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VATICAN - "GOD'S HOUSE, STONES, SOUNDS, COLOURS" Bishop Mauro Piacenza - "Sacred Music one of the cultural treasures of the Church" (part 2)

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Since music is the expression of a reality which creates culture, as is the Church, it is truly a "cultural treasure of the Church", to be understood as a living reality. This was affirmed by John Paul II when he addressed the 1st Plenary of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church: "[…] the idea was to give precise significance and immediately understandable content also to the very concept of "cultural heritage", including in it, first of all, the artistic treasures of painting, sculpture, architecture, mosaic and music put at the service of the Church's mission […]" (speech 12 October 1995, n. 3).
It is clear, cultural heritage in the mind of the Church is not a static reality to preserve in a museum or an archive, instead as John Paul II said " 'Cultural treasures' are destined for the promotion of mankind and in the ecclesial context they assume a specific significance since they serve for evangelisation, worship ad charity" (Chirograph to the 2nd plenary, 27 September 1997, n. 2).
The Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, has always sought to promote this concept with its texts and interventions. In a document on the formation of future priests with regard to the necessary attention for the cultural treasures of the Church, it states: "Besides making its own contribution towards the integral promotion of man with various educational and cultural initiatives, the Church has proclaimed the Gospel and perfected divine worship in many ways by means of the literary, figurative, musical, architectonic arts; and by preserving historical memories and precious documents on the life and the reflection of the faithful. The message of salvation has been communicated and is still communicated also by these means to vast multitudes of believers and non believers" (Formation of priests 15 October 1992, n. 1)
Therefore, also when she looks at the past, the Church is actually looking at the present also with regard to music, she considers it a living heritage to be used in the liturgy or, whatever the case to proclaim the Gospel or spiritual elevation, according to the characteristics of the composition.
Drawing inspiration from Proposal 36 put forward by the recent Synod of Bishops which, as instructed by Vatican II (cfr Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 36) recommends that the use of Latin in the celebration of Mass should not be neglected, especially during international assembles, and importance should be given to Gregorian Chant (cfr Sacrosanctum Concilium, nn. 116-117), above all in these contexts, I would dwell on a few general considerations on this musical tradition.
Latin and Gregorian Chant, closely linked with biblical, patristic and liturgical fonts, are part of the lex orandi forged in over a millennium. Today we hear often of roots and their rediscovery : well, Latin and Gregorian Chant are, so to say, the roots of liturgical music.
In this sense Gregorian Chant should be seen as a point of reference and, when possible, used again by the assembly. And this in the ambit of the long desired return to the seriousness of liturgy, holiness, beauty in form and universality, which should characterise all liturgical music worthy of the name, and which is in keeping with the perspective of obedience to the liturgical reform exactly as it was understood by the Second Vatican Council.
At times one has the impression that bishops and clergy underestimate the learning ability of the Christian people: when we think that the assembly once knew the Gregorian melodies, which it has been almost forced to forget, better than other hymns often poor in form and contents! It is obvious that the whole repertoire cannot be proposed to the people, but it is also true that in hymns, as with the liturgy, it is not necessary for everyone to do everything, rather as John Paul II said in the recent Chirograph: "Good coordination of all - the celebrant and the deacon, acolytes, lectors, psalmists, choir, musicians, cantor, assembly - produces the right spiritual atmosphere and renders the liturgical moment truly intense, participated and fruitful". Besides also in Eastern Christian tradition, in which liturgical chant - like figurative art- has an essential function, the part of the priest, deacon, the

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choir, sometimes complex, are so well known that they are sung by heart by the ordinary faithful.
A “new launching” of Gregorian Chant for the assembly might start with the acclamations, the Pater noster, the chants of the Ordinary of the Mass, Kyrie, Sanctus, Agnus Dei. In many countries people were once very familiar with the Credo III part of the Ordinary of Mass VIII (de Angelis), and much more! They knew the Pange lingua, the Salve Regina and other antiphons, known today by a very few. A minimum repertoire is found in the famous “Jubilate Deo” by Paul VI, and in the “Liber cantualis”. If the people become accustomed to singing its part of Gregorian repertoire, then it will be capable of learning new hymns in different living languages, those worthy of being executed in church and given a place alongside the Gregorian repertoire.
However what is most serious is that the ‘umbilical chord’ with tradition has been severed, and this has educated new composers of liturgical music in the living languages, some of them technically well prepared, but lacking the humus indispensable for composing in consonance with the spirit of the Church. This is somewhat like certain commissions in the field of architecture, or plastic arts, or interior decoration. Rather than preconceived ideas or ideologies or osmosis with secularised thought what is needed is sensus fidei. + Mauro Piacenza, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church and president of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. (Agenzia Fides 18/7/2006 - righe 68, parole 949)

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