



ADOREMUS

BULLETINS

Mar 11, 2017

Musicam Sacram: Preface and Part I

By

THE EDITORS

EDITOR'S NOTE: IT'S ONE THING TO HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT LITURGICAL music; in fact, it is difficult not to have an opinion. But having an informed opinion—one shaped by the Magisterium, the Church's tradition, and sound pastoral practice—is quite another.

Any Catholic—be he a pastor, musician, or member of the lay faithful—desirous of knowing the principles and norms by which liturgical music is put into practice must be familiar with Sacred Congregation for Rites 1967 document Musicam Sacram, which turns 50 years this March 5.

While many of the faithful may have read parts of it at one time or another, or have encountered its directions in subsequent instructions—the General Instruction of the Roman Missal or the US Bishops' Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship—given the profound importance of this document this foundational teaching always rewards further study.

If you, our readers, are not as familiar with Musicam Sacram as you could be, consider taking its anniversary as the occasion to inform your own musical opinion. The Church's "treasure of inestimable value" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 112) needs sound minds and voices on this score.

The Preface and Part I are reprinted here; Parts II through VII will appear in the May issue.

Preface

1. Sacred music, in those aspects which concern the liturgical renewal, was carefully considered by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. It explained its role in divine services, issued a number of principles and laws on this subject in the Constitution on the Liturgy, and devoted to it an entire chapter of the same Constitution.

2. The decisions of the Council have already begun to be put into effect in the recently undertaken liturgical renewal. But the new norms concerning the arrangement of the sacred rites and the active participation of the faithful have given rise to several problems regarding sacred music and its ministerial role. These problems appear to be able to be solved by expounding more fully certain relevant principles of the Constitution on the Liturgy.

3. Therefore the Consilium set up to implement the Constitution on the Liturgy, on the instructions of the Holy Father, has carefully considered these questions and prepared the present Instruction. This does not, however, gather together all the legislation on sacred music; it only establishes the principal norms which seem to be more necessary for our own day. It is, as it were, a continuation and complement of the preceding Instruction of this Sacred Congregation, prepared by this same Consilium on 26 September 1964 [*Inter Oecumenici*], for the correct implementation of the Liturgy Constitution.

4. It is to be hoped that pastors of souls, musicians and the faithful will gladly accept these norms and put them into practice, uniting their efforts to attain the true purpose of sacred music, “which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful.”¹

(a) By sacred music is understood that which, being created for the celebration of divine worship, is endowed with a certain holy sincerity of form.

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(b) The following come under the title of sacred music here: Gregorian chant, sacred polyphony in its various forms both ancient and modern, sacred music for the organ and other approved instruments, and sacred popular music, be it liturgical or simply religious.³

I. Some General Norms

5. Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, with the ministers of each degree fulfilling their ministry and the people participating in it.⁴

Indeed, through this form, prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Pastors of souls will therefore do all they can to achieve this form of celebration.

They will try to work out how that assignment of different parts to be performed and duties to be fulfilled, which characterizes sung celebrations, may be transferred even to celebrations which are not sung, but at which the people are present. Above all one must take particular care that the necessary ministers are obtained and that these are suitable, and that the active participation of the people is encouraged.

The practical preparation for each liturgical celebration should be done in a spirit of cooperation by all parties concerned, under the guidance of the rector of the church, whether it be in ritual, pastoral or musical matters.

6. The proper arrangement of a liturgical celebration requires the due assignment and performance of certain functions, by which "each person, minister or layman, should carry out all and only those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy."⁵ This also demands that the meaning and proper nature of each part and of each song be carefully observed. To attain this, those parts especially should be sung which by their very nature require to be sung, using the kind and form of music which is proper to their character.

7. Between the solemn, fuller form of liturgical celebration, in which everything that demands singing is in fact sung, and the simplest form, in which singing is not used, there can be various degrees according to the greater or lesser place allotted to singing. However, in selecting the parts which are to be sung, one should start with those that are by their nature of greater importance, and especially those which are to be sung by the priest or by the ministers, with the people replying, or those which are to be sung by the priest and people together. The other parts may be gradually added according as they are proper to the people alone or to the choir alone.

