, Catholic Church and Spiritual uplifting of the faithful.

Introduction

Sacred music holds a prime position in the liturgical life, rite and ceremonies of the Church. It is an integral part of the solemn liturgy, whose true purpose is the Glorification of God and Sanctification and Edification of the Faithful (cf. Vat. Council II, constitutions on the Liturgy Art. 112). Pope St. Pius X presented the importance of sacred music as a means of lifting the spirit to God and as a precious aid for the faithful in their “active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church”. (*Musicae Sacrae Ministerium* p.125). It contributes to the decorum and the splendour of the ecclesiastical ceremonies. Sacred music interprets and expresses the deep meaning of the sacred text to which it is intimately linked. Hence its proper aim is “to add greater efficacy to the text, in other that through it, the faithful may be the more easily moved to devotion and be better disposed of for the reception of the fruits of grace belonging to the celebration of the Most Holy mysteries”. (The “*Motu Proprio*” of Pius X Nov. 22, 1903).

Sacred music should possess in the highest degree, the qualities proper to the liturgy and in particular, sanctity and goodness of form, which will spontaneously produce the final quality of universality. It must be Holy and must, therefore, exclude all profanity not only in itself but in the

manner in which it is presented by those who execute it. It must be through art, for otherwise, it will be impossible for it to exercise on the minds of those who listen to it that efficacy which the Church aims at obtaining in admitting into her liturgy the art of musical sounds.

Sacred music as an integral part of the liturgy should exhibit threefold function: high qualities of holiness, artful beauty and universality to enable it to fulfil the purpose for which the church admitted into her solemn liturgy and mysteries. Sacred music must at the same time be universal. Even though every nation is "permitted to admit into its ecclesiastical compositions those special forms which may be said to constitute its native music, still, these forms must be subordinated in such a manner to the general characteristics of sacred music" so as to be acceptable to all (the "Motu Proprio" of Pius X)

Different Kinds of Sacred Music

Gregorian chant which holds the important position is the first and the best; sacred polyphony in its various forms both ancient and modern, sacred music for the organ and other approved instruments, and sacred popular music, be it liturgical or simply religious (Flannery, 1967).

The Presence of the Holy Spirit in Sacred Music

The Holy Spirit is present in the sacred music, and as such, plays a very vital role in all aspects of it. It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens, inspires, gives the gifts, talent and directs all the acts of the sacred music and human persons whom he uses to fulfil such very important tasks. All these, enable the dignity and lofty purpose for which the holy church admitted this holy and important art into her solemn liturgy and mysteries possible as well as flourish. Just as a Father of the Eastern Church, Jacques Chailley exclaimed that "Music was born in heaven; if a man is Musical; he is so by the workings of the Holy Spirit. (Jacques CHAILLEY, *Histoire musicale du Moyen Age*, Paris 1950, pg. 37 ff) St John Chrysostom, Hildegard of Bingen answer for the Latin Church: as Christ's body took flesh in the bodily integrity of the Virgin Mary by the workings of the Holy Spirit, so has the songs of praise rooted itself in the Church through workings of the same spirit, according to heaven's harmony. (Saint Hildegard, *Esprit*. XL; P. L. 197, 221). Such affirmations are rich in consequences and compel from us a high opinion of liturgy in general and of vocal praise in particular (*Musicae Sacrae Ministerium*, 1997:57). Sacred music as an integral part of the liturgy should exhibit threefold function: high qualities of holiness, artful beauty and universality, in other to enable it to fulfil the purpose for which the Church admitted it in to her solemn liturgy and mysteries. Sacred music, like the Catholic Church, must be one, holy and universal to be efficacious and effective in the sacred acts and holy mysteries of the Church it accompanies and serves. This gives an authentic explanation of the zeal of the various Popes to promote, encourage and foster sacred music through diverse means in the church. As Pope John Paul II rightly puts it in his chirographic on the centenary of the Motu Proprio "Tra le sollecitudini" on sacred music "the attention my predecessors thus paid to this delicate sector was constant".

In Cardinal Ratzinger's (the present Pope) talk on "Liturgy and Church music" during the international sacred music congress held in Rome in 1986, he pointed out that "mere words do not suffice when man praises God". Hence, let us raise up our voice and praise the Lord with lute, harp, tambourines and all sounding instruments, (cf Ps. 150:3-6, Ps .33:2-3; Canticle of Judith 16:2-3a, 13-15.) because he who sings prays twice. Also to sing is to pray. It is therefore our intention here to briefly present such various documents starting from the reform of sacred music of the "Motu Proprio" of Pius X, November 22, 1903 to the second Vatican council.

