



Mont St. Michel, France

CONCERTS IN CHURCHES

(The following declaration of the Congregation for Divine Worship was sent to the presidents of the national conferences of bishops and through them to commissions on liturgy and sacred art. It has protocol number 1251/87, and is dated November 5, 1987.)

I. MUSIC IN CHURCHES OTHER THAN DURING LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

1. The interest shown in music is one of the marks of contemporary culture. The ease with which it is possible to listen at home to classical works, by means of radio, records, cassettes and television, has in no way diminished the pleasure of attending live concerts, but on the contrary has actually enhanced it. This is encouraging, because music and song contribute to elevating the human spirit.

The increase in the number of concerts in general has in some countries given rise to a more frequent use of churches for such events. Various reasons are given for this: local needs, where for example it is not easy to find suitable places; acoustical considerations, for which churches are often ideal; aesthetic reasons of fittingness, that is to present the works in the setting for which they were originally written; purely practical reasons, for example facilities for organ recitals: in a word churches are considered to be in many ways apt places for holding a concert.

CONCERTS

2. Alongside this contemporary development a new situation has arisen in the Church.

The *Scholae cantorum* have not had frequent occasion to execute their traditional repertory of sacred polyphonic music within the context of a liturgical celebration.

For this reason, the initiative has been taken to perform this sacred music in church in the form of a concert. The same has happened with Gregorian chant, which has come to form part of concert programmes both inside and outside the church.

Another important factor emerges from the so-called "spiritual concerts," so termed because the music performed in them can be considered as religious, because of the theme chosen, or on account of the nature of the texts set to music, or because of the venue for the performance.

Such events are in some cases accompanied by readings, prayers and moments of silence. Given such features they can almost be compared to a "devotional exercise."

3. The increased numbers of concerts held in churches has given rise to doubts in the minds of pastors and rectors of churches as to the extent to which such events are really necessary.

A general opening of churches for concerts could give rise to complaints by a number of the faithful, yet on the other hand an outright refusal could lead to some misunderstanding.

Firstly, it is necessary to consider the significance and purpose of a Christian church. For this, the Congregation for Divine Worship considers it opportune to propose to the episcopal conferences, and in so far as it concerns them, to the national commissions of liturgy and music, some observations and interpretations for the canonical norms concerning the use of churches for various kinds of music: music and song, music of religious inspiration and music of non-religious character.

4. At this juncture it is necessary to re-read recent documents which treat of the subject, in particular the constitution on the liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the instruction *Musicam sacram* of March 5, 1967, the instruction *Liturgicae instaurationes* of September 5, 1970, in addition to the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law, can. 1210, 1213 and 1222.

In this present letter the primary concern is with musical performances outside of the celebration of the liturgy.

The Congregation for Divine Worship wishes in this way to help individual bishops to make valid pastoral decisions, bearing in mind the socio-cultural situation of the area.

II. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The character and purpose of churches

5. According to tradition as expressed in the rite for the dedication of a church and altar, churches are primarily places where the people of God gather, and are "made one as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one, and are the Church, the temple of God built with living stones, in which the Father is worshiped in spirit and in truth." Rightly so, from ancient times the name "church" has been extended to the building in which the Christian community unites to hear the word of God, to pray together, to receive the sacraments, to celebrate the Eucharist and to prolong its celebration in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (Cf. Order of the Dedication of a Church, ch. II, 1).

Churches, however, cannot be considered simply as public places for any kind of meeting. They are sacred places, that is, "set apart" in a permanent way for divine worship by their dedication and blessing.

As visible constructions, churches are signs of the pilgrim Church on earth; they are images that proclaim the heavenly Jerusalem, places in which are actualized the

mystery of the communion between man and God. Both in urban areas and in the countryside, the church remains the house of God, and the sign of His dwelling among men. It remains a sacred place, even when no liturgical celebration is taking place.

In a society disturbed by noise, especially in the big cities, churches are also an oasis where men gather, in silence and in prayer, to seek peace of soul and the light of faith.

That will only be possible in so far as churches maintain their specific identity. When churches are used for ends other than those for which they were built, their role as a sign of the Christian mystery is put at risk, with more or less serious harm to the teaching of the faith and to the sensitivity of the People of God, according to the Lord's words: "My house is a house of prayer" (Lk 19, 46).

Importance of Sacred Music

6. Sacred music, whether vocal or instrumental, is of importance. Music is sacred "in so far as it is composed for the celebration of divine worship and possesses integrity of form" (*Musicam sacram* n. 4a). The Church considers it a "treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art," recognizing that it has a "ministerial function in the service of the Lord" (Cf. SC n. 112); and recommending that it be "preserved and fostered with great care" (SC n. 114).

