

Enquiry to Episcopal Conferences and Major Religious Institutes and Faculties of Theology

SACRED MUSIC 50 Years after the Council

Foreword

Fifty years on from the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments and the Pontifical Council for Culture are undertaking, with a pastoral perspective, an enquiry into the state of sacred music in all its aspects (liturgy, formation, pastoral activity, concerts) with the aim of reflecting on the developments in the field of music and the desire to offer a contribution to the ministry of musicians for the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful.

Formation of those cultivating music for ministerial service

The “ministerial” identity of those who work at the service of the sacred liturgy comes from the unique mission entrusted to the baptised in Christ. The primary objective of every serious path of formation has to be that of showing the collaborators of the Church the universal mission to which the Church is consecrated: everyone can thereby grow in the desire to know her, love her and be a part of her, with intelligence and creativity, through the humble offering of their own talents, and announce, through their own contributions, small or great, that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and resurrected, is the Lord and Christ, Sovereign of time and history.

1. What institutions are there that are dedicated to the field of sacred music (Episcopal Commissions, Diocesan, State, etc.)?
2. What engagement has the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy in the field of music? Does it include experts in Sacred Music?
3. At the diocesan, regional, or national levels, are there structures for musical, liturgical or spiritual formation for the various roles in animation (animator of the assembly, psalmist, organist, composition, etc.)?
4. What structures are there to promote the pastoral care of artists in their musical activity (in theatres, concert halls, conservatoires?)
5. How are those who have an academic musical formation prepared to integrate into the liturgy?
6. What formation is given to those who are given responsibility to ensure the interior adhesion and exterior participation of the faithful, through the way of behaving during liturgical functions, gestures to be carried out, etc.?
7. In the course of ordinary formation of the clergy and religious men and women, what attention is given to musical formation?

Musical Heritage

The universal patrimony of sacred music safeguards, for the good of all the Church, an extremely rich theological, liturgical and pastoral heritage. The different musical

expressions placed at the service of the sacred liturgy and the sacramental life of the Church clearly show the quest for a spiritual elevation and an interior relationship with God. The spirit of faithfulness, which also recognises healthy experimentalism, should offer to the contemporary Church a living and current musical repertoire, that allows the many developments of Christian art that have taken place during two millennia to flourish, and at the same time be able to undergo an authentic renewal, so as to raise new stimuli and serve the liturgy today.

8. Is Chant (e.g. Gregorian) used on Feast Days in the proper of the liturgy?
9. How do the dioceses look after and promote musical patrimony? Are there libraries and archives, and promotion of research in musicology?
10. Are compositions of the pre-Conciliar patrimony used?
11. How is the encounter with musical traditions in diverse cultures experienced? At a time of globalisation and of new ecclesial movements is there a good equilibrium between inculturation, welcoming and growth in cultural identity?

As with other cultural initiatives, any concerts should respect the clear guidelines laid down by the Magisterium (cf. particularly, The Congregation for Divine Worship on Concerts in Churches), and show a spiritual character that places them clearly in the sacred context. In fact, if similar initiatives are to be a valid means to safeguard the traditional sacred music patrimony, stimulating an enriching encounter with civil life, and promoting the spiritual elevation of believers and non-believers, not for this should there be a general opening, but something motivated by cultural goals.

12. Are there documents of the Episcopal Conference, pastoral instructions or guidelines that regulate the performance of concerts in churches?

Contemporary musical culture

The evolution of musical languages has given new generations, particularly under the impact of globalisation, new criteria in their listening, participating and interpretation. The Church, ever attentive to people and their joys and sufferings, is called to know the emerging languages in continual transformation, with the aim of transmitting the Message of Salvation in the places and ways that are consonant with the new cultural areopagus (Cf. Benedict XVI, Discourse to the Artists)

13. What are the ecclesial initiatives which have most facilitated the encounter between the Church and the contemporary musical culture, both in the phase of promotion and in that of welcoming these new musical registers?
14. Is there space in the different musical expressions (rock 'n' roll, pop, musical, ambiental music, experimental and electronic etc.) for a dialogue that can lead to a redefinition of sacred music? Indeed of liturgical music?
15. In the pastoral care of those who live in the contemporary musical culture scene is there a continuity in the desire for spiritual growth and Christian formation, a fullness in the offering of sacred music? Or are we faced with a separation so marked that a radical re-elaboration of the grammar of sacred music is necessary?

Eucharistic celebrations, other sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours

There is a need to proceed to a global recovery of the meaning of music, and to deepen the value of sacred music in the context of liturgy. The full participation of the liturgical assembly needs animators of all the assembly so as to be able to reach the highest expressions of solemnity.

