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## The Liturgical Music in the Italian Church

The modern era of liturgical music in the Italian Church has favored a situation in which a multiplicity of languages, styles and genres coexist which probably characterize its uniqueness on the world scene.

Since its inception, Italy has been fertile ground for the study, growth and progress of such a noble and sublime art as music.

Think of the monodic repertoires, still scientifically investigated today, coming from *ancient Roman chant*, the one which together with the *Gallican chant*, formed the basis of that great *cento* which gave life to the *Gregorian repertoire* used by the Catholic Church for the past fifteen centuries; remember the *Ambrosian tradition* which gave us real masterpieces forged by the mastery that *Ambrogio da Milano* put into practice with the art of *hymnody*; consider the no less important testimonies of the *Aquileia* and *Benevento schools* which for a few centuries distinguished themselves, albeit locally, in different parts of Italy.

The history of music also places all the *polyphonic* experience in the Italian peninsula, the development of the musical chapels and the Renaissance artistic apogee that we can remember citing *Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina* still considered today as an ideal model for the composition of sacred polyphony.

And in later times we cannot fail to consider the *Venetian style* characterized by the contribution of *Adriano Willaert*, *Gioseffo Zarlino*, *Giovanni Croce* and, above all, *Andrea* and *Giovanni Gabrieli* and, again, what left by *Claudio Monteverdi*, *Antonio Vivaldi* and many others up to that real revolution which, in the Romantic era, profoundly marked the destiny of liturgical music. Better known as the *Caecilian renewal*, we can recall it by quoting the major proponents who throughout the twentieth century worked to sublimate the cult of the Church with the art of music: *Lorenzo Perosi*, *Luigi Picchi*, *Domenico Bartolucci*, *Luciano Migliavacca* and many others with them.

Italy has distinguished itself in various historical periods as a privileged place to be able to enjoy all this evolution: a wonderful observation point which has not, however, only allowed to enjoy the evolutionary beauty of this so sublime art, but

has also highlighting excesses which, on several occasions, have compromised the role which has always been assigned to it in the liturgy.

Already in 1322, Pope John XXII denounced the reprehensible state of music in the liturgy:

The singers, disciples of the new fashions (*Ars nova*) [...] inebriate the ears and bring no healing; they simulate with external gestures what they pronounce; thus that devotion which should be sought is neglected, and that lasciviousness which should be avoided is propagated<sup>1</sup>.

The breakdowns of music in the liturgy are also the subject of a brief and concise intervention by the Council of Trent, in session XXII, *De observandis et vitandis in celebratione Missae* (1562):

The Bishops are to remove from churches any music in which, both in the organ and in the singing, something lewd or impure is mixed, as well as any extraneous action, vain or profane chatter, movement, racket and shouts, of so that the house of God appears and can truly be called a house of prayer<sup>2</sup>.

Also noteworthy is the incisive experience of the great Milanese bishop, *St. Charles Borromeo*, a member of the commission of cardinals created by Pius IV in 1564 for the implementation of the reform of music in the church. Where the Council of Trent does not go into details, it does so with a series of Provincial Synods starting from 1565. Great severity is required in the choice of music and in its composition, banning any bizarre which, in particular, would make the sung text incomprehensible. Furthermore, all musical instruments are excluded from the church, except the organ. The provisions born from the intervention of St. Charles Borromeo have lasting consequences not only in the Ambrosian diocese, but in vast areas of northern Italy.

We are in 1749 and the great and learned Pope Benedict XIV even dedicates an encyclical to sacred music, the *Annus qui*, where he denounces the abandonment of the Gregorian chant, the fashion for symphonic music in the church, the transposition of theatrical musical fashions into liturgical texts, the din of the instruments, the sloppiness of the liturgical celebrations, the hurriedness of the singing

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<sup>1</sup> John XXII, Bull *Docta sanctorum patrum*, 1322.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Trent, Council Constitution *De observandis et vitandis in celebratione Missae*, 1562, n. 5.

of the Office. And it recalls the priority of the human voice, the need to make the texts being sung understood, the search for an appropriate style for the liturgical celebration and the refusal of any theatricality.

All of which lead to the decisive intervention of Saint Pius X who, with the Motu Proprio *Inter sollicitudines*, signed on the feast day of Saint Cecilia in 1903, indicates very specific objectives:

Sacred music must [...] possess in the best degree the qualities that are proper to the liturgy, and precisely the sanctity and goodness of the forms, from which its other character arises spontaneously, which is universality<sup>3</sup>.

Indicates historical models to draw inspiration from:

These qualities are found in the highest degree in Gregorian chant, which is consequently the proper chant of the Roman Church, the only chant that it has inherited from the ancient fathers, which it has jealously guarded over the centuries in its liturgical codes, which as its directly proposes to the faithful, which in some parts of the liturgy he exclusively prescribes and which the most recent studies have so happily restored to its integrity and purity<sup>4</sup>.

The aforementioned qualities are also possessed in an excellent degree by classical polyphony, especially of the Roman School, which in the 16<sup>th</sup> century obtained its maximum perfection through the work of Pier Luigi da Palestrina and then continued to produce compositions of excellent liturgical and musical<sup>5</sup>.