Any performance of sacred music which takes place during a celebration, should be fully in harmony with that celebration. This often means that musical compositions which date from a period when the active participation of the faithful was not emphasized as the source of the authentic Christian spirit (SC n. 14; Pius X *Tra le sollecitudini*) are no longer to be considered suitable for inclusion within liturgical celebrations.

Analogous changes of perception and awareness have occurred in other areas involving the artistic aspect of divine worship: for example, the sanctuary has been restuctured, with the president's chair, the ambo and the altar *versus populum*. Such changes have not been made in a spirit of disregard for the past, but have been deemed necessary in the pursuit of an end of greater importance, namely the active participation of the faithful. The limitation which such changes impose on certain musical works can be overcome by arranging for their performance outside the context of liturgical celebration in a concert of sacred music.

Organ

7. The performance of purely instrumental pieces on the organ during liturgical celebrations today is limited. In the past the organ took the place of the active participation of the faithful, and reduced the people to the role of "silent and inert spectators" of the celebration (Pius XI, *Divini cultus*, n. 9).

It is legitimate for the organ to accompany and sustain the singing either of the assembly or the choir within the celebration. On the other hand, the organ must never be used to accompany the prayers or chants of the celebrant nor the readings proclaimed by the reader or the deacon.

In accordance with tradition, the organ should remain silent during penitential seasons (Lent and Holy Week), during Advent and the liturgy for the dead. When, however, there is real pastoral need, the organ can be used to support the singing.

It is fitting that the organ be played before and after a celebration as a preparation and conclusion of the celebration.

It is of considerable importance that in all churches, and especially those of some importance, there should be trained musicians and instruments of good quality. Care should be given to the maintenance of organs and respect shown towards their historical character both in form and tone.

III. PRACTICAL DIRECTIVES

8. The regulation of the use of churches is stipulated by canon 1210 of the Code of Canon Law:

“In a sacred place only those things are to be permitted which serve to exercise or promote worship, piety and religion. Anything out of harmony with the holiness of the place is forbidden. The Ordinary may, however, for individual cases, permit other uses, provided they are not contrary to the sacred character of the place.”

The principle that the use of the church must not offend the sacredness of the place determines the criteria by which the doors of a church may be opened to a concert of sacred or religious music, as also the concomitant exclusion of every other type of music. The most beautiful symphonic music, for example, is not in itself of religious character. The definition of sacred or religious music depends explicitly on the original intended use of the musical pieces or songs, and likewise on their content. It is not legitimate to provide for the execution in the church of music which is not of religious inspiration and which was composed with a view to performance in a certain precise secular context, irrespective of whether the music would be judged classical or contemporary, of high quality or of a popular nature. On the other hand, such performances would not respect the sacred character of the church, and on the other, would result in the music being performed in an unfitting context.

It pertains to the ecclesiastical authority to exercise without constraint its governance of sacred places (Cf. canon 1213), and hence to regulate the use of churches in such a way as to safeguard their sacred character.

9. Sacred music, that is to say music which was composed for the liturgy, but which for various reasons can no longer be performed during a liturgical celebration, and religious music, that is to say music inspired by the text of sacred scripture or the liturgy and which has reference to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to the saints or to the Church, may both find a place in the church building, but outside liturgical celebration. The playing of the organ or other musical performance, whether vocal or instrumental, may: “serve to promote piety or religion.” In particular they may:

- a. prepare for the major liturgical feasts, or lend to these a more festive character beyond the moment of actual celebration;
- b. bring out the particular character of the different liturgical seasons;
- c. create in churches a setting of beauty conducive to meditation, so as to arouse even in those who are distant from the Church an openness to spiritual values;
- d. create a context which favors and makes accessible the proclamation of God’s word, as for example, a sustained reading of the gospel;
- e. keep alive the treasures of church music which must not be lost; musical pieces and songs composed for the liturgy but which cannot in any way be conveniently incorporated into liturgical celebrations in modern times; spiritual music, such as oratorios and religious cantatas which can still serve as vehicles for spiritual communication;
- f. assist visitors and tourists to grasp more fully the sacred character of a church, by means of organ concerts at prearranged times.

10. When the proposal is made that there should be a concert in a church, the Ordinary is to grant the permission *per modum actus*. These concerts should be occasional events. This excludes permission for a series of concerts, for example in the case of a festival or a cycle of concerts.