Papal Documents on Music

(A) Terms used in Classifying Papal Documents:

- Papal constitutions are pontifical acts that deal with matters of greater importance like the welfare of the church or a great part of it.
- “Motu Proprio” are documents given by the Pope of his own accord, in the form of simple decrees.
- Apostolic Letters “Litterae Apostolicae” are the acts or Roman Pontiffs issued in the form of solemn letters through bulls or briefs, which treat affairs of the executive or administrative order.
- Epistolae or Litterae Pontificiae are letters in which the sovereign pontiff explains catholic doctrine, gives instructions, as well as exhorts, admonishes, condemns and expresses congratulations, benevolence and so forth as a father, teacher and doctor.
- Encyclical Letters “Litterae Encyclicae” treats those acts of the Roman Pontiffs which are directed to all Bishops and ordinaries, in communion with the Apostolic see.
- Autograph Letter “Chirographa” are personally written documents with informal statements by the Holy Father to cardinals and important heads of states, putting across his view on certain important matters or subjects.
- Decrees of Acts of the Sacred Congregation of Rites deal on laws and matters of public worship, which includes the music of the church, the use of organ and voice.
- Instructions “instructions” are doctrinal explanations, rules, directive norms and admonitions on any aspect of the life and constitution of the church.

The greater number of documents concerning sacred music is found in the form of “Papal constitutions”, “Motu Proprio”, encyclical letters and of course in the form of decrees of the congregation of sacred rites which take precedence over the first three. Cf. HARBURN, R. F., papal legislation 95A. D. to 1977 A. D., Minnesota (The Liturgical Press) 1979, P. 510

(B) The Four Major Documents Issued on Sacred Music

The four major documents issued on sacred music, namely:

- i. The “Moto Proprio” of Pius X (November 22, 1903)
- ii. “The Divini Cultus Sanctitatem” of Pius XI (December 20, 1928)
- iii. The “Musicae Sacrae Disciplina” of Pius XII (December 25, 1955)
- iv. The “Sacrosanctum Concilium” of Paul VI (December 4, 1963)
- v. The “Sacrosanctum Concilium” of Paul

i. “Moto Proprio” Tra le sollicitudine of Pope Pius X

Barely three and half months after his enthronement, Pius X on November 22nd 1903, promulgated this “motu proprio” -a document of paramount importance in the church's organization, liturgy and worship.

Parts three of the “motu proprio” treats the “instructions on sacred music”, and are subdivided into the general principles, the different kinds of sacred music, the liturgical text, the external form of the sacred compositions, the singers, organ and instruments, the length of the liturgical chant, principal means and the conclusion.

Pope Pius X's faithfulness to his motto: “To restore all things in Christ”, really achieved in his “motu proprio” the changes that affected “every aspect of the life of present-day Catholics”, with special emphasis on the field of sacred music. Even in the introductory part, His Holiness pointed out the different abuses in sacred music and singing, while ready to welcome orderly reforms in sacred music, he warned against all forms of deviation from laid-down principles.

ii. The “DiviniCultusSanctitatem” of Pius XI (December 20, 1928)

Though he wrote several important letters, aimed at carrying further the reform policies of his predecessors (Pius X and Benedict XV), Pius XI's most important document regarding church music, was surely the “DiviniCultusSanctitatem” of December 20, 1928, in which among other things he laid stress on the fuller and more active participation of the faithful in the church's liturgy and worship. He highlighted too, the appropriate rules of teaching sacred music in seminaries; as well as in all houses of formation for the religious.

In the introductory part of this Apostolic constitution, Pius XI, sought most especially to enforce, for a more conscientious practice and fulfilment, the laws and directives of Pius X (see above, pg). The proper singing of divine office among the clergy and the faithful were encouraged as a means of fostering popular piety. Frowning at those who either neglected or became lax with regards to the directives of Pius X, and committed to once and for all correcting the anomaly, the Pope issued in the main body of his document, his “recommendations” in eleven articles.

iii. “Musicae Sacrae Disciplina” of Pius XII

In this great Encyclical letter (of December 25, 1955), Pius XII presenting as it were decree on sacred music showed a keen interest to build upon the church's long-standing heritage in music, - right from the early fathers to the twentieth century. And reaching much beyond Pius X and Pius XI he allowed more liberal use of orchestral instruments and the performance of some kinds of religious compositions at non-liturgical service. The Pope acknowledged the great part that music played in the religious life of God's people, both in the old and new testaments, as also in the post-apostolic church. (cf. Exodus 15: 1 20, 2 Sam. 6:5)(In the New Testament; Eph. 5:18ff, Col. 3: 16, 1 cor. 15. 26 etc). He not only advanced the course of the achievements of his predecessors, (especially St. Gregory the great on the “Gregorian” chant) but indeed created new forms of the sacred chants as well as new types of songs.

