

Sacred Music, Fall of 1999

Editorial by Dr. Poterack



There have been several articles in recent issues of *The Latin Mass* magazine that touched on the connection between the traditional liturgy and the "treasury of sacred music." There was one article in the summer 1998 issue by Jeffrey Tucker entitled, "The New Rite and the Destruction of Sacred Music," and an interview with the concert organist

Richard Morris in the spring 1999 issue. Both of these articles brought up the difficulty of presenting a polyphonic Mass setting within the context of the new liturgy, particularly the *Sanctus/Benedictus* split (which works best during a silent canon), and the *Agnus Dei*. There are ways of solving these problems in the New Rite (cf. Cardinal Ratzinger's *A New Song for the Lord*, pp. 141-146). However both the construction of the New Rite and the complex of theological propaganda with which liturgists surrounded it, does make it difficult to preserve this aspect of the treasury of sacred music which the Second Vatican Council itself had ordered.

I cannot let the opportunity pass without making a few comments about Jeffrey Tucker's article. Though I am somewhat loath to criticize a fellow liturgical conservative, I must say that his criticism of the *Adoremus Hymnal* is off target. Put briefly, he seems to dislike it because it is not the *Liber Usualis* and not Tridentine. What can I say?

My personal pride in the *Adoremus Hymnal* aside, I am even more concerned about Mr. Tucker's thesis that there "is no substitute for regarding the musical side of the Mass as having an identity *separate* from the prayers of the celebrant and the people." (emphasis added) He seems to reject the almost century-old teaching that sacred music is an *integral part* of the sacred liturgy when he says that this separation is "the only way the music side of our worship, which is always exogenous to the Mass itself, can develop and be worthy of the event taking place." Pius X, call your office!



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I have had some questions from readers concerning my comments in the last issue on Jeffrey Tucker's article, "The New Rite and the Destruction of Sacred Music" which first appeared in the Summer 1998 issue of *The Latin Mass* magazine. Perhaps I was too flippant. Mr. Tucker indeed seems to be "onto something," but I think he expresses it incorrectly. He bases his "two theater" theory of liturgical action on the fact that, in the Tridentine High Mass, the priest silently says all of the prayers that the choir sings. This grafting of the priest's low Mass on to the High Mass—for this is what it is—is a rather late development (approx. 13th century), and it has nothing to do with the development or preservation of the Church's *thesaurus* of sacred music. It is not the priest's simultaneous recitation of the *same* prayers the choir sings, it is his simultaneous recitation of prayers *different* from the choir in the Tridentine Mass that allowed for the development and preservation of at least some of the Church's treasury of *musica sacra*.

Let me demonstrate this using the *Sanctus-Benedictus*. It is not that the priest is reciting the same text, but a different text—appropriate to a priest (the Canon)—at the same time as the *Sanctus-Benedictus*. While the priest performs his unique order (to offer the Sacrifice in *persona Christi*), the choir performs simultaneously, not separately—its unique order (the angelic praise of the *Sanctus*, and the *Benedictus*). The two parts of this "liturgical counterpoint" are each integral to the Mass. One is not "exogenous" to the other.

This is the author's misstep—the old assumption that the "real Mass" is the priest's low Mass, and that everything else, including music, is just so much extra baggage added on. However integrity need not imply a linear order (B follows A), but can imply a simultaneity (B and A). As in a fugue, the subject and the countersubject occur at the same time and are both integral to the composition. One can still say that the subject is more important than the countersubject, as one can say that the Canon is more important than the choir singing the *Sanctus-Benedictus*. Indeed the Canon is essential to the Mass, while music is not essential. However sacred music, as Pope Pius X and the last Council taught us, is *integral* to the solemn liturgy.

Also in a Tridentine Mass the priest recites the prayers at the foot of the altar while the choir sings the Introit, and he recites the much longer Offertory prayers while the choir sings the Offertory and, often, an Offertory motet as well. Again, what is going on is not the choir duplicating, in musical fashion what the priest is saying. Rather, each is performing its own particular "order" of worship. This simultaneity is the earthly equivalent of that "eternal now" of heaven in which all things shall be present at once. This aspect of worship fell victim to the full fury of the fussy Enlightenment didacticism of the liturgical reform. Everything had to be clear, out in the open, and very linear. The priest's prayers had to be unobstructed and clearly audible for the edification and instruction of the people.

This preference for the linear—and the consequent peril to the *thesaurus musicae sacrae*—is present in the structure of the *Novus Ordo* and some of the confusing rubrics that surround it. This is what I think Mr. Tucker is really "onto."