When the Ordinary considers it to be necessary, he can, in the conditions foreseen in the Code of Canon Law (can. 1222, para. 2) designate a church that is no longer used for divine service, to be an “auditorium” for the performance of sacred or religious music, and also of music not specifically religious but in keeping with the character of the place.

In this task the bishop should be assisted by the diocesan commission for liturgy and sacred music.

In order that the sacred character of a church be conserved in the matter of concerts, the Ordinary can specify that:

a. Requests are to be made in writing, in good time, indicating the date and time of the proposed concert, the programme giving the works and the names of the composers.

b. After having received the authorization of the Ordinary, the rectors and parish priests of the churches should arrange details with the choir and orchestra so that the requisite norms are observed.

c. Entrance to the church must be without payment and open to all.

d. The performers and the audience must be dressed in a manner which is fitting to the sacred character of the place.

e. The musicians and the singers should not be placed in the sanctuary. The greatest respect is to be shown to the altar, the president's chair and the ambo.

f. The Blessed Sacrament should be, as far as possible, reserved in a side chapel or in another safe and suitably adorned place (Cf. C.I.C., can 938, par. 4).

g. The concert should be presented or introduced not only with historical or technical details, but also in a way that fosters a deeper understanding and an interior participation on the part of the listeners.

h. The organizer of the concert will declare in writing that he accepts legal responsibility for expenses involved, for leaving the church in order and for any possible damage incurred.

11. The above practical directives should be of assistance to the bishops and rectors of churches in their pastoral responsibility to maintain the sacred character of their churches, designed for sacred celebrations, prayer and silence.

Such indications should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in the art of music.

The treasury of sacred music is a witness to the way in which the Christian faith promotes culture.

By underlining the true value of sacred or religious music, Christian musicians and members of *scholae cantorum* should feel that they are being encouraged to continue this tradition and to keep it alive for the service of the faith, as expressed by the Second Vatican Council in its message to artists:

"Do not hesitate to put your talent at the service of the divine truth. The world in which we live has need of beauty in order not to lose hope. Beauty, like truth, fills the heart with joy. And this, thanks to your hands" (Cf. Second Vatican Council, Message to Artists, December 8, 1965).

Rome, November 5, 1987

Paul Augustine Card. Mayer, O.S.B.

Prefect

Virgilio Noe

Tit. Archbp. of Voncaria

Secretary

FROM THE EDITORS

Concerts in Church

Without doubt, most parish priests and musicians will be happy for the recent declaration of the Congregation for Divine Worship, entitled "Concerts in Churches," dated November 5, 1987. Surely everything must be done to preserve the sacred character of a church as God's house and the very gate of heaven. The disappearance of the practice of maintaining silence in church has worked against the holiness of the place; construction of new churches and renovation of older buildings in a style that is secular has also militated against a sacred atmosphere. But more than anything else has been the giving over of the church to secular activities: meetings, political assemblies, and concerts of secular music. The churches in many cases have become meeting halls and concert auditoriums.

The Holy See has now moved to stop this trend and to restore an atmosphere of holiness to buildings that are dedicated to the worship and the service of God. All else must be excluded. This is, of course, nothing new; the new Code of Canon Law only repeats what has long been the law. Canon 1210 is the basis for the more detailed rules given in the recent document, which is printed in its entirety in this issue of *Sacred Music*.

In reading the document, however, one cannot help but wonder about some other activities that destroy the holiness of our churches. Not least is the music performed, not at concerts, but within the liturgy itself, music which is not sacred nor is it art. So much of the output of instrumental and vocal combos that one experiences so frequently in parish liturgies today does more to secularize the church than most concert programs. Most organ and orchestra concerts in church at least feature good music even though not always sacred. While making an effort to control concert performances, authorities should exercise more control of the liturgical performances so widely used today.

Further, the document moves from its subject—concerts in churches—to comment on matters not directly concerned with the issue at hand. In paragraph 6, it says: "musical compositions which date from a period when the active participation of the faithful was not emphasized as the source of the authentic Christian spirit are no longer to be considered suitable for inclusion within liturgical celebrations." These, whatever they might be, are allowed for sacred concerts in church. But the question that arises is what is meant by the phrase, "a period when the active participation of the faithful was not emphasized." Most Gregorian chant was sung almost exclusively by monastic choirs. The music of Palestrina was written for sixteenth century polyphonic choirs. And yet both those styles have continuously been upheld by the popes for use and imitation as the proper music for liturgical celebrations. This sentence is liable to cause problems if it is picked up by those who have tried so hard to destroy the art of sacred music, those who in the twenty years since the Second Vatican Council have nearly succeeded by disbanding choirs and forbidding the use of Latin, all in the name of participation.

