

## LITURGY AND CONGREGATIONAL SINGING \*

When we compare the magnificent achievements of ancient and modern Church music with popular Church music, it is like seeing the undergrowth beneath the mighty trunks of forest trees—bushes and shrubs upon which one is inclined to set little value. On the other hand it is obvious that in recent decades, the value of popular Church music has been recognized, not only by priests and people who are fond of singing, but also by the hierarchy, most of all by local bishops. New and improved diocesan hymn-books are appearing everywhere, congregational singing is being encouraged in dioceses where it was never known before. In Austria as in Germany in recent years, for the first time, unison songs have been appointed which are sung everywhere with the same text and melody.

This is no accidental phenomenon: rather it must be considered as part of that religious revival affecting, not the bulk of the people, but a very important section of the Christian people. It began with Pius X who led the way, on the one hand, towards a strengthening of sacramental and liturgical life, and on the other towards a deepened understanding of the Church—to the 'awakening of the Church in the soul'.

It is plain to see that awareness of the nature of the Church has known a revival in our time; and the experience goes on. For all too long, even amongst the clergy, there has been a wide-spread tendency to think of the Church only in terms of the ecclesiastical hierarchy: Pope, Bishops and priests, and to some extent it has been forgotten that the faithful do not merely come to Church, are not merely looked after by the Church, but are themselves the Church. It is true that within this community certain organs have to emerge and must be given authority to exercise their various functions for the good of the whole community, but the whole organism must be alive.

This more complete concept of the Church as the holy community of the faithful was already operative at the beginning of this century. Above all it lies behind the liturgical movement, which is commonly said to have begun at the congress of Catholic societies in Mechelen in 1909, but which had its preparation in the Communion decrees and the *Motu proprio* concerning Church music of Pius X.

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In this *Motu proprio* the active participation of the faithful in the mysteries and in the prayer of the Church is mentioned for the first time. But once mentioned it has been stressed repeatedly by succeeding Popes. Pius X was thinking primarily of the people singing during worship. In general he was thinking first of all of the sung Mass in which the people were to take part, and he expressly stressed the fact that within the Mass (i.e., the *Missa cantata*) and the Office, hymns in the vernacular were forbidden. In the early days of the liturgical revival this was an understandable limitation. It was the confirmation of a settled practice which had been first prescribed universally, at least from Rome, by a decree of 1894. This adherence to the exclusive use of Latin did, it is true, place an obstacle in the way of the progress of congregational singing; at any rate a perceptible tension was created between the demands made by a popular Latin form of hymn-singing, and the demands made by the active participation of the people in the service—a tension which would have to be resolved sooner or later.

At the International Liturgical Congress in Lugano in September 1953, in which seventeen bishops and one representative from the Congregation of Rites took part, two of the four resolutions concerned the position of the vernacular in the liturgy. One of these made the petition: As Pius X made the Eucharistic Bread freely available for the Christian people, might not the Bread of God's Word be made more readily available by letting the people hear the readings at Mass in their own tongues, directly from the lips of the priest. This motion was only summing up what no less a person than Cardinal Lercaro, Bishop of Bologna had expressed to the congress in an extensive referendum. The other resolution concerned the hymns in the Latin Mass. It ran: The congress requests: so that the people may more easily and with more benefit take part in the liturgy, may bishops have authority to allow the people, not only to hear the Word of God in their own language, but to pray and sing in that language even in the Mass (*Missa Cantata*), and so make some sort of response. As well as by Bishop Weskaman of Berlin, the matter was specially represented by the former missionary to China, P. Hofinger. The report in the Liturgical Year Book adds the comment: in this it would be a case of relaxing the prohibitions of 1894 and 1903. (which demanded the exclusive use of Latin hymns); and goes on to observe: 'Heed would have to be paid to the sacral character of the vernacular hymns'. All this leads on to further extension of the possibilities of congregational singing in the various languages, and that for the sake of vitalizing the concept of the Church.

Beside the awakening of the Church in the soul and the desire for active participation in the life of the Church, in public worship, we must mention also a second factor, which concerns the singing of the people within the Mass, that is the better understanding of the meaning of the liturgy, especially of the Mass.