8. Whenever, for a liturgical service which is to be celebrated in sung form, one can make a choice between various people, it is desirable that those who are known to be more proficient in singing be given preference; this is especially the case in more solemn liturgical celebrations and in those which either require more difficult singing, or are transmitted by radio or television.⁶

If, however, a choice of this kind cannot be made, and the priest or minister does not possess a voice suitable for the proper execution of the singing, he can render without singing one or more of the more difficult parts which concern him, reciting them in a loud and distinct voice. However, this must not be done merely for the convenience of the priest or minister.

9. In selecting the kind of sacred music to be used, whether it be for the choir or for the people, the capacities of those who are to sing the music must be taken into account. No kind of sacred music is prohibited from liturgical actions by the Church as long as it corresponds to the spirit of the liturgical celebration itself and the nature of its individual parts,⁷ and does not hinder the active participation of the people.⁸

10. In order that the faithful may actively participate more willingly and with greater benefit, it is fitting that the format of the celebration and the degree of participation in it should be varied as much as possible, according to the solemnity of the day and the nature of the congregation present.

11. It should be borne in mind that the true solemnity of liturgical worship depends less on a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial than on its worthy and religious celebration, which takes into account the integrity of the liturgical celebration itself, and the performance of each of its parts according to their own particular nature. To have a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial is at times desirable when there are the resources available to carry them out properly; on the other hand it would be contrary to the true solemnity of the liturgy if this were to lead to a part of the action being omitted, changed, or improperly performed.

12. It is for the Holy See alone to determine the more important general principles which are, as it were, the basis of sacred music, according to the norms handed down, but especially according to the Constitution on the Liturgy. Direction in this matter, within the limits laid down, also belongs to the competent territorial Episcopal Conferences of various kinds, which have been legitimately constituted, and to the individual bishop.⁹

13. Liturgical services are celebrations of the Church, that is, of the holy people, united under and directed by the bishop or priest.¹⁰ The priest and his ministers, because of the sacred order they have received, hold a special place in these celebrations, as do also—by reason of the ministry they perform—the servers, readers, commentators and those in the choir.¹¹

14. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, presides over the gathered assembly. Since the prayers which are said or sung by him aloud are proclaimed in the name of the entire holy people and of all present,¹² they should be devoutly listened to by all.

15. The faithful fulfill their liturgical role by making that full, conscious and active participation which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself and which is, by reason of baptism, the right and duty of the Christian people. This participation:

(a) Should be above all internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace,¹³

(b) Must be, on the other hand, external also, that is, such as to show the internal participation by gestures and bodily attitudes, by the acclamations, responses and singing.¹⁴

The faithful should also be taught to unite themselves interiorly to what the ministers or choir sing, so that by listening to them they may raise their minds to God.

16. One cannot find anything more religious and more joyful in sacred celebrations than a whole congregation expressing its faith and devotion in song. Therefore the active participation of the whole people, which is shown in singing, is to be carefully promoted as follows:

(a) It should first of all include acclamations, responses to the greetings of the priest and ministers and to the prayers of litany form, and also antiphons and psalms, refrains or repeated responses, hymns and canticles.¹⁴

(b) Through suitable instruction and practices, the people should be gradually led to a fuller—indeed, to a complete—participation in those parts of the singing which pertain to them.

(c) Some of the people's song, however, especially if the faithful have not yet been sufficiently instructed, or if musical settings for several voices are used, can be handed over to the choir alone, provided that the people are not excluded from those

parts that concern them. But the usage of entrusting to the choir alone the entire singing of the whole Proper and of the whole Ordinary, to the complete exclusion of the people's participation in the singing, is to be deprecated.

17. At the proper times, all should observe a reverent silence.¹⁴ Through it the faithful are not only not considered as extraneous or dumb spectators at the liturgical service, but are associated more intimately in the mystery that is being celebrated, thanks to that interior disposition which derives from the word of God that they have heard, from the songs and prayers that have been uttered, and from spiritual union with the priest in the parts that he says or sings himself.