The document gives good guidelines for regulating the use of churches for concerts, which is its purpose. The extra comments, such as the one quoted above, are not on the subject and may stir up false ideas about true participation. Each age did indeed participate in the liturgy; former eras cannot be judged by our standards of the means to participate. Indeed, differences even in today's world bring about the variety that is witnessed in today's liturgies. Palestrina and the renaissance polyphonists and certainly the Gregorian repertory, when listened to within a liturgical

setting, can bring about a deep participation in the congregation through listening. (Cf. article on participation in this issue of *Sacred Music*.)

Serious attention and obedience must be given to this declaration from Rome. It can bring about nothing but an improvement in making our churches the holy places that they should be. As musicians we have an important role through music to promote the sacred.

R.J.S.

The Demise of the Devotional

Much has been said about the loss of liturgical sense of the sacred, but little has been said of the pivotal personage mainly responsible for this unfortunate development, the priest celebrant. It is he who sets the mood knowingly or unknowingly, creates the atmosphere deliberately or otherwise, whenever Mass is celebrated. The manner in which he says Mass is a transparent index as to his convictions concerning himself first of all, but also concerning his spiritual life and being, concerning his understanding of the priesthood, and lastly, of the awesome act he is performing. Consciously or unconsciously, he betrays his piety or lack thereof, his dedication or lack thereof, his culture and education or lack thereof, a sensitivity which will not allow him to impose or intrude his own personality upon the ritual he is enacting, that he himself is nothing, but what he does is ineffable. The word one searches for and finally finds is the word "objectivity."

The preconiliar way of enacting the Mass was objective in the sense that it permitted little display of the individual. Priests were tall or short, stout or thin, but when they put on the almost ubiquitous fiddleback vestment, they all were simply priests. The fiddleback was the great leveler of individuality. And when the fiddleback mounted the altar steps the congregation knew subconsciously that, like Moses, he was going up to talk to God and that was what they were paying him for. The mystique of the Latin contributed to objectivity, uniformity. Even if he wanted to, in those far off times, there was little the priest could do to deprive the Mass of its objective sacredness. But then things got turned around, not just the altars, but the priests themselves, degenerating as they did into a generation of thespians, and very poor ones at that, becoming actors without being trained in the subtleties of acting, in the restraint, nuances and understatements which are the actors' tool of trade. The anonymous fiddleback was traded off for something closely resembling a horse blanket, the ample folds of which encourage wildly flaying gesticulation and other theatricities. "Look at me in my horse blanket; am I not wonderful to behold?" The congregation found themselves eye ball to eye ball with this hirsute anomaly no longer an avenue to the deity but an obstacle thereunto. Their sensibilities devastated, they took off, carrying their offertory envelopes with them.

We priests could take a cue from the apostles, the founders of our ancient faith. Although they received their priesthood directly from the dear Lord Himself, they were largely a faceless, anonymous group. We know nothing of most of them except that they preached the gospel and died because they did so. Liturgical anonymity and objectivity are achieved and can be restored by faithful observance of the rules and rubrics. Do it the way the book says and you have a holy Mass. The rules and rubrics leave little leeway for adlibbing, interpolation, innovation, intrusion of the "imaginative" individual.

Meanwhile the side-shows go on and a shallow faith becomes shallower still.

The characteristic of objectivity applies equally to that integral liturgical action which is the proclamation of the word. The temptation is always there for the preacher to insinuate himself as orator or comedian or rhetorician, the turner of the artful, clever phrase. He must learn to obscure himself in the objective reality and



Saint Michael conquering the Dragon. Tympanum of the church of St.-Michael d'Etraignes, Angoulême. c. 1140.

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FROM THE EDITORS

- Concerts in Church 3
The Demise of the Devotional 4
Latin and the Novus Ordo 5

PARTICIPATION

- Monsignor Richard J. Schuler* 7

GREGORIAN SEMIOLOGY: THE NEW CHANT. PART III

- Robert M. Fowells* 11

CONCERTS IN CHURCHES

- Declaration of the Congregation for Divine Worship* 17

EDWARD M. CONNOR (1919-1987)

- Catherine M. Dower* 22

ORGAN RESOURCE LIST 23

REVIEWS 26

NEWS 29

EDITORIAL NOTES 30

CONTRIBUTORS 30

INDEX TO VOLUME 114 31