The community celebrations of the sacraments and the sacramentals foresee song. Song and music acquire, in the ritual context, a sacramental value, as they both offer a valid contribution in the communication of that divine reality whose presence is realised in liturgical action.

Liturgical music must respond to its specific requisites: full adherence to the texts that it presents, consonance with the time and liturgical moment for which it is destined, adequate correspondence to the gestures the rite proposes (John Paul II, Chirograph for the centenary of the Motu Proprio Tra le sollecitudini sulla Musica sacra, 5). The artistic value of a musical component then is a necessary but insufficient premise, and the ritual context requires that the work of art be concretely modelled in light of the needs of the liturgical action.

16. Is care taken to ensure that melodies are sung which are able to make manifest the beauty and pastoral efficacy of the different rituals?
17. Are there experiences of liturgical song, during the celebrations of Baptism and Marriage, that express the commitment of the Christian community that animates these rites?
18. Is there a programming of musical intervention able to promote the real significance of the liturgical year? In the musical choices is awareness elicited of the variations of the Liturgical Times?
19. Beyond the religious communities, are there places, at least in the cities, where the liturgy of the hours is sung, especially Morning and Evening Prayer?
20. In meetings or ecclesial conventions is there an encouragement to sing the liturgy of the hours?

Composition

The criterion of “newness in faithfulness” should orient every process of inculturation, so that sacred music, in proposing “a new song”, becomes a vehicle of the living and creative tradition. On this note it is good to recall that “adapting sacred music for those regions which possess a musical tradition of their own, especially mission areas, will require a very specialised preparation by experts. It will be a question in fact of how to harmonise the sense of the sacred with the spirit, traditions and characteristic expressions proper to each of these peoples. Those who work in this field should have a sufficient knowledge both of the liturgy and musical tradition of the Church, and of the language, popular songs and other characteristic expressions of the people for whose benefit they are working.” (Instruction, Musicam Sacram, 61; cfr. Second Vatican Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium, 119).

21. In your area of competence, who are the main composers of sacred music in these last fifty years? How are they assisted in their artistic and liturgical service?
22. Are melodies being composed that are apt for the differences in the choirs, the liturgical times, with texts in the vernacular of the Christian community?

23. Do they compose only for the liturgy or also works inspired by liturgical texts apt for concerts, prayer meetings and moments of catechesis?
24. Do the scores in use follow the compositional codes proper to music at the service of the liturgy? Are they accessible to parish assemblies and choirs?
25. Do the new compositions, rooted in the diverse cultures, draw from traditional song and the characteristic feelings of a people?
26. Is there a repertoire of liturgical music approved by the Episcopal Conference? Is its use fostered by opportune initiatives?
27. What procedure is followed in controlling new texts and new musical compositions? In particular, for the popular songs of entrance, preparation of gifts and communion, are the texts approved by competent authority?
28. Are there guidelines for authors and those who are called to perform the new compositions?
29. In the new compositions and in collections (song-books) what is done to meet the needs of the international context of our assemblies due to the migrations of peoples?
30. Are there competitions open for the composition of liturgical music, including for exceptional occasions (commemorations, conferences etc.?)

Choir

The choir (the Cappella musicale, schola cantorum) has the duty of ensuring the proper performance of the parts which belong to it, according to the different kinds of music sung, and of encouraging the participation of the faithful in the singing. (MS n.19)

31. Are there choirs which manage to carry out their proper function in the liturgy and in the life of the Christian community? How many and what kind?
32. Do the choirs have a set of Regulations overseen by the Ordinary?
33. Does the location of the choir facilitate its liturgical ministry, communicate its being a part of the assembly and ensure participation in the mystery being celebrated?
34. In projecting new churches is the space for a choir foreseen? Do acoustics feature in the planning.
35. To promote the participation of the entire assembly, what space is given to the animator of singing by the liturgical assembly, as distinguished from the director of the choir?

Instruments

“The use of musical instruments to accompany the singing can act as a support to the voices, render participation easier, and achieve a deeper union in the assembly.” (MS n. 64)

36. Do the most important churches have a pipe organ? Does it have a permanent structure for maintenance and restoration? Are festivals for organ music promoted?
37. What other musical instruments are in use? Are they played by people who have an adequate preparation and who know the spirit of the liturgy?
38. Has the Episcopal Conference emanated instructions in this matter?
39. Is there a fund to provide payment for musical interventions or for permanent functions in the ministry of liturgical animation?

40. What relations exist between the Church, the publishing houses and the associations of musicians to facilitate the spread and availability of scores, respecting the rights of authors, and support new generations of composers and musicians for the liturgical field?

Accompanying Text

1. This text is offered as a support to the questionnaire-census “Musica Sacra, 50 years after the Council”, and considers particularly the Instruction *Musicam Sacram* of 5 March 1967, which was promulgated by the Sacred Congregation of Rites with the aim of illustrating the ministerial task of music at the service of the liturgy.

