EDITORIALS

THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH MUSIC

Almost sixty years ago, Pius X said of sacred music that it must be *true art*. Of all the arts, it is an integral part of the liturgy and participates in the same general purpose of the liturgy: the glory of God, and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. Its own proper end is to make the liturgical text more meaningful, thus to move the faithful to devotion, the better to dispose them to receive the fruits of grace from the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. But it must be true art. For, says Saint Pius, "in no other way can it affect the minds of the hearers in the manner which the church intends in admitting into her liturgy the art of sound."

A musical culture arose out of the liturgy as mountain flowers spring out of the snow. Pius XII describes its progress and fulfillment: "With the favour, and under the auspices of the church . . . sacred music has gone a long way over the course of the centuries. In this journey . . . it has gradually progressed from the simple and ingenious Gregorian modes to great and magnificent works of art. To these works, not only the human voice, but also the organ and other musical instruments, add dignity, majesty and a prodigious richness. The progress of this musical art shows how sincerely the church has desired to render divine worship ever more splendid and pleasing to the Christian people."

There is today a considerable body which challenges the art principle of the liturgy, and it is felt in some quarters that liturgical music is at a cross-roads, if not, indeed, altogether on the block. For many, music is no longer music by definition. The official attitude of the American Liturgical Conference, for example, is this: "The Liturgical Movement is not 'arty', it is rather almost brutally practical in its view of the arts and aesthetic values." A prominent prelate, who declared oddly enough that the 1958 Instruction of Pius XII had put an end to the liturgical movement, has recently said that the parish without a choir is fortunate indeed. In some areas, the services of competent church musicians are being dispensed with as inconsequential to the carrying out of the latest instructions. There are "Parish Kyriales" which omit so trenchant a melody as that of the Requiem Gradual (it is the same melody as the Easter Gradual). And it is not uncommon to hear, from teachers with more enthusiasm than sense, that it is not important whether the children can sing, as long as they do. It is all a little like the redoubtable Florence Jenkins observing of her critics: "They may say that I *can't* sing, but they can't say that I *didn't*." Such attitudes have little in common with the "active participation" first mentioned by

Pius X in the introduction to his *Motu Proprio*. And they have nothing at all to do with history.

It is generally true to say that music first entered the service of the liturgy in the area of the proper or changeable parts of the mass rather than the ordinary, and that in either case it was not a time when, as the old wives' tale goes, "the people sang," but more probably a time when the clergy, soloists, and the schola sang. In the early church the order of Cantor ranked with that of Lector, and for many years the title "Lector" included both offices. This music made its entrance by way of psalmody, a bequest of the Jewish Church. We are here concerned chiefly with the mass, where the readings of the scriptures and the celebrant's prayers did not leave much time for singing. During the communion of the faithful, however, psalm 33 was sung, on account of the words in verse 9: "*Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus:*" And Tertullian mentions the psalmody between the Lessons and the sermon — today's Gradual. The execution of the psalmody in the earliest Christian times was almost exclusively entrusted to a single person. (The psalmodic solo is again a copy of the practise of the synagogue.) As with the *jubilus* of the Allelulia, music took over when words failed, and the task of the singer assumed virtuoso proportions. The earliest mass music, even before the fourth century, partook of the ornate melismas with which we are familiar today, and a good two centuries before the time of Gregory the Great, Scholae of boys were formed to exemplify its execution. Such parts as the people sang were purely responsorial in character.

By the ninth century, all the musical elements of the mass as we know it are present, with the possible exception of the Credo, which was an import from the East. But the primacy of the propers remains: Around them developed the special significance of the celebration of the Mysteries. They were ever-changing, and never omitted. The oldest extant choir books are therefore collections of the propria, though, curiously, it was eventually the ordinary that came to be known as the *Missa*. In every instance, the Introit, Gradual-Tract and Alleluia, Offertory and Communion were melismatic in character. Of the common parts, the Kyrie was a kind of Litany, carried over from the processions to the station churches. The Gloria was recited in Greek by the clergy in the sanctuary. The Sanctus was but an extenuation of the Priest's preface, the melodic feature of which is still apparent in the Requiem Mass. The Agnus Dei suggested itself as something appropriate to communion time, and was probably taken from the Greek Gloria, for it was unknown in the early western church, witness its omission in the Easter Vigil service. The first Roman ordo assigned it to the schola.

Now it is true that by about this time — the ninth century — this secondary and sometimes partially omitted part of the musical service was sung by the people. This was certainly the case in Gaul, and to a lesser extent in Rome. What is noteworthy is that it was syllabic recitative of the simplest sort. Father Jungman has concluded that it was probably not singing at all, but something akin to a well modulated dialogue mass. But as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the schola had taken over the ordinaries. *And the crux of the problem of church music is not so much that the schola took over, but that the mass melodies which have come down to us were composed for the schola, and not the congregation.* So that what is true of the gigantic ordinaries composed by the renaissance polyphonists is also true, even though the extent by not as great, of the Kyriale. A long time ago, Peter Wagner wistfully dreamed of the treasures of polyphonic propria which were never written (although there are more than he could have known of) because of the constant attention to the larger forms of the ordinary.

Before venturing a solution to the problem, it should be remarked that the new rash of so-called "people's masses", most of them maudlin, is no answer at all. For they too can serve but a select group of people (likely less than 50%) who can carry a given tune in a given key. Neither is the debated matter of the use of the vernacular apropos here, simply because the question solves no musical problem, when one is speaking in terms of what people can sing. Nor should we especially hanker after an English equivalent of the German "Sung Mass", for presently this reduces the solemn services to hymn-singing during mass. That much said, one might make the following proposals:

1. For regular fare, when participation by all the faithful is desired, why not settle for a kind of choric recitation of the ordinary? Mediant inflections and cadences should be reduced to an absolute minimum, if they be used at all. God knows we have settled for just such renditions of the historically musical propers!

2. The musical tradition of the ordinary, now nearly a thousand years old, would still have its place, as the encyclicals suggest, on particularly solemn occasions, or in particular churches. The principle of edification (and participation) by listening need not be discarded. There ought to be places where people go to hear polyphony as they go to monasteries to hear chant.

3. The propers, our primary musical tradition, must be the task of a schola equal to the performance of the chant and polyphonic treasures which comprise this heritage. One makes no defense of the mediocre parish choir, but that is not to wink at mediocrity multiplied a thousandfold in the name of congregational participation.

Francis Schmitt

CAECILIA

A Review of Catholic Church Music

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