
CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE PLACE OF MUSIC IN THE LITURGY

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Abstract

Music's role in heightening the degree of man's psycho-spiritual experience in worship has been found indispensable, undeniable and inalienable. Little wonder various religions like Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity and even traditional religions have been known to always engage its services during worship sessions. Since man has found himself capable of music-making and singing precisely, it becomes an irresistible practice for him to express and engage this activity in his worship of his maker for his own supreme spiritual fulfillment and religious contentment, since his Life finds rest and peace only in praising his God. As a result of this, the place and role of music, even in the Catholic Liturgy and other Christian churches has been appreciated and sustained even in the old law to the beginning of Christianity till today.

Keywords: Music, Sacred Liturgy or Liturgical celebration

Introduction

The relevance or the roles of music, as a more lively cum solemn accompanying mode of worship in the liturgical celebration, has ever been appreciated since the beginning of Christianity, and even before it. As an inherently musical being, natural religious instinct irresistibly urges man to honour, and worship God by means of music, as well as by the other arts in order to heighten his religious experience and encounter.

A cursory look into some scriptural texts (Ex 15:1, Judges 5, Amos 6:5, Ezra 12: 5, Lk 1:46-55) are evidence of places and times, the Israelites or God's children, and worshippers had adorned their worship through music or songs of praises. From the dawn of Christianity into the middle ages, Carolingian era, scholastics era, through the medieval, baroque which all, liturgically pervaded the Vatican I council, are replete with wonderful contributions of beautiful and solemn chants, to grace the liturgical worship.

In the 4th century, it was St. Augustine that clearly defined the relationship between good solemn music that glorifies God, and edifies man, as prayer. Thus an age-long aphorism, “*Qui bene cantat, bis orat*”, remains credited to him. Therefore, music and indeed beautiful well-rendered solemn music during the liturgical celebration has their roles and the church has always emphasized the preservation of its place in worship, through competent hands and direction. It is the purview of this presentation to rediscover and project these roles, via its various perspectives: psychological, spiritual, pastoral and theological.

The Place of Music in the Liturgy:

The phrase “the place of music” unequivocally means the roles or importance of music, in the Liturgy. Before delving into unveiling these roles, it is expedient to remark that there is

specific music being referred to here, the sacred liturgical music, and as such, ones used in our context here, the Liturgy of the Church or Liturgical celebrations and even the Liturgy of the hours.

Drawing from its classical Greek orientation, Liturgy (*leitourgia*) had a secular meaning, which denoted the work (*ergon*) undertaken on behalf of the people (laos) Thus, Liturgy in the ecclesiastical context, according to Vatican II *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No I, “is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ, which involves the presentation of man's sanctification, under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses, and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs”. Thus, in the Sacred Liturgy, or liturgical celebration, “the church expresses her response of adoration (worship), to God, through Christ, her head. In other words, the Liturgy, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice, provides the forum or setting for the public adoration and worship of God, by the Church, through Christ who saved us, by his death and resurrection”.

Sacred Liturgical Music

According to Vatican II's “*Musicam Sacram*”(no 4), “Sacred Liturgical music is “that music being created or composed for the celebration of divine worship, is endowed with a certain holy sincerity of form”. In other words, liturgical music carries a solemn uniqueness proper for the liturgy. Thus, Liturgical music can also be defined as "that music which weds itself to the liturgical actions and serves to reveal the full significance of the rites, and in turn, derives its full meanings (theology) from the Liturgy. The ability of this term to emphasize the fundamental link between music and the Liturgy recommends its usage and highlights the ambiguity of the more generic term, Sacred Music. Hence, the latter definition is the most direct particularization of the distinctive quality or uniqueness of Liturgical music. Liturgical music is, therefore, sacred music in a general sense, but more particularly distinct from other sacred or religious music, like gospel choruses, pastoral music, or religious or gospel 'pop', which may not strictly qualify for use during a solemn liturgical celebration.

Roles of Music in the Liturgy

It is pertinent at this point to establish that natural instincts exhibited by human beings, since his appearance or creation by God, have shown him, as musical beings, who make music, sing, or express himself or his/her emotions or feelings, via musical phenomenon. Psychologically, music has been found to have effects on human behaviours to the extent that the influence of its power can change human feelings and behaviour. Music can orchestrate swinging from one form of mood to another depending on the type of music being listened to, or being created. In human societies and various cultures, music has played great roles socially, economically, and spiritually, in religious worships. Thus, “studies made on the phenomenon of music and its impact on men and women in the societies demonstrated that “music is not valued for its own sake, but serves a variety of functions in human society” (*Merriam, Anthropology of music, Evanston, 1904:209-277*).

