



VATICAN - "GOD'S HOUSE, STONES, SOUNDS AND COLOURS" Bishop Mauro Piacenza - "Sacred Music one of the cultural treasures of the Church " (part 3)

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - In the vast, agitated and travailed sea of 'sacred' Music what is to be done? Certainly formation is the first task, and in the first place formation of the clergy, called to be promoters sacred music. Unfortunately ever more frequently we find that real education to the great musical tradition of the Church or even the most elementary of musical formation in seminaries and houses of religious formation is lacking while banality and bad taste prosper.

Saint Pius X was well aware, and with him the subsequent Magisterium of the Church, that it is impossible to undertake any work of "reform" without adequate formation of both clergy and laity. Among the most substantial fruits of his Motu proprio, which lasts through time, is the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music soon to mark its centenary. This praiseworthy institution produced many of the world's maestri of Gregorian Chant, polyphony, organists, operators of sacred music. Appreciable work is done by other Superior Schools of Sacred Music, diocesan schools, various courses and seminars on liturgical-musical formation. However these institutes should never neglect teaching, also in depth, Gregorian Chant.

It can be said that Gregorian Chant is the song of the Church, not in the sense that she recognises no other form of music, but because this Chant is paradigmatic of the relation between liturgical text and music. Indeed from a technical point of view the great masters of polyphony based their innovations on Gregorian Chant, altering the thematic, modality and poly-rhythm. We find Gregorian Chant at the basis of compositions of Palestrina, Lasso, Victoria, Guerrero, Morales, and others of the Tridentine reform. Gregorian Chant is also the backdrop of works of the great contemporary musicians who accompanied the "extended" liturgical reform of the 20th century : Perosi, Refice and Bartolucci. Gregorian Chant is always the underlying trace.

I refer not only to complex and choral compositions but also to various melodies, in Latin or the vulgate, for liturgy or devotional acts. The more a sacred chant draws inspiration from Gregorian Chant Authentic, the more it will be valid and substantial. John Paul II, of venerable memory, wholeheartedly embraced the principle of Saint Pius X: "The more a Church composition is similar in rhythm, inspiration and form to Gregorian Chant, the more it will be sacred and liturgical, and the less it is by inspired that supreme model the less it will be worthy of the Church" (Tra le sollecitudini, n. 3; Chirograph, n. 12 [our English translation]).

It is obvious that it will never be possible to tackle the creation of a repertoire of quality for the liturgy, also in the living languages, if composers continue to ignore Gregorian Chant. Naturally a thing of beauty is obtained only at a cost. Although good will is most important it is not always sufficient. To obtain good results it is necessary to invest resources, above all in formation, engaging true professionals full-time. Also at the level of Scholae, at least with regard to choirs at Cathedrals and Shrines, direction and accompaniment must be entrusted to professional figures with appropriate liturgical and musical formation. Not to be undervalued either the commission of new musical works created purposely for the festive liturgy of the different Seasons of the liturgical year. Works suited to the sensitivity of our day while keeping in mind the Church's great musical tradition.

Pope John Paul said: "The musical aspect of liturgical celebrations therefore cannot be left to improvisation or discretion of individuals, it must be entrusted to well concerted direction with respect for norms and competencies, as a significant fruit of adequate liturgical formation". + Mauro Piacenza, president Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church, president Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology. (Agenzia Fides 25/7/2006 - righe 46, parole 649)