It provides that the sound of the organ abandons symphonies and opera arias and assumes a more serious and severe style.

It is a real legal code for sacred music and, therefore, an indisputable law.

It also aims to: “return Gregorian chant to the use of the people, so that the faithful once again take a more active part in ecclesiastical officiation, as was the custom in ancient times”<sup>6</sup>.

This pastoral concept traces a precise path towards the *actuosa participatio* indicated in a complete way by the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council. Reform which, together with a whole series of theological, pastoral and ritual

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<sup>3</sup> Saint Pius X, Motu proprio *Inter sollicitudines*, 1903, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Saint Pius X, Motu proprio *Inter sollicitudines*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Saint Pius X, Motu proprio *Inter sollicitudines*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Saint Pius X, Motu proprio *Inter sollicitudines*, 3.

changes, has also required from the world of liturgical music, as is known, a new strong commitment to renewal, evolution and innovation.

## 1. What has all this led to the liturgical music practiced today in the Italian Church?

We certainly cannot say that we are living in such a happy era from this point of view. After almost 60 years in which a false concept of *liturgical creativity* has been able to operate almost undisturbed, we are faced with an immense variety of situations in which – even in the presence of virtuous and significant experiences – a sort of generalized mediocrity is imposed which undermines almost all the cornerstones dictated by tradition and redefined by Vatican II.

## 2. The functionality of liturgical music

Regarding this principle, in the conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* we can read:

Sacred music will be all the holier the more closely it is united to the liturgical action, both by giving prayer a more gentle expression and favoring unanimity, and by enriching the sacred rites with greater solemnity<sup>7</sup>.

And *Mons. Valentino Miserachs Grau*, director of the “Liberian” Musical Chapel and emeritus president of the *Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music*, states:

Therefore, it is a matter of composing holy music, and it will be the more it is united, in every sense, with the liturgical action; from this will derive a more gentle and compelling expression, aimed at making the sacred rites better understood and enjoyed; it will favor unanimity, that is, the awareness of belonging to the people of God, to the holy assembly. On the contrary, solemnity is not excluded, and this presupposes that liturgical music should not be limited to simple refrains, but that it can instead aspire to forms of greater development and greater artistic depth. [...] Obviously, it is not a question of delighting the ears or filling in empty spaces, much less of cheering up a meeting of friends, things that unfortunately are the order of the day<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1964, n. 112.

<sup>8</sup> V. Miserachs Grau, *Composing for the ritual between problems of functionality and artistic needs, intervention at the Conference entitled “The composition of music for the liturgy at the beginning*

### 3. The music that dresses the word

Giacomo Baroffio, Gregorianist and theologian, affirmed:

The history of music in the Christian liturgy marks a stage in a long journey that began in the prayerful experience of Israel, when it was understood that only the musical language was adequate for transmitting the Word of God in the liturgical celebration. [...] A purely physical fact required by the need to convey the divine message to a chaste circle of listeners present in a large space. [...] a fact of spiritual relevance: every proclamation in song is always also an interpretation of what is announced. The tone of the voice, the changing of the timbre, the fluidity or gravity in the pronunciation, the subdued or strong tone, are all components that on an instinctive level [...] reveal what is really perceived as the central nucleus of the speech being pronounced or of the word which reads<sup>9</sup>.

The evangelizing function of liturgical music is often diminished by the use of trivial, sloppy texts that absolutely do not meet strictly liturgical criteria such as to allow one to enter into a relationship with the rite. In many situations there is a lack of awareness of the importance of using biblical texts or specially prepared texts to support the rite in the liturgical context. The liturgical books – above all the *Missal* – are the most important, authoritative and complete source of the texts that make up the rite, which constitute its soul and which form the basis of its essence. This indicates unequivocally that the reference to such texts should be an indispensable choice.

The experience of the *Musical Chapel of the Lodi Cathedral* which, as has been amply illustrated to us by its Maestro, Mons. Piero Panzetti, has put the introit Antiphons of all Sundays and solemnities of the liturgical year back at the center of attention – renewed in the new edition of the *Roman Missal* – is a virtuous example of the use of music at the service of the *word*, a practice which, at the same time, is at the service of the ritual gesture.

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of the new millennium”, Associazione Italiana Santa Cecilia, September 1–3, Rome–Vatican City 2017.

<sup>9</sup> G. Baroffio, *Singing and music in Christian worship*, in: *Elements of liturgical musicology*, Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra, Rome 2016, n. 1.

#### 4. The musical forms

It is not trivial to remember that the various ritual moments, in order to best express their purposes, require specific musical forms which, without the ambition to mention them all, we can summarize in the following list:

- the *litany* (Kyrie, Agnus Dei, Prayer of the Faithful, Litany of the Saints);
- the *acclamation* (Alleluia, Mystery of faith, Amen, Sanctus, Yours is the kingdom);
- the *proclamation* (Sung Readings, Responsorial Psalm, Responsories);
- the *psalmody* (cantillation, hymn psalmody, psalmody in alternating choirs);
- *rhythmic and free hymnody* (Gloria, Te Deum, Ambrosian and Gregorian hymn, Renaissance Choral);
- the *solo recitative* (Orations, Preface, Eucharistic Prayer, Doxology, Embolism, Greetings, Blessings);
- the *choral recitative* (Pater, Credo);
- the *processional* (Entrance, Offertory, Communion);
- as well as other forms which – due to their episodic technique and lyrical concentration of the texts – are themselves rituals, such as the *motet*, the *troparion* and the *canzone*.