2. Sacred music, an integral part of the *ars celebrandi*, has a particular bond with the liturgical celebration and is called to foster in the faithful a full, prayerful and respectful participation of the sacred silence. The celebrative style of liturgical music should tell aloud the primacy of God and His work of salvation for us, testifying to the centrality of Christ who died and rose again, and renews his sacrificial offering in the Eucharist. The language of sound, which reaches across every geographic-cultural boundary and can be understood in every time and place, is the privileged instrument with which to celebrate the universality of the Church, whose Mystery of Unity is made present in every community reunited around the Eucharistic table. As with the liturgy, sacred Music must aspire to a noble beauty, and be able to bring together the treasures of the past with the real art of our time.

3. “Beauty, then, is not mere decoration, but rather an essential element of the liturgical action, since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed, if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendour” (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 35). If the celebration of the mystery of Christ is both *schola et via pulchritudinis*, sacred music can offer a notable contribution so that the assembly can perceive, know and love Him who, in the interpretation of the Psalms by the Church Fathers, is “the most beautiful of the sons of man” (Psalm 44). As every authentic musical work of art is able to purify us, raise us up, let us perceive the greatness and the beauty of God, so sacred music, provoking vivid awe, favouring contemplation, and awakening in us the desire to meet the risen Lord, opens the faithful to the salvific action of the grace of God inviting us to respond to his love.

4. A proper formative itinerary can help choose, conceive and make music that is authentically liturgical. Beauty and religious inspiration do not guarantee, in fact, a full response to the demands of the rite, and liturgical action needs music dedicated to it which has a sacred character. Safeguarding the creative liberty of the composer and the variety of possible expressive choices, the inspiration, the text and the forms of the liturgical music should be nourished by the Mystery of Christ, orienting thoughts and emotions to Him, so as to render the liturgical assembly a docile instrument of the Mystery of the Incarnation: revelation of God, in Christ, through the Church gathered in the sacramental event.

5. Universality, simplicity, nobility, purity and density of meaning are certainly qualities useful for fostering participation and spirit of prayer in the liturgical assembly. Being inspired by such criteria, and with the help of an adequate formation and a serious experience of evangelisation, the ministers of music for the liturgy can once again reach the

spiritual heights and thence in contemplating, knowing and loving the mystery of Christ, give to the Church new music that shines in dignity, reflecting the noble sentiments of the faith and able to make known the presence of God.

6. As an integral part of the liturgy, sacred music has the supernatural ability to promote the “glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful” (Pius X, *Tra le sollecitudini*, 1). In daily liturgical celebrations use is made, in some parts of the world, of a music of a minimalist character defined “ambiental music” or “new age”. Often, for example, it is used as background music for Eucharistic adoration, but it is not really conducive to a state of personal prayer. While prayer opens up, through the action of the Spirit, to the mystical contemplation of the mystery of Christ, ambiental music raises states of consciousness that are artificial and inadequate, being similar to some techniques of mind manipulation commonly used in subliminal psychology. Liturgical music does not induce silence but conduces it; it welcomes as a gift and fruit of grace what ambiental music achieves through mere human effort. Preparing the soul to welcome sacred silence, and keeping carefully this privileged place of encounter between God and the person, sacred music guides the individual and the entire community to full intimacy with Christ, when prayer becomes adoration and song of praise.

7. In the articles briefly developed here a framework of the theme of sacred music has been given, focusing on the attention of its privileged relationship with sacred liturgy. The dignity and nobility of sacred music can only derive from a proper understanding of the relationship that links liturgy and the *actuosa participatio*. The proper *ars celebrandi* needs a deep knowledge of liturgical books, filial respect for every rule and norm established by the Magisterium, a responsible sense of communion with the ecclesial “we”, and an intelligent and well chosen use of the signs and symbols with which the rite expresses the encounter with the mystery of God. From faithful respect of such criteria will derive, in turn, the *actuosa participatio* of the gathered faithful, which does not then depend from the multiplication of gestures and roles but descends naturally from the quality and faithfulness of the liturgical action. Sacred music is called to adopt a liturgical “style” that knows how to express through sound and song, the beauty of the communion with the Mystery and with the family gathered around the Eucharistic table. Fusing harmoniously with the gestures, the images, the aromas, the colours and every other *sign* proper to the liturgical language, music also participates, then, in that simple beauty, noble and transcendent that can touch the mind, spirit and heart and raise marvel, desire for God and charity towards neighbours.

Responses to the Questionnaire should be sent before 30 April 2014 to the Pontifical Council for Culture, Vatican City. Or via email to cultura@cultura.va
You can also find on the Council’s website (www.cultura.va) the questionnaire in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.