The study of sacred music was already on a course of great progress from the simple and natural Gregorian modes to great and magnificent works of art. Not just human voices alone but also the organ and other musical instruments played their parts in embellishing and adorning sacred music with a prodigious richness. The desire to render divine worship ever more splendid and worthy of its name still constrained the church to keep a watchful eye against anything profane finding a place in sacred music.

Just as any artist aiming at producing works for the church must have a deep faith and religious insight for his point of departure, so also (and even in a stricter and holier way) should those working on sacred music reflect most clearly the inner nature of divine worship. Sacred music after all is much more intimately connected with divine worship than any of the purely liberal arts.

The dignity and lofty purpose of the function of sacred music are threefold: to beautify and embellish the voices of the Priest and the people praising God in the Eucharistic celebration; to lift up to God the minds of the faithful taking part and increase the fruits which the faithful, moved by the sacred harmonies derive from the holy liturgy, lastly, to make the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive, fervent and increase the honour given to God. Hence, the dignity and force of sacred music are greater the closer sacred music itself approaches to the supreme act of Christian worship, the Eucharistic sacrifice of the altar. One of the examples which clearly resemble the other highest function of sacred music is that of accompanying and beautifying other liturgical ceremonies, particularly, the recitation of Divine office in Choir.

Religious music is another art of its own that is not primarily a part of the sacred liturgy, but by its power and purpose greatly aids religion. This type of music which has always been from the beginning and developed under the church's auspices has been used inside the church during non-liturgical service and ceremonies and outside the church at various solemnities and celebrations. With its easy tunes, which is also sung in the language of the people, this music is easy to memories, serves as a sort of catechism and conveys the truths of the faith. Being of great help to Christian apostolate, this kind of music must be carefully cultivated and promoted. The Pope spared no words in praising and encouraging all composers, teachers and performers in sacred music for they are exercising a true genuine apostolate which will surely be rewarded at God's hand.

Specific Guidelines to be followed:

Cathedrals and major churches should have their own good schools of singers (scholacantorum), where there are enough choir boys, a group of men or women or girls can be used as a substitute, with their places located outside the sanctuary and set apart from the exclusive use of the group. In the seminaries and religious houses, there should be proper instruction in the doctrine and the use of sacred music and Gregorian Chant according to the mind of the church, by the experts in the field. Promising students with musical talents should be sent to the pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome or some other institution for more adequate training in the field.

Each diocese should have an expert in religious music and chant to be in charge of the sacred music programme in the diocese, working hand in hand with the ordinary of the place. The Pope concluding re-emphasized his desire and hoped that all the recommendations and directives, herein advanced, would be conscientiously taken up by all so that the Church's divine worship and liturgy will attain the dignity and beauty required of it.

iv. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council

In this document of Vatican council II, promulgated by Paul VI on December 4, 1963, Chapter six is devoted to the theme of Sacred Music with unqualified emphasis on the need to improve congregational singing and so achieve the fullest participation of the faithful in liturgical singing. To this end, the document directs that music be composed for the parts of the ordinary of the mass at sung masses, and even vernacular hymns at the low mass and other services. While encouraging continuous use of Gregorian Chant, polyphony and modern music, the documents equally counsel the incorporation of the musical traditions of mission lands in their liturgy and worship.

Article 112: of this document highlights the church's concern to always improve the role of music in divine worship, - hence the resolve to accept into the church's liturgy and worship all forms of true art. Sacred music should always have its aim God's glory and the sanctification of the faithful.

Article 113: the celebration of the divine office in solemn songs with the sacred ministers and the active participation of the faithful make liturgical worship noble.

Article 114: again on the careful cultivation of the sacred music all through the church, the document encourages the development of choirs in all local churches.

Article 115: Directs that experts should personally conduct the teaching and practice of sacred music in seminaries, religious houses of formation and catholic institutions.

Article 116: putting the Gregorian chant in a privileged position, the council Fathers still welcomes other kinds of sacred music like polyphony. The constant emphasis conforms with the spirit of the liturgical action (cf. art. 30).

Article 117: The typical edition of the books of Gregorian chant is to be completed; also an edition containing simpler melodies for small churches' use should be prepared.

Article 118: Congregational Religious singing is to be encouraged and fostered intelligently, so that the voices of the people may be heard in devotions, sacred exercise and liturgical services.