As a result of the above, the case is not different in liturgical worship. Music is employed in

the liturgy as a result of its power to move men and women, and therefore, serves as a catalyst and aid to more prayers, and praises in worshipping God, and serves in the accentuation of texts, and ritual illumination of the Liturgy. Thus, according to K. Sachs (1943), “word-born” or logogenic music was an essential part of the Judae –Christian tradition, perpetuated through the centuries by the continued insistence on intelligibility in music and music's need to serve the word.” Now, if music has the power to move men psychologically, Sacred liturgical music, well-composed can move the worshippers, as it “goes to the heart of what the liturgy accomplishes and thus adorning the rites with intense solemnity, and simultaneously heighten the devotion and spiritual experience of worshipers. A perfect example of the effect, role, and impact of sacred liturgical hymns or music is seen in St. Augustine's touching confession, on the seizing impact of such music:

How I wept, deeply moved by your hymns, songs and voices that echoed through your Church. Those sounds flowed into my ears, distilling the truth in my heart. A feeling of devotion surged within me, and tears streamed down my face, tears that did me good (confessions of St. Augustine, 9, 6, 4, 1986 pp. 1455 -1456).

From the above confession of one, who really associated sacred hymn, to prayer, we can see one of the great roles of sacred music, which Mike Talbot had corroborated or confirmed when he said that “music can convert a sinner”.

Sacred Liturgical Music or Hymns, Encompassing Roles

Before articulating the submission of Vatican II, in her “*Musicam Sacram*”, it is an imperative of scholarly integrity to present certain papal documents that anticipated the latest Vatican II. Pope Pius X, in his “*Tra Le Sollicitudini* (1903) called for the participation of the people in the worship and song of the church. “Though such participation was considered only in terms of Gregorian Chant, Pius X was nonetheless determinative for reaffirming the centrality of the community in worship and recognizing music as the hand aid of the Liturgy.” He further asserted that “music was an integral part of the solemn liturgy” (no I). Believing that music's principal role is to serve the liturgical text (no I), Pius X delineated three criteria for sacred music: “it must be holy; it must be true art, and it must be universal. Moreover, Pope Pius (XII) in his “*Musicae Sacrae Disciplina*, no 63, also corroborated the above, by saying that sacred music employed must be intended for use in the sacred liturgy; and must correspond with the theme and nature of the liturgy.

Vatican II, “*Musicam Sacram*” A Resume

As a post-conciliar document, “*Musicam Sacram*” of Vatican II, dwelt especially on the roles of sacred music. Thus, in its number 5 article, it states: “through this form, prayer is expressed more attractively, the unity of heart is more profoundly achieved; by the union of voices, minds are easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites”. In its introduction, it, however, states clearly that the major role and aim of the sacred liturgical music is the glorification of God and the sanctification of the worshippers. The pastoral roles of Sacred liturgical music are stated thus:

(a) Expressing prayer more delightfully

- (b) Fostering unity of minds
- (c) Enriching sacred role with great solemnity
- (d) Active participation of the people

Finally, from all these, we summarily itemize the roles of SLM we gathered, as follows:

- (1) Aids or helps prayer and praises
- (2) Uplifts the hearts and minds of the worshippers to heavenly realities celebrated.
- (3) Accompanies and interprets the rites celebrated
- (4) Sacred liturgical music teaches the faithful.
- (5) Expresses communion (oneness) of the worshipping community.
- (6) Enlivens the liturgy.
- (7) Adorns the liturgy with more solemnity.
- (8) Accentuates texts, or textual illumination.

The Imperative of the Guidance of the Ordo in choosing songs for the seasons, Feasts and Solemnities

The Ordo is a daily calendar that guides the church on the different seasons and celebrations of the church: Advent, Christmas, ordinary time, lent, holy week, Easter, Pentecost, etc. As a result, to help sacred liturgical music achieve its best effect or role on worshippers, choirmasters must carefully choose relevant hymns that celebrate and illuminate the different seasons, feasts, or solemnities being celebrated. By so doing, the choristers are not only helping the church or the worshippers to grow in the knowledge of the history of our salvation, but also in holiness or heightened devotion to God.

A special Caveat to Choristers

It is a special privilege to have been endowed with a good voice, to sing the praises of God. So, we are all encouraged to always present or give back to God, this gift by using it in accomplishing these 4 fold functions:

- (i) Worshipping God
- (ii) Fostering your own holiness
- (iii) Inspiring the worshippers to worship easily, praise, and praying more during the liturgical celebrations.
- (iv) Adorning the liturgy or worship with solemnity.

Therefore, it is not an easy or simple task. It is, however, a vocation that must be accepted and lived out in total seriousness, and devotion, to really give God their best, and to receive all the blessings there from. Of great importance, therefore, is the preservation of the unspoken voices of our hearts in purity, away from unnecessary worries, and distractions. When we sing with pure hearts, simple, and undistracted minds, choristers are angelically used to bring down the glory of heaven, in our worship and liturgical celebrations. Give God the glory as the psalmist says in (psalms 149:1-6; Ps. 150:1-6, Ps. 26:7)

Conclusion

It is a wonderful thing to have been endowed with a good voice and to be a chorister. It is indeed a vocation, therefore, we are encouraged to use it to worship God, grow in holiness, balance our spiritual and emotional life, and at the end join the nine choirs of the Angels: Cherubim, Seraphim, Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Principalities, and powers- in singing eternal praises to the God of the Angels and the saints, and indeed our God, in heaven.

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