Understanding of the Mass has not been of a very high order since the Middle Ages. People, for the most part, were satisfied if they were simply present at Mass and knew about the sacred mystery which was being celebrated here: and at the same time they emphasized the memory of Christ's Passion, and especially in the later Middle Ages, the adoration of the sacred Body and Blood. In the Mass, therefore, the aspect of Christ's coming to us was stressed. The Mass was seen and described primarily as an epiphany of Christ, an appearance of Christ, or more vaguely, as God's appearance before the congregation. Corresponding to this aspect was the interpretation of the external action of the rite of the Mass in an allegorical way. The Gloria represented the Christmas mystery, the Epistle was the preaching of the Baptist, the Sanctus the entry into Jerusalem, the last blessing was the Ascension. In the external action people wanted to make visible the whole work of Redemption. And this was consistently in line with the fact that the people felt no need to be active themselves. They only wanted to look on, laying hold of the mystery reverently with eye and ear.

This was not a false, but was an inadequate conception of the Mass. For in truth the Mass is more than an epiphany of Christ; it is thanksgiving, sacrificial devotion. 'Eucharistia' is one of the oldest names for the Mass, and the idea of thanksgiving determines its essential structure to this day. Eucharistia means thanksgiving. The authentic action of the Mass begins with the invitation: Let us give thanks, *Gratia agamus*, *Εὐχαριστώμεν*. In essence the Mass is a mighty prayer of thanks which moves on into the thank-offering. It is not just a God-manward happening, a descent of God to man, but, based upon that, is an activity from man's side, a reaching up towards God. It is observance before God, led by Christ who acts through the celebrating priest at the moment of consecration; it is obedience before God indeed, which is fulfilled not by Christ alone, but precisely so that it is offered to God by Him in the midst of His Church and along with His Church. And so this movement upwards is present in the prayers and hymns of the Mass, not in the sense that a solitary individual makes this movement as representative of the rest, but in the sense that the whole congregation is

assembled for the very purpose of entering into Christ's sacrifice, into His thanksgiving, homage and devotion, and so of being raised up to God. Hence the 'we' of the prayers of the Mass; hence all along the line (if we look at the older textual material) the situation was such that the attending people were called upon to answer and confirm the prayers with their Amen—and also to join in the singing.

First and foremost, and according to the oldest tradition, this applies to the hymn which formed the first climax to the prayer of thanksgiving, the Sanctus. For centuries, and in our northern lands, until the height of the Middle Ages, the Sanctus was a song of the people. By the entire congregation taking up the song, there was a simple fulfillment of what was announced by the concluding words of the Preface: *Cum quibus et nostras voces . . .* This is indeed a climax in the liturgical action, and the dignity of the Church on earth should be manifest by its being raised up through the priest's prayer of thanksgiving to join with the Church in heaven to sing the one hymn of praise to God's triune Majesty, thus sharing, while still on this earth, in the praise of the celestial spirits. Obviously the other Mass hymns will be influenced too by this active conception of the liturgy which invites the people to join in, a conception now beginning to take hold and which we are gradually winning back. It would be specially easy to accomplish the active participation of the faithful in the Kyrie because it is the reiterated, litany-like cry of petition which rises to the Kyrios from His people; and likewise with the *Credo*, the profession of faith which ought to be spoken by all present.

These are all conclusions drawn predominantly from the history of the liturgy, and yet they are at the same time fundamental and therefore claim general application. Concerning the people singing at Mass, we are not interested in reviving a custom simply because it once prevailed: we wish rather to reinstate something which was more clearly appreciated in early times for the very reason that it is in harmony with the timeless meaning of the Mass and its liturgy.

In all of this we must bear in mind the well-known fact that the hymns of the Ordinary of the Mass, strictly speaking, were not originally songs in the musical sense of the word: they were spoken chorally with slight intonation, at most in a dignified recitative like that of the chant of the celebrant at the altar. This is obvious of the Sanctus, which was but the extension of the

Preface, and of the Credo, which is only a profession of faith, said in unison. The fact applies least of all, perhaps, to the Gloria which has always had something of the style of a hymn. It is significant that the Carolingian composer, Aurelian of Reaumé was still treating only the following as chants of the Mass: the Kyrie and the Gloria, and besides these, only the Proper chants—Introit, Gradual, Alleluia, Offertory and Communion. By contrast, the Credo, Sanctus and Agnus Dei are not included.