18. Among the faithful, special attention must be given to the instruction in sacred singing of members of lay religious societies, so that they may support and promote the participation of the people more effectively.¹⁵ The formation of the whole people in singing, should be seriously and patiently undertaken together with liturgical instruction, according to the age, status and way of life of the faithful and the degree of their religious culture; this should be done even from the first years of education in elementary schools.¹⁶

19. Because of the liturgical ministry it performs, the choir—or the *Capella musica*, or *schola cantorum*—deserves particular mention. Its role has become something of yet greater importance and weight by reason of the norms of the Council concerning the liturgical renewal. Its duty is, in effect, to ensure the proper performance of the parts which belong to it, according to the different kinds of music sung, and to encourage the active participation of the faithful in the singing. Therefore:

(a) There should be choirs, or *Capellae*, or *scholae cantorum*, especially in cathedrals and other major churches, in seminaries and religious houses of studies, and they should be carefully encouraged.

(b) It would also be desirable for similar choirs to be set up in smaller churches.

20. Large choirs (*Capellae musicae*) existing in basilicas, cathedrals, monasteries and other major churches, which have in the course of centuries earned for themselves high renown by preserving and developing a musical heritage of inestimable value, should be retained for sacred celebrations of a more elaborate kind, according to their own traditional norms, recognized and approved by the Ordinary.

However, the directors of these choirs and the rectors of the churches should take care that the people always associate themselves with the singing by performing at

least the easier sections of those parts which belong to them.

21. Provision should be made for at least one or two properly trained singers, especially where there is no possibility of setting up even a small choir. The singer will present some simpler musical settings, with the people taking part, and can lead and support the faithful as far as is needed. The presence of such a singer is desirable even in churches which have a choir, for those celebrations in which the choir cannot take part but which may fittingly be performed with some solemnity and therefore with singing.

22. The choir can consist, according to the customs of each country and other circumstances, of either men and boys, or men and boys only, or men and women, or even, where there is a genuine case for it, of women only.

23. Taking into account the layout of each church, the choir should be placed in such a way:

(a) That its nature should be clearly apparent—namely, that it is a part of the whole congregation, and that it fulfills a special role;

(b) That it is easier for it to fulfill its liturgical function;

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(c) That each of its members may be able to participate easily in the Mass, that is to say by sacramental participation.

Whenever the choir also includes women, it should be placed outside the sanctuary (*presbyterium*). [*Editor's note: This instruction reflects the discipline of the Missal in use in 1967 which allowed only ministers, each of which was male, to perform their tasks in the sanctuary.*]

24. Besides musical formation, suitable liturgical and spiritual formation must also be given to the members of the choir, in such a way that the proper performance of their liturgical role will not only enhance the beauty of the celebration and be an excellent example for the faithful, but will bring spiritual benefit to the choir-members themselves.

25. In order that this technical and spiritual formation may more easily be obtained, the diocesan, national and international associations of sacred music should offer their services, especially those that have been approved and several times commended by the Holy See.

26. The priest, the sacred ministers and the servers, the reader and those in the choir, and also the commentator, should perform the parts assigned to them in a way which is comprehensible to the people, in order that the responses of the people, when the rite requires it, may be made easy and spontaneous. It is desirable that the priest, and the ministers of every degree, should join their voices to the voice of the whole faithful in those parts which concern the people.

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27. For the celebration of the Eucharist with the people, especially on Sundays and feast days, a form of sung Mass (*Missa in cantu*) is to be preferred as much as possible, even several times on the same day.

28. The distinction between solemn, sung, and read Mass, sanctioned by the Instruction of 1958 (n. 3), is retained, according to the traditional liturgical laws at present in force. However, for the sung Mass (*Missa cantata*), different degrees of participation are put forward here for reasons of pastoral usefulness, so that it may become easier to make the celebration of Mass more beautiful by singing, according to the capabilities of each congregation.

These degrees are so arranged that the first may be used even by itself, but the second and third, wholly or partially, may never be used without the first. In this way the faithful will be continually led towards an ever greater participation in the singing.

29. The following belong to the first degree:

(a) In the entrance rites: the greeting of the priest together with the reply of the people; the prayer.