A real endowment of working tools available to those who are called to compose music intended to play a ritual role in the liturgy.

*Fulvio Rampi*, Gregorianist, choir director and composer explains:

The vast repertoires of traditional and post-conciliar popular song have crystallized the most disparate musical forms, with a marked propensity, especially in recent decades, for the responsorial form. In truth, a serious journey has been made in the search for forms compatible with the potential of a common assembly; a path, however, also full of degeneration both on a textual and formal level. The assemblyist anxiety extended the comfortable responsorial form made up of simple refrains that can be used immediately – to all the songs of the rite (even to the Gloria or the Credo), fatally contradicting their specific liturgical nature<sup>10</sup>.

There is a need to go back to revitalizing and enhancing those musical forms that tradition has given us as instruments aimed not only at ennobling the musical art, but also useful for satisfying the need to achieve that ritual pertinence that the liturgy requires.

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<sup>10</sup> F. Rampi, *Hymns for the liturgical assembly*, Elledici, Turin 2013, p. 9–10.

St. John Paul II also reminds us of this in his 2003 chirograph drawn up for the centenary of the Motu Proprio *Inter sollicitudines*:

Liturgical music must respond to its specific requirements: full adherence to the texts it presents, consonance with the time and liturgical moment for which it is intended, adequate correspondence to the gestures proposed by the rite. Indeed, the various liturgical moments demand their own musical expression [...] now proclaiming the marvels of God, now manifesting feelings of praise, supplication or even sadness for the experience of human pain, an experience however that faith opens to the perspective of Christian hope<sup>11</sup>.

## 5. The recovery of music in celebrations

Baroffio explains again:

within the liturgy [...] – Baroffio explains again – it is absolutely necessary to recover the musical language, given that, in fact, today the celebration in most cases is amusical. The parts of the president are totally recited: think of the prayers and the Eucharistic prayer. Even the proclamation of the Gospel, which would be the responsibility of a deacon, is usually spoken without any modulation. The sporadic interventions of the assembly are also recited, often in a disorderly way. [...] Responsibility for the current situation does not fall mainly on liturgical pastoral care even though it is latent or completely non-existent in many parishes. The cause-fault is to be attributed rather to the widespread culture of our time, an era that sees the passive use of a lot of music – mostly reproduced on records – while in recent decades active music-making has significantly decreased, either with singing and at the instrumental level.

A widespread situation of musical illiteracy – consider, for example, the totally insufficient musical preparation at school level – considerably worsens the condition of music in the liturgy because in fact the assemblies, at least in Italy, are not able to sing. The insufficient musical culture also produces an artistic recklessness which is expressed in the lack of critical judgment on the marketed products. In other words, little or no singing

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<sup>11</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Chirograph for the centenary of the Motu Proprio “Inter sollicitudines”*, 2003, 5.

is done, and what is sung is often not in keeping with the dignity of the liturgical celebration<sup>12</sup>.

## 6. Choice of repertoire

Baroffio indicates precise needs:

*In order to plan an appropriate liturgical-musical repertoire, two instances must be kept in mind:*

- (1) The musical preparation of the assembly. At this level many difficulties are encountered because the mentioned lack of musical education does not allow the engagement of songs that exceed even a minimal threshold of difficulty. This means that the principle advocated enthusiastically by some groups immediately after the Council is highly negative, that is, to make everyone sing everything.
- (2) [...] In choosing the chants I must not first ask myself which piece the congregation willingly performs or wants to sing, but rather I must ask myself which passage, both from a textual point of view and from a musical point of view, can help the liturgical assembly to pray<sup>13</sup>.

The established trend is by now that of always performing the same songs chosen from an increasingly restricted repertoire. The frequent level of classification of the pieces is often reduced to a mere subdivision of the same for adaptability to the liturgical time. There is a need to rediscover the *rituality* of singing and its *function* as a true communicative propeller of the biblical message that every celebration brings with it in an unambiguous form.

It is also necessary to rediscover the need to associate only “sacred” music with the liturgy, understood as music that uses a clear, meaningful and comprehensible language, which brings to mind only the message, the *word*, which is echoed. There are very frequent choices of pieces and melodies – albeit accompanied by pertinent sacred texts – which recall situations extraneous to the ritual being performed: opera arias, film soundtracks, etc.

Each melody has its own “reputation” which must always be measured, weighted and monitored over time.

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<sup>12</sup> G. Baroffio, *Singing and music in Christian worship*, in: *Elements of liturgical musicology*, Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra, Rome 2016, n. 7.

<sup>13</sup> G. Baroffio, *Singing