The Ordinary was the People's portion: but this did not remain so. In festal celebration when richer melody was desired, and then later in general, this became the preserve of the clergy who now formed the choir. Clergy and chorus meant the same thing, and even the sanctuary took from this its name of 'choir' which it keeps to this day. The liturgical recitative, the song of the Church, became the chorale. Within this choir with its chorales there was always the *schola cantorum* as a special group who took over the more elaborate melodies of the antiphonary or the Gradual. The people began to lose their voice.

At the same time the musicianship of the choir progressed and polyphony arose. Having first been tried out on the Proper, this spread to the Ordinary, and to develop its potentialities to the limit, it enlisted the help of the laity. Polyphony now flourished and displayed all of its wonderful richness. Church music had filled up the vacuum created by the silence of the people. Two forces, one positive and the other negative, both worked towards the same end: the positive power of the mightily progressing development of Church music and the negative tendencies which led to the silence of the people. Awareness of the Church vanished, as did understanding of the Mass in its complete sense as Eucharistia and sacrifice of the Church. It is significant that in the Middle Ages the word 'Eucharistia' was no longer translated by 'thanksgiving,' but by *bona gratia*: the Mass was understood to be an actual gift from on high—which it is; but that it was also the upsurge of the Christian people to God, was forgotten.

Today we are again beginning to overcome the people's silence. Does this mean that church choirs and polyphonic High Masses must fall into decay? In the heat of the battle such things have been said. These must be seen in the context of the battle of a young struggling movement which is important for the life of the Church, and which can only prevail after much labour.

The liturgical movement has fittingly been called a renaissance

which the Church has experienced in our own day, a rebirth in which a formerly attained happy condition has been brought back. In the liturgical movement the life of worship of the young Church is revived as a model, as a model for the active participation of the faithful in public worship. But no true renaissance can ignore the years that lie between; it must always try to understand the value of the immediate tradition, and to bring into harmony with the re-discovered values of the ancient model.

The liturgy is the public worship of the Church. Therefore it is and remains an ideal that the whole Church, the congregation here assembled, present its praise to God as a living organism. But the liturgy is the Church's service to God; it is God, infinite, eternal and almighty, who is to be given honour. In all ages and amongst all peoples it has always been accepted as obvious that for the glorification of God only the best is good enough, that to show homage to Him the very highest of which man is capable must be offered. Thus religion and its cult has always been that central point around which the arts have gathered: architecture, plastic and pictorial arts, and music.

The actual assembly of the faithful who are here and now united to worship God, made up of city-folk and country-folk, officials, businessmen and housewives, of parents and their children, can never provide, on their own, what advanced musical art can offer to God's honour. Often they will have to retire into passivity before it. They will not therefore refrain from praising God out of their own mouths also; but at the same time, where it is fitting, they will sometimes ask great music to offer in their name what they cannot themselves perform. And so ever and again all will resound in harmony with the splendour and beauty of the festally decorated house of God, with the richness of the vestments, the gold of the sacred vessels; and in God's house of all creation will join together to sound the praise of the Creator.

Against all this it could be argued that the Church of early times possessed the possibility of taking artistic song and musical instruments into its worship, and that it did not do this; more than this, that through the mouths of its most prominent men it constantly declined emphatically to have such accessories in its spiritual worship.

This shows us that they were unwilling to adopt forms which were current amongst the heathen cults. They did not want to

use the lyres, tympani, and symbols of Greek sacrifice, or the flutes of the Roman. They did not want to become confused with the cults of the gods or with the orgies of the mystery religions with their highly developed music. They had no stress the inner spiritual nature of their own worship in contrast to the external heathenish cults. A more serious consideration, however, is this: the early Church also declined to follow the example of Old Testament reference according to which the Word of God declared that God was supposed to be worshipped *in psalterio et cithara, in tympano et choro, in chordis et organo*. Even Chrysostom considered the instrumental music of Jewish worship to be but a concession to the weakness of the Jews, something to keep them back from worse things. And for a long time even vocal choirs were unheard of.