(b) In the Liturgy of the Word: the acclamations at the Gospel.

(c) In the Eucharistic Liturgy: the prayer over the offerings; the preface with its dialogue and the *Sanctus*; the final doxology of the Canon, the Lord's prayer with its introduction and embolism; the *Pax Domini*; the prayer after the Communion; the formulas of dismissal.

30. The following belong to the second degree:

(a) the *Kyrie*, *Gloria* and *Agnus Dei*;

(b) the Creed;

(c) the prayer of the faithful.

31. The following belong to the third degree:

(a) the songs at the Entrance and Communion processions;

(b) the songs after the Lesson or Epistle;

(c) the Alleluia before the Gospel;

(d) the song at the Offertory;

(e) the readings of Sacred Scripture, unless it seems more suitable to proclaim them without singing.

32. The custom legitimately in use in certain places and widely confirmed by indults, of substituting other songs for the songs given in the *Graduale* for the Entrance, Offertory and Communion, can be retained according to the judgment of the competent territorial authority, as long as songs of this sort are in keeping with the parts of the Mass, with the feast or with the liturgical season. It is for the same territorial authority to approve the texts of these songs.

33. It is desirable that the assembly of the faithful should participate in the songs of the Proper as much as possible, especially through simple responses and other suitable settings.

The song after the lessons, be it in the form of gradual or responsorial psalm, has a special importance among the songs of the Proper. By its very nature, it forms part of the Liturgy, of the Word. It should be performed with all seated and listening to it—and, what is more, participating in it as far as possible.

34. The songs which are called the “Ordinary of the Mass,” if they are sung by musical settings written for several voices may be performed by the choir according to the customary norms, either *a capella*, or with instrumental accompaniment, as long as the people are not completely excluded from taking part in the singing.

In other cases, the parts of the Ordinary of the Mass can be divided between the choir and the people or even between two sections of the people themselves: one can alternate by verses, or one can follow other suitable divisions which divide the text into larger sections. In these cases, the following points are to be noted: it is preferable that the Creed, since it is a formula of profession of faith, should be sung by all, or in such a way as to permit a fitting participation by the faithful; it is preferable that the *Sanctus*, as the concluding acclamation of the Preface, should

normally be sung by the whole congregation together with the priest; the *Agnus Dei* may be repeated as often as necessary, especially in concelebrations, where it accompanies the Fraction; it is desirable that the people should participate in this song, as least by the final invocation

35. The Lord's Prayer is best performed by the people together with the priest.

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If it is sung in Latin, the melodies already legitimately existing should be used; if, however, it is sung in the vernacular, the settings are to be approved by the competent territorial authority.

36. There is no reason why some of the Proper or Ordinary should not be sung in said Masses. Moreover, some other song can also, on occasions, be sung at the beginning, at the Offertory, at the Communion and at the end of Mass. It is not sufficient, however, that these songs be merely "Eucharistic"—they must be in keeping with the parts of the Mass, with the feast, or with the liturgical season.

Parts II through VII of Musicam Sacram will appear in the May Bulletin

Footnotes

1. Constitution on the Liturgy, 112. 

2. Cf. St. Pius X, Motu Proprio, *Tra le sollecitudini*, 2. 

3. Cf. Instruction of the S.C.R., 3 September 1958, 4. 

4. Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 113. 

5. Constitution on the Liturgy, 28. 

6. Instruction of the S.C.R., 3 September 1958, 95. 

7. Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 116. 

8. Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 28. 

9. Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 22. 

¹⁰Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 26 and 41-32; Constitution on the Church, 28. 

¹¹Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 29. 

¹²Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 33. ↩

¹³Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 11. ↩

¹⁴Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 30. ↩

¹⁵Cf. Instruction of the S.C.R., 26 September 1964, (D.3), 19 and 59. ↩

¹⁶Cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 19; Instruction of the S.C.R., 3 September 1958, 106-8. ↩

¹⁷Cf. *Inter Oecumenici*, (D.3). ↩

¹⁸Cf. *Inter Oecumenici*. ↩

¹⁹Cf. *Inter Oecumenici*, 48. ↩

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Commission to Review *Liturgiam Authenticam*

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