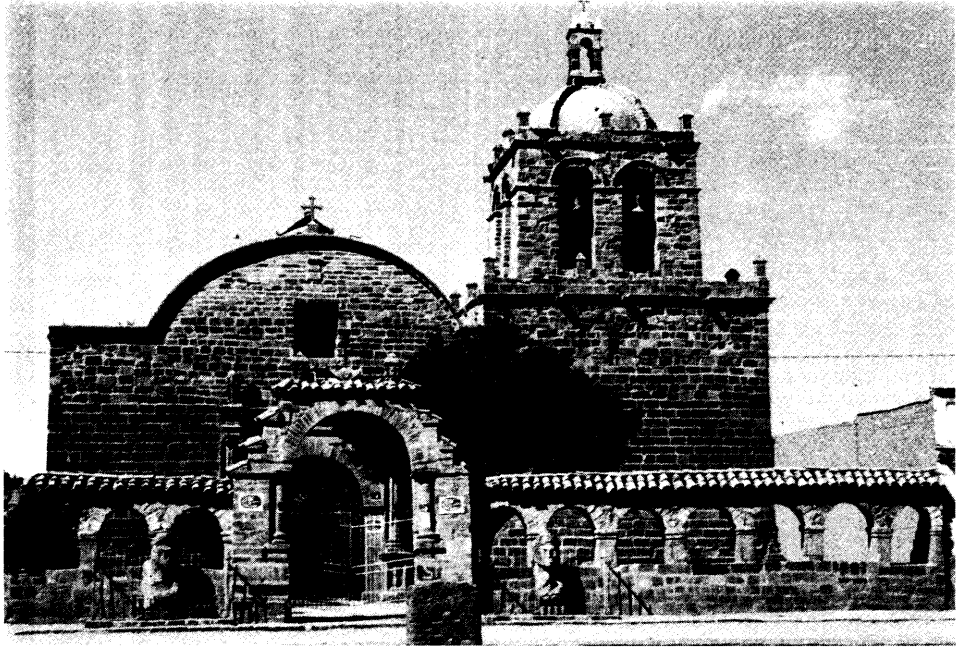

Church of Tiwanaku in Puerta del Sol, Bolivia

LITURGICAL MUSIC AND THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED

There are men and there are things; there are persons and there are objects. There are also principalities and powers; there are thrones and dominations. Theologians and moralists are familiar with virtues and vices; philosophers know qualities and modes of being. But what is *musica sacra*? What does "sacred" mean? A recent response claims that "liturgical theology" knows liturgical art to be "appropriate only to the degree that it functions in support of sacred liturgical signs" (meaning, in the case of liturgical music, the "communitarian sign" of the liturgy, i.e., "our oneness in the Lord"). A practical conclusion is drawn from this postulate: "Sacred music should only sustain the continuity of the voices during worship." If it does not do so, it is "inappropriate to the liturgy and is then not sacred." In a manner which evokes faded memories of the old Society of St. Gregory and its "lists" white and black, proponents of this view pinpoint a lack of analysis as the reason why the standards for judging music to be sacred "are only restrictive," and hence not useful as guides: "they help you selectively eliminate songs but do not show which to include.1

It is always helpful to begin formulating a reply on the basis of concrete facts, of phenomena, of what presents itself to our senses. Let us therefore try to "approach the things themselves" as they are given, and examine the way they constitute themselves in the consciousness and intentions of the perceiver.

Let us visit in mind the Church of Santa Maria della Rotunda in Rome, popularly known as the Pantheon. It is the summer of 1973. Seeking temporary respite from the glare of the midday sun, people wander in and out, deep in conversation but filled with curiosity. Not a few continue to smoke their cigarettes to the end, or to light up a new one. And when one of them is told: Please, no smoking here, because we are in a church, he replies in amazement, Is this a church? (The architectural form alone is, of course, not enough to answer the question convincingly.) And then, after a moment's pause, the final question: Even if it were a real church — why not smoke?

Let us move to Treptow, a suburb of East Berlin, in 1981. We are all admonished to extinguish our smoking materials at the entrance to the huge memorial park dedi-

cated to the fallen soldiers of the Red Army.

