

# FROM THE EDITORS

## A Suggestion for the “Reform of the Reform”

For the past twenty years, each Holy Week at the Church of Saint Agnes in Saint Paul, Minnesota, a group of men (twenty, this year) have sung *Tenebrae* on Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the Triduum. The entire office of matins and lauds in the full Gregorian settings of the psalms, antiphons, readings and responsories is carefully and reverently sung, taking a little over two hours each day. It is a time of peace and meditation. Since the texts of the revised office are not yet issued with their musical settings, we continue to use the texts from the *Liber Usualis*.

Even though the music continues without interruption for over two hours, there is still ample opportunity for reflection and thought, especially during the responsories and readings. It occurred to me that so many of the texts in the old breviary, texts that were so familiar and so meaningful to those who over the years had sung them, have been eliminated from the reformed office. What I was singing at this year's *Tenebrae* at Saint Agnes is no longer the official office of the Church. Yet many of the words in that old office have been the inspiration of priests and religious for centuries. Composers have left settings of the responsories in a variety of styles that form one of the great treasures of sacred music, from the Gregorian chants to twentieth century compositions.

One rightly asks “why?” Why have the lamentations of Jeremiah been deleted? Where are the texts of the old responsories (nine each day)? Why has the reform brought so much elimination? The first antiphon of the first nocturn of matins for Holy Thursday, *Zelus domus tuae comedit me*, was the opening cry of the Triduum, almost like the moslem's prayer from the minaret announcing the beginning of the holy days. It sounded around the world, in every cathedral, monastery, seminary and religious house. Truly it was an expression of unity and universality as Christendom begins its solemn observance of the events of the redemption.

Michael Haydn's responsories, Allegri's *Miserere* that Mozart heard in the Sistine Chapel, Palestrina's lamentations and many other musical glories of the Church have been swept away since the texts have ceased to be a part of the official prayer of the Church. There was no part of the church year that had a greater wealth of compositions than Holy Week. And composers are still attracted to those texts. Why were they eliminated?

It is an interesting fact that words set to music make a much greater impression on the reader than words alone without music. Children learn the alphabet much quicker and remember it longer when it is sung. We even have singing telegrams, not to mention the entire advertising industry for which music plays so large a part. The old texts, learned in the seminary and sung to music of the great masters, literally rose up off the page of the breviary even when it was only read silently, by priests who once sang them in school. Why have the ancient offices of Holy Week been revised?

The venerable Roman rite was particularly rich in the Holy Week ceremonies. Through the centuries changes that occurred in other parts of the liturgical year were not applied to Holy Week, even in the reforms following the Council of Trent. Why have we lost them now? Is not this present “reform” rather an impoverishment than an enrichment?

What has happened to the rogation days, the octave days of Pentecost, the twelve days of Christmas with the Epiphany octave? Even some of the new names for the liturgical periods lack mystery and meaning as when we speak of “ordinary time” instead of Sundays after Epiphany or Pentecost. To move immediately from the glory and exaltation of Pentecost Sunday with red vestments and *Gloria, Credo* and

sequence, into a Monday with the green vestments of ordinary time does not reflect the human need to extend a celebration.

Ecumenism should also enter this "reform." The Lutherans still keep Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima to designate the Sundays before Lent, terms that can no longer be found in the Roman books. We are anxious to share with non-Catholic brethren, but we have confused them by abandoning liturgical terminology that we formerly held in common. A good example is the designation of Palm Sunday as Passion Sunday.

All these suggestions could easily be incorporated into a new edition of the Roman missal. Restoring many of these now eliminated texts and feasts could be accomplished by a reform of the calendar. We do need a "reform of the reform." Let us start with a few restorations.

R.J.S.

## Our Covers

With this issue we begin a new series of covers for *Sacred Music*. They will portray the life of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary in stained glass, and continue for the next twelve issues over three years.

Made by the F. Meyer Co. of Munich, Germany, the windows were installed in the Church of Saint Agnes in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1930. They are a classical expression of the Munich school of stained glass, and are similar to other installations found in the United States and Canada, a notable example being the Church of the Mother of God in Covington, Kentucky, once a great center of liturgical music in the Caecilian tradition. The cathedral of Quebec is another instance of Meyer's work.

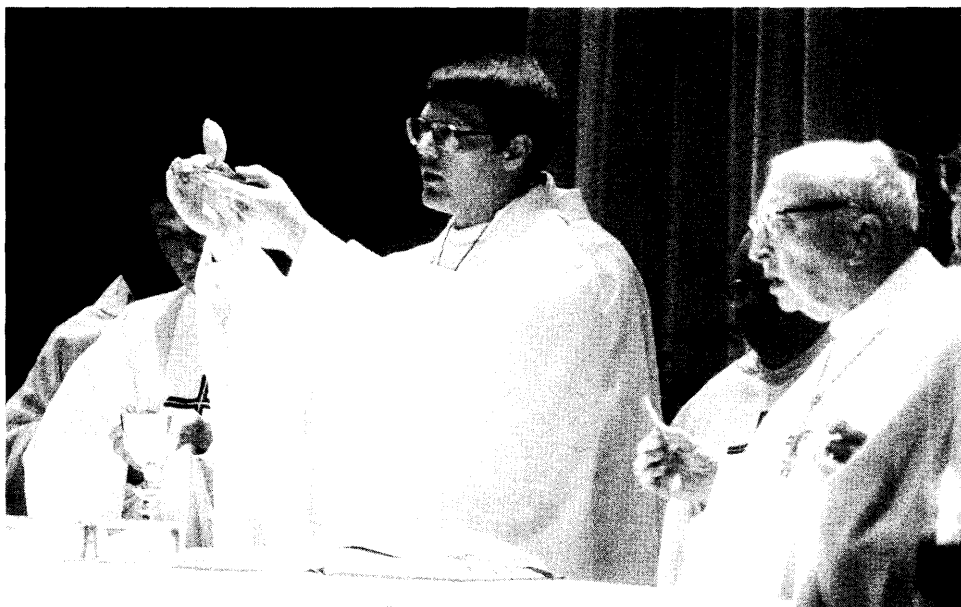
The iconography at Saint Agnes has the life of the Blessed Virgin in the windows of the west wall, and those depicting Christ's life on the east wall. The details of the glass are best seen in photographs which bring the fine fabrics of the robes and the minute architectural decoration close to the viewer. The pictures were taken by Joseph Oden of the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*.

Stained glass has long been one of the symbols used in Catholic instruction and worship. In the middle ages, gothic architects built churches with great expanses of window area into which the glassiers put a riot of colored glass, responding to the contrasts of sunlight in morning and evening hours, the changes brought on by winter and summer, the brilliance of the south exposure and the coolness of the northern light. But these windows were means of catechesis as well. A prayer book of those times instructed the worshiper to enter the church, adore the Blessed Sacrament and then walk around and look at the stained glass windows which gave him a complete summary of his faith. The mysteries of Christ's life, the various virtues, the forever interesting question of the last judgment, heaven and hell, and portraits of the saints were laid out for one to study and contemplate. Hours of devotion and learning were provided in the stained glass.

Today's new churches are often called secular buildings without any religious symbols. There are no statues, paintings or shrines. But the use of stained glass often turns such a building into a religious space. Even without an iconography or pictures of any kind, the simple use of color will create an atmosphere of the sacred and turn a secular building into a holy place.

We hope you will enjoy our covers.

V.A.S.



*First Mass. Fr. Joseph Hirsch. Sparta, Wisconsin.*

# SACRED MUSIC

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