Article 119: The musical tradition in certain countries, especially in mission lands that have their musical tradition, which play a great part in their religious and social life should be encouraged, held in proper esteem and given a suitable place because it helps in forming their religious sense as well as for adapting worship to their native genius (cf. arts. 39 and 40).

Article 120: Again uploads the use of the pipe organ, while leaving to the approval of the competent territorial authorities, the use of other instruments.

Article 121: Animated Christian composers are encouraged in their vocation to cultivate sacred music in conformity with Catholic doctrine, drawn chiefly from the sacred scriptures and liturgical sources. They should also endeavour to increase its store of treasure, with qualities of compositions proper to genuine sacred music which should invite the active participation of larger and smaller choirs as well as the congregation.

Recommendations on some Aspects of Sacred Music that Concerns Us Today

The main aspects or elements of Sacred Music to concern ourselves with are as follows;

1. The Gregorian chant
2. Composition
3. Selection of appropriate hymns for the liturgy
4. Singing/choristers/choirmasters
5. Organ and other musical instruments
6. The foundation of music schools and teaching of music
7. Music commission and associations
8. The celebration of the Divine Office

1. The Gregorian Chant

Among the musical expressions that correspond best with qualities or purpose demanded by the notion of sacred music, especially liturgical music, the Gregorian chant ranks first as well as the best and has a special place. Pius X considers it, "the supreme model of sacred music". The second Vatican council recognized that "being specially suited to the Roman Liturgy, "it should be given, pride of place, other things being equal". John Paul II reaffirms that "Gregorian chant continues today to be an element of unity in the Roman Liturgy". (cf. *Musicae Sacrae Ministerium*, 2002/2003, chirograph of the supreme Pontiff, John Paul II for the centenary of "Motu Proprio", pg. 128 129).

Thus the Gregorian chant must be actively fostered and encouraged everywhere, especially since its Latin language portrayed the essential universal character of the church. It continues also today to be an element of unity in Roman liturgy; therefore, it should be highly treasured and sung during the liturgical celebrations in our churches. Here in Nigeria, masses are supposed to be celebrated at least once a month in the Gregorian chant in our churches. Let us sing at least the unchanging parts of the mass, namely the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, Credo, so that numerous foreigners can join and feel at home in the liturgy. Some parishes like Cathedral parish and others can have Latin Mass on Sundays. The proper and some important aspects could also be sung in solemnities like Christmas, Easter, All Saints, Assumption of our Lady. This chant gives a feeling of the oneness of the Roman Catholic Church all over the world. We have a great need to hand over these chants to our younger ones in the faith. This teaching should start early enough in primary schools. This can also be achieved through organizing singing competitions on the chant, at least on the common of the mass, for the different parishes/Diocesan

organizations or statutory bodies e.g. C.M.O., C.W.O., C.B.O., C.G.O., charismatic groups, bible society etc.

2. Composition

The church has always recognized and fostered progress in the musical arts, hence, compositions of polyphony, modern music and religious songs are encouraged as long as it respects both the liturgical spirit and true values of this art form. These compositions must be in full conformity with Catholic doctrine. They must be simple “and express in melody the truth of the mystery that is celebrated in the liturgy.” (cf. second Vatican council, constitution on the sacred liturgy.....n.

112). The composer should be deeply imbued with the sense of mystery, faith, prays for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in other to compose melodies that suit the text as well as lift the heart. New compositions on liturgical music should be submitted to the music commission for proper vetting and approval.

3. Selection of Appropriate Hymns for the Liturgy

Appropriate hymns that suit the different parts of the liturgy should be selected. Hymns are not selected based on the fact that you like them; they must suit the purpose or aim and must be heart-lifting and inspiring too. Hymns for different parts of Holy mass which relate to the word of God in most proper. The first communion hymn should be an invitational hymn, while other hymns could express thanksgiving, faith, love, hope, which moves one to reflect and be thankful for the food of life, the body of Christ received. Entrance hymn and dismissal are to be vibrant, joyful, inviting, disposing and should move the desire to participate in the liturgy. The dismissal hymn also should be joyful and express readiness to go out and proclaim Christ to all peoples, to spread the good news. The Director of the choir (choirmaster) should take care that people always associate themselves actively with the singing at the liturgical celebrations, by performing at least, the easier sections of the hymn, while the choir leads the harder sections. The faithful should not be “idle observers and dumb spectators” at the liturgy.