Or let us travel to Israel, very recently, and very discreetly but quite firmly. The same thing happens again. In the hotel restaurant, as American tourists at the next table take out their after-dinner cigarettes, someone says: No smoking, please! But why not? Here and now, of course, not for the sake of the place but because of the time. It is Friday evening and the Sabbath has begun.

In none of these cases does purposefulness or prevention play a part, as it would in a college lecture room or a hospital operating theatre. The danger of fire is not a factor in these examples, as it is during an airliner landing or take-off. These instances, finally, do not contain a general rejection of smoking, as though it were something to be forbidden in principle.

But in Rome, in Berlin and in Tel Aviv there was a common factor, namely the circumstance that in each case a limit or frontier was to be made evident and recalled to mind—a boundary line which distinguishes and separates a special place and a non-ordinary period of time from the arbitrary, run-of-the-mill "somewhere" or "anytime."

From everyone who crosses the threshold into this "other" area there is expected a type of behavior which differs from his otherwise normal conduct. Whoever enters a mosque or the walled enclosure of an Indian temple, must remove his shoes. And in the case of the Indian temple the limitations can be so strict that the non-Hindu will be forbidden to enter the innermost sanctuary. In Christian churches, gentlemen remove their hats, as they do before an open grave, or when the national anthem is sung. By contrast, the believing Jew covers his head, not only in the synagogue but wherever he prays. (If you go to visit the grave of Moses Maimonides at Tiberias and do not wear a cap or a hat, the custodian will deny you entrance.)

In cultic areas, in spaces reserved for worship, it is above all silence which prevails; loud calls and laughter at any rate are considered reprehensible. Tourists are denied entrance to the great basilicas of Rome if they are clothed in an all-too-unconcerned fashion. And at such temples one is accustomed to regard with mistrust the instruments of public curiosity: photography is forbidden, at least during divine services in many Christian churches. And the same is true in the temples of orthodox Hinduism. The Pueblo Indians of New Mexico are offended when camera-carrying tourists even approach the entrance to their underground cultic chambers.

Now, if a stranger, an outsider, a non-initiate were to ask what all these curious and often difficult rules of conduct were supposed to mean, he would probably hear, in spite of all the concrete differences in detail, the same basic answer in each case: the meaning of all this is simply to attest and express reverence and respect. Reverence for what? For something—in any event—which demands and deserves respect and veneration. And when we try to specify more precisely the exact nature of that which is worthy of veneration, then we encounter the difficulty of reducing the various replies to a common denominator. But the answers would nonetheless converge on a common indication of something which is (or should be) in some sense "sacred" to men, whether that be the "grim majesty of death," or the dignity of the fatherland, or the honor of fallen war heroes—or indeed the especially concentrated presence of the Divine—in fact of God Himself.

The conviction common to all of these replies is the existence, within the world as man experiences it, within the boundaries of time and space, certain pre-eminent places and periods of time which plainly stand forth above and beyond the level of everyday normality because they are of a special and exceptional dignity.

The selective de-limitation of something exceptionally worthy of veneration is the clear and original meaning of the apposite vocabulary still in use today. Hagios, for instance, the Greek word for "sacred," implies opposition to koinos (the "average,"

common, usual). And the piece of ground belonging to the gods, upon which the altar or the temple is built, is termed *to temenos*, that which has been cut off or "carved out" of the total property which otherwise belongs to the community. In Latin the verb *sancire* (the root of *sanctus* = sacred, holy) means to limit, circumscribe, draw a boundary around: for the ancient Romans, the term *sanctio* (sanction) originally denoted the delimitation of sacred places and their protection against transgression and profane contact.