What should we think of the attitude of the early Church? Besides the contrast to heathendom there is another factor which must be considered. This was the extraordinary mistrust of the world of sense which arose, not from Christian revelation but from Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy which constituted the intellectual habitat of the early Fathers. For Plato, the body with its senses is but a prison in which the soul is confined during this earthly life. Consequently, the formation of the soul necessitates the rejection of this prison as much as possible. The faculties of sense must be suppressed and weakened, certainly they must not be cultivated. St. Augustine is still deprecating the fact that he finds pleasure in harmonious sound and that the words of the holy Scripture move him more deeply when they are sung than when merely spoken. Ambrose took a different view, and Augustine began, as he admits, to change his. Nevertheless the feeling persisted right up to the flowering of scholasticism in the 13th century. Not till then did that pessimistic outlook give way, and the philosophy of Aristotle propounded the principle that all spiritual life must follow the path of the sense, and that even sensuous passions are not evil but necessary, only requiring to be controlled and kept in due proportion.

The negative appraisal of musical art by the Fathers and their refusal to use it in worship need not be normative for us, quite apart from the fact that Church music of recent centuries, especially vocal music, is something quite different from the noisy instrumental music of the heathendom with its reliance mainly on rhythm.

Congregational singing will once again take its place in the

liturgy, but it will no longer reign alone. This arises from our conception of the liturgy. Congregational singing must be admitted because the liturgy is the *Church's* worship; but the potentialities of Church musical art must also be admitted because the liturgy is *God's* service. The question now is how to achieve the right balance. I would like to suggest a few lines of thought, confining myself to the heart of the liturgy, the celebration of the Mass.

On great feast-days congregational singing will not be absent, but Church music will predominate. On these festal occasions the great settings of the Ordinary of the Mass which have been written during recent centuries will always come into their own. The same sort of thing will take place apart from great festivals in representative Churches in large cities—in cathedrals and the like.

On ordinary Sundays in the average parish, congregational singing according to the prescribed rules, must always have preference. Certain latitude and compromise will, of course, always be possible. There remains the Proper, containing those chants which have more the character of decorative interludes and to execute which the declining Middle Ages created the *Schola cantorum*.

We know that many serious obstacles stand in the way of the polyphonic intonation of the Proper. The chants of the Proper change Sunday by Sunday and can indeed be used but once in the year. In the traditional Latin form their texts are not understood by the faithful, less understood than the text of the Ordinary. Very often the texts are not particularly opposite, bearing a particular reference neither to the rest of the Mass formula nor to the relevant part of the action of the Mass. In short, they need reforming. Several ways of reform are possible, all of which present tasks to the Church music of the future. One line of reform would consist in fixing more appropriate and more easily understood texts for each sequence of Sundays. A radical reform has already been suggested: that even in a Latin High Mass, the Latin chants of the Proper should be replaced with the spirit of the liturgy. And there seems to be no reason why such chants could not be adopted by church choirs just as they were adopted in their older Latin form by the *Schola cantorum*.

With regard to the Ordinary too, the solution can be envisaged in the average parish, whereby congregational singing of the choir would be combined just as a *sol* and choir have been combined

elsewhere, or in such a way that there is an alternation from verse to verse. Such a solution has already been tried—in St. Stephen's in Vienna for example. Only the people's part must remain genuine congregational singing.

Today moreover, congregational singing and Church music are in a position to draw much closer together than they could formerly. All can read, many can read music, and everyone can get a hold of a book. Singing is of a higher standard—at least it is more widespread than it used to be. Congregational singing is no longer felt to be something foreign to worship. Whereas in Pius X's time we were only speaking about Gregorian Chant in Latin, Pius XII speaks in *Mediator Dei* of the fostering of religious congregational singing without reservation, of appropriate hymns which the people should sing within the Mass. Congregational singing in Church has re-awakened. Even Church music will not shrink from recognizing the people's singing as her true, if plainer, sister.

# CAECILIA

*A Review of Catholic Church Music*

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