4. Singing, Chorister, Choir-Master

There is a great need to give sound training to our choristers, organize seminars for their continual formation. Choristers should know that they are performing a sacred duty, hence they must live up to expectations morally, spiritually, be respectable, to suit the sacred role they undertake. As they are generous with their gifts and talent and make a lot of sacrifices for the good of others and the church; their reward will be great in heaven. The responsorial psalm which should be declamatory and clear should be sung by a good singer who will uplift and lead the congregation to deeper devotion and reflection. The response and verse of the responsorial psalm should be sung by a good audible voice. The response should at least be sung with the verses recited. Good singing enhances very much the liturgical celebration. The practical preparation for each liturgical celebration is very important. Teaching and “singing by the faithful is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises as well as in liturgical services, the voices of the faithful may be heard...” they are not to be spectators or the mute listeners. (no. 118 vat. II). The choirmaster should conduct the choir modestly and with comportsment and should not cause unnecessary distractions by conducting as one in the musical theatre. The body movement should be controlled. The art of conducting/breeding a choir should be taught through seminars and workshops.

5. Organ and Other Musical Instruments

Musical instruments can be very useful in sacred celebrations, whether they are played as solo instruments. “The pipe organ is to be held in high esteem in the Latin Church since it is its traditional instrument, the sound of which can add a wonderful splendour to the church's

ceremonies and powerfully lift up people's minds to God and higher things". (Second Vatican Council, constitutions on the Sac Sacred liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium n. 120). Today, we use different types of electronic organs and keyboards (Harmonium) etc. The use of other instruments, the local instrument may also be admitted in Divine worship, provided that the instruments are suitable for sacred use, or can be adapted to it, that they are in keeping with the dignity of the temple, and truly contribute to the edification of the faithful. The use of musical instruments to accompany the singing can act as a support to the voices, render participation easier, and achieve a deeper union in the assembly. Note, the instrument accompanies the voice, hence it should not be played very loud as to overshadow the voices. Instruments, which by opinion and use, are suitable for secular music only, are altogether prohibited from every liturgical celebration and popular devotion. E.g. piano forte, some local cultural instrument e.g. Ufie etc. Instruments can be played solo at the beginning before the priest riches the altar, at the offertory, at the communion and the end of the mass or dismissal. The playing of the instrument as Solos is forbidden in Advent, lent, during the sacred Tridum and in the offices and Masses of the Dead. The organist and the instrumentalist should possess the skill to play properly to enrich the sacred celebration and encourage the participation of the faithful.(cf Second Vatican Council, Concilium, Constitutions on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, sacred instrumental music n. 62-67).

6. The Foundation of Music Schools and Teaching of Music

It is of paramount importance to have schools of music open and teach music in all our schools and houses of formation. Music is life and plays a vital role in human persons. It is a formative subject and an integral part of our liturgical life. No wonder, different Popes in their different sacred music documents stressed very much the need to teach music in the Seminaries, houses of religious formation, religious houses, institutions and to the faithful at large, by experts in the field. Promising students with musical talents they said, should be sent to the pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome, (which was opened in 1910) or to some other institution for a more adequate training in the field, to help train others. Each diocese according to the second Vatican council should have an expert in religious music and chant, to be in charge of the music programme and to work hand in hand with the bishop of the diocese and the sacred music commission. There is a great need to have music schools and to start as early as possible in the primary schools to form our children in good music and church music. Gifted persons can be trained in the schools and those already in the field could be upgraded. We need to advance in our knowledge and share sound knowledge.

7. Music Commission and Association

The Diocesan Commissions for Sacred music are of most valuable assistance in promoting sacred music together with pastoral liturgical action in the diocese. Both of them should work hand in hand. The commission in conformity with the bishop may form Catholic Choir Association (C.C.A.) which is an easier way to reach the parish choirs. The C.C.A. takes full instructions from the commission and works hand in hand with them.

All the new compositions of the sacred music pass through the commission who controls the doctrine and sacred aspects and forms satisfy them or amend them. The Diocesan commission is fully responsible for the sacred music, hence must be experts in the field.

8. The Celebration Of The Divine Office

The Divine office is one of the liturgical prayers of the Church. Its celebration in solemn songs with the clerics, religious and the entire faithful, at least on Sundays and feast days is highly recommended. The melodies used in singing should bear the characteristics of sacred music to suit the holy act. The divine office could be sung both in English, Latin and Vernacular.

Conclusion

Finally, we thank God for having gifted us with the privileged position and endowed us with musical talent, which enables us to participate in the church's Evangelization through music. We pledge our love to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of the choirs of angels and saints in heaven. We pray and are hopeful that we will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven, where we will join the eternal choir in praising the Lord in songs, with sweet-sounding voices, resounding instruments and sweet melodies forever. Amen.

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