Contemporary vernacular usage is of a piece with the classical roots. *Sacré* is that which belongs to an *ordre des choses séparés*; the OED says that one of the meanings of "sacred" is "set apart." The term "sacred," then, refers to a special dignity or preeminence which rises above the continuum of everyday normality, which is precisely "abnormal" and clearly marked off as distinct from the usual, the customary, the normal. And such dignity quite rightly demands from men special forms of respect, simply because certain empirically ascertainable objects, spaces, times and actions possess the special characteristic of being ordered to the divine level or sphere in a manner which exceeds the normal and the average. And it is on the basis of this exceptional ordination to the supra-human level, of this precisely uncommon and exceptional "fulness" or concentration of the divine Presence that we can comprehend the boundary or limit which divides and separates that which is "sacred" in this sense, from the "profane." "Profane" simply means that which is precisely "unexceptional," that which belongs to the realm of the normal, the average, the everyday; "profane" does not necessarily mean "unholy" (even though the specifically "unholy" does in fact exist, representing the acme of "profanity"). Thus we can say with a certain justification that all bread is "holy" (because created by God, nourishment of human life) or that every piece of earth is "consecrated ground," and so forth. Expressions such as these do not call into question the existence of a completely unique kind of "holy bread" or of "consecrated ground" in a literally incomparable sense of that word. And so we can agree with the sentence of Aquinas, confirmed by ethnology and the philosophy of religion as well as the theological interpretation of testaments both old and new. Something is sacred (*sacrum*) on the strength of its ordination toward cultic worship, *ad cultum divinum*.

The available evidence, when analyzed, allows us to conclude that if a special presence of the Divine is to be found anywhere in man's historical world, it is to be found in its most concentrated form in a sacred ritual action, and because of their relationship to this sacred action, persons, places, times and objects are also called "sacred."[4]

But what is an *actio praecellenter sacra*? It is simply the accomplishment of an action, a rite, performed by a community in a non-ordinary way.[5] Let us be very precise: we are speaking here of the celebration of the Eucharistic mysteries during which there occurs the *Exceptional par excellence*, the un-common and extraordinary in the absolute sense of those words—God's physical presence among men under the forms of bread and wine. The meaning of this divine Presence for man is precisely *rapi*—to be enraptured, carried up and away beyond the "here and now." And nothing could be more obvious to a man of faith than to act "differently" within such a circumscribed context, "differently" than he acts otherwise, on the tennis courts, for instance, or at the supermarket. One speaks a language which is obviously human but different; "special," somehow, in delivery, in style, in diction and grammar, and in vocabulary.

What then of the *musica sacra* which forms an integral part of this *actio praecellenter sacra*? What must its distinctive characteristics be? Will it sound, for example, like ordinary, everyday pop music to which more or less "pious" texts have been joined? Will it sound like common, everyday entertainment music? like a more or

less inconspicuous background accompaniment for toothpaste commercials? Romano Guardini has reminded us that the foundation of any liturgical formation or education is the ancient truth that the soul informs the body: *anima forma corporis*.[7] Comprehension of this truth is the key which unlocks the world of the Sacred, for it enables us to grasp what is meant by a symbol. It is not necessary to be a Christian in order to understand what is meant by a "sign," but he who does not know what a "sign" is, cannot comprehend a sacrament.

Is it rash to ask whether one of the reasons for the decline of the Sacred is the fact that the Christian "sacred myth" (i.e. the gospels) is being weakened, doubted and attacked? For a long time, we have been told that the evidence of the new testament must be reconsidered in light of the new "historical sense." Indeed, the evidential value of the bible as a whole is to be examined anew, it is claimed, "in light of that analytical criticism which has no parallel for acuteness of investigation, carefulness of method, and completeness of apparatus, since the days of our blessed Lord's life on earth" (Ch. Gore). Now, if this fresh study results in disbelief in the "sacred tale," it follows that the Christian "sacred object" will no longer seem so, and that the God-Man Jesus Christ is neither mediator nor object of the sacrum. And when the believer is no longer conscious of a connexion between the human world and a higher realm, where everything refers to everything else and many levels are interrelated in a meaningful way which links man's microcosm to the macrocosm of the Transcendent, then it should come as no surprise if in a desacralized world, the abandoned altars eventually become the dwelling of demons (E. Junger).

