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VATICAN - THE STONES, SOUNDS AND COLOURS OF GOD'S HOUSE
Bishop Mauro Piacenza: "Sacred music, one of the Church's cultural treasures" (I)

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The beloved Pope John Paul II celebrated in keeping with the 'mind' of the Catholic Church the hundredth anniversary of the Motu proprio issued by Saint Pius X Tra le sollecitudini, which is still today a valid presentation of the features of religious music. (John Paul II, Chirograph on Sacred Music "Motivated by a strong desire", 23 November 2003, n. 1; cfr Pio X, Motu proprio on sacred music "Tra le sollecitudini").
Sacred music is essentially an integral part of the divine Liturgy since its purpose is "the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful" (Vatican II, Constitution on the Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium, 112). In this sacred music is set within a living tradition which dates to the early Christian communities urged by Saint Paul to "sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col 3, 16; cfr Eph 5, 19),
However for sacred music to fulfil its purpose it must posses features clearly stated in the texts of the Magisterium of the Popes. First of all it must express holiness, that is it must possess and sense of prayer and constitute a means of lifting the mind to God and helping the faithful "to participate actively in the sacred Mysteries and the public and solemn prayer of the Church" ("Tra le sollecitudini", Proem); it must be faithful to biblical and euchological texts, in keeping with the liturgical seasons and must follow the gestures and contents of the Liturgical Celebration.
A second characterising principle regards the quality, sacred music must be "authentic art", imbued with dignity and beauty in order to introduce to the sacred Mysteries.
Thirdly - and this is a most sensitive point - it must combine the demands of adaptation and inculturation - required by the Church's diffusion among all the different peoples and cultures, and by adaptation to the times - the requisite of universality, detected when a composition is perceived as sacred in every place and time.
When the Magisterium turns to offering concrete examples of the kind of music that meets with the features mentioned above, it inevitably gives first place to Gregorian Chant. Besides the texts mentioned we recall Pope Pius XII who described Gregorian Chant as the Church's "heritage" (Encyclical Letter Musicae sacrae disciplina, 25 December 1955, part III) and Vatican II which in the Constitution on the Liturgy affirms in harmonic continuity "The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy" (Sacrosanctum Concilium 116).
Of course with Gregorian Chant we must also consider sacred polyphony and the vast production of masses, motets, chorales etc., whose "sacred" quality is perceived all the more when the composers besides being experts in the art of music were "imbued with the sense of the Mystery" and partakers in the life of the Church (Giovanni Paolo II, Letter to Artists, 4 April 1999, n. 12). These compositions, besides a strictly 'religious' repertoire, such as Oratorios, with intent typically didactic or the whole production, sometimes of the highest level, formally liturgical, but too tied to temporal aesthetic postulates, constitute one of the most consistent fruits of Christian humanism and are a valid contribution to human culture on the part of the faith.
Although not all religious music can be considered liturgical, it constitutes a cultural heritage still today living, still today appreciated and should be fully put to use in opportune places. If strictly liturgical music and song of the past should be still usefully executed during Celebrations, the remaining repertoire can find full appreciated in ad hoc performances entrusted to cultural institutions whose purpose is the recovery, knowledge and execution of sacred music of the past, the most well known and the most rare, both for the liturgy and, depending on the case, for executions spiritually fruitful all the same.
Therefore we can well understand the definition of music as a "cultural treasure" understood in the first place as a heritage to preserve, safeguard, make use of and promote while at the same time promoting new productions

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ensuring that the features mentioned above are met. To be encouraged in this field catalogues of collections of musical manuscripts present in numerous ecclesiastical libraries and archives, their publication and studies of musical philology. In this sector the Church can seek collaboration with universities and scientific institutions and public provisions which can be found. + Mauro Piacenza President of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, President of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. (Agenzia Fides 11/7/2006 - righe 55, parole 730)

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