The analysis can be taken a step further. When the divinity of Jesus Christ was denied by rationalist critics, it did not take long for the Eucharist to come under fire. In 1891, Ad. Harnack announced that at the Last Supper the Savior was primarily interested in the meal itself: it was the meal that Jesus blessed, and in so doing He taught His followers to sanctify the most important act of physical life. He also promised to be with them in the future, at every meal which they would henceforth share in remembrance of Him. Thus Harnack, a century ago.

And so it seems like old wine in New Age wine skins when tired voices, re-echoing the past, continue to entice the unsuspecting down the same sorry path which leads from the main line to the old line to the sideline. Thus the authors of a recent and widely hailed catechism explicitly call upon the Church to abandon the term "sacrifice" as a specification of the content of the Eucharistic celebration. In its place, the aspect of "meal" or "banquet" is to be emphasized. "The determining structure is that of the meal." The Eucharistic Sacrifice is thus to be understood as a meal: "In the Eucharist the memory of Christ's suffering is celebrated in the form of a meal....It is the basic form of the Eucharistic sacrifice" (Schmaus).

Divergence of views regarding the relation between the dogmatic and liturgical levels of the question has quite rightly been called the "central problem" of the *accomodata renovatio in liturgicis* (Joseph Ratzinger). Why has Christian art always pictured the Last Supper as a tragic event and not a joyous repast? Is it not true that "sacrifice" and "meal" are two concepts which cannot be equated with each other? Are they not in fact essentially (and not just externally) contrary human psychological processes?

The essence of a sacrifice is the freedom of total giving made possible through self-denial: *oblatus est quia ipse voluit* (Is. 53:7). Every sacrifice, including Holy Mass insofar as it is identical with the sacrifice of Calvary, necessarily implies merit and consequently moral freedom as necessary pre-condition of any merit, hence also logically presupposing suffering or self-denial as the necessary condition of freedom. In other words, meritoriousness is the necessary consequence, freedom an essential element, and suffering or self-denial the necessary pre-supposition of sacrifice. No

sacrifice is possible without suffering or self-denial, hence no Sacrifice of the Mass without the sacramental re-presentation of suffering. And precisely here lies the fundamental contradiction between sacrifice and meal: in the participants, they imply—nay, require!—psychological states of mind which are mutually exclusive.

It would mean delivering dogs to Bautzen if one were to attempt to explain the role of a meal as source of joy in holy writ. Suffice it to recall the fact that in the preaching of Jesus, the banquet or meal is a preferred symbol for the joys and glories of heaven. There is in fact an inseparable link between meal and joy, between eating and enjoyment, between *usus cibi et potus* and *delectatio*. There is no meal or banquet without enjoyment, without a delectatio of the senses.

Some, therefore, claim that since the Eucharist is a memorial not only of the Savior's death but also of His resurrection, it makes us share in the triumphant life of the risen Lord and hence implies an atmosphere of joy. But it is quite clear that the "memorial" concentrates primarily and directly on the last supper and on the passion, of which the Eucharist is one moment.[10]

The sacrament of the Eucharist is received and eaten because food and drink better symbolize the specific effects of the grace of this sacrament. The Eucharist is both sacrifice (insofar as it is offered) and sacrament (insofar as it is received).[11] The Church offers up the Mass, for it is a sacrifice; but holy Communion is a food, a gift, a privilege, something not offered but enjoyed. The real distinction between sacrifice and sacrament is to be sought in the contrary aspects of suffering and joy, though in a sacrifice, suffering plays a different role than does joy in the case of a meal. Suffering is a necessary pre-condition of the sacrifice, whereas joy is a necessary consequence of a meal. To summarize: a meal as meal cannot be a sacrifice, and a sacrifice as sacrifice cannot be a meal. To represent one "in the form of" the other is to present a tragedy "in the form of" a comedy, or to depict a circle "in the form of" a square. In liturgico-musical terms: if holy Mass is indeed a sacrifice, an *actio praecellenter sacra*, then one of its integral and necessary parts will be a music which is also *sacra*. But if a fraternal meal is actually being celebrated, then very different music will be appropriate. . . a "polka Mass," for instance.

During the *ad limina* visit of the Brazilian bishops of their pastoral region Sul-I, on March 20, 1990, Pope John Paul II made these significant remarks:

> Legitimate and necessary concern for current realities in the concrete lives of people cannot make us forget the true nature of the liturgical actions. It is clear that the Mass is not the time to "celebrate" human dignity or purely terrestrial claims or hopes. It is rather the sacrifice which renders Christ really present in the sacrament.

This concise statement of Catholic belief really requires no further comment. The competent choirmaster, who in recent decades has often enough felt the lashes of Rehoboam, need only draw the logical conclusions in his daily liturgico-musical practice.

But this, you say, is one step removed from reality. If that be so in truth, then it may be that all of us must steel ourselves to persevere among the "sole retrievers of an ancient prudence." Those whose names are writ large, in golden letters, in the calendar of saints of the new age, in fact resemble nothing more closely than the tired knight who sees a recognition of his steed and a guarantee of his own knightly existence in the fact that modern technologies of energy are still often measured in...horse-power.

It is understandable that today, both the competent choirmaster and the legitimate liturgist often feel like Benito Cereno, like one who finds himself, according to Herman Melville's late novella, in the situation of that unlucky captain whom the guileless and the good-natured assume to be the master of a pirate vessel. In reality,

however, Benito Cereno was a hostage in danger of death; his veiled hints and discreet indications were not understood by his well-meaning visitor, who was instead strengthened in his mistrust. Has Benito Cereno perhaps become in fact a symbol for the situation of many a man in the midst of an *ecclesia in mundo hujus temporis* ruled by increasingly neoteric tendencies and antilatreutic orientations? *Nostra res agitur*! It behooves us to work while the light lasts, so that the *Ecclesia orans* will not have to cross the threshold of the third millenium with empty hands and ears ringing to the faint echoes of the ancient laughter of Gelimer, King of the Vandals. Let us therefore continue to do the best things in the worst times, and to hope them in the most calamitous. *In mundo pressuram habebitis, sed confidite, ego vici mundum.* In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

REVEREND ROBERT A. SKERIS

NOTES

1. R. Dobbs, letter to the editor of *Homiletic & Pastoral Review,* 92/9 (June 1992) 3.
2. J. Pieper, *Entsakralisierung*? (Zurich 1970) 7/32. The succeeding paragraphs are indebted to Pieper's analysis.
3. *Sum. Theol.* II-IIae, q. 99, a. 1.
4. *Ordo Missae,* editio typica: Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani (Citta del Vaticano 1969) 60, #256 = sacras aedes; 62, #260 = locum sacrum; 65, #280 = sacras actiones; 67, #289 = vasa sacra; 68, #297 = cultu sacro, sacrae vestes, etc. See also *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* art. 7 (actio praecellenter sacra).
5. See B. Droste, "Celebrare" in *The Language of the Roman Liturgy,* (Munchen 1963) 196.
6. See e.g. the Christmas preface (*in invisibilium amorem rapiamur*) which anciently served as the preface par excellence of the Blessed Sacrament.
7. See R. Guardini, *Der Kultakt und die gegenwartige Aufgabe der Liturgie: Liturgie und liturgische Bildung,* (Wurzburg 1966) 38 f.
8. A. Harnack, *Brod und Wasser: die eucharistische Elemente bei Justin* (Leipzig 1891). See the discussion of this and other theories by A. Piolanti (tr. L. Penzo), *The Holy Eucharist* (New York 1961) 17/22, 97/8 on the erroneous view that sacrifice is only a meal taken in common by a group of men for the purpose of strengthening their social and religious bonds. In fact, "the Eucharistic table sunders man from sin and draws him close to God by sanctifying—which is to say by sacrificing—him."
9. *Sum. Theol.* II-IIae, q. 141, a. 5.
10. Thus R. Amerio, *Iota unum. Studio delle variazioni della Chiesa cattolica nel secolo XX* (Milano 1986) 502 and note 11.
11. *Sum. Theol.* III, q. 79, a. 5.

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W. H. Mallock, *Doctrine and Doctrinal Disruption* (London 1908) 93/111, here 98.
J. Ratzinger (tr. G. Harrison), *The Feast of Faith* (San Francisco 1986) 33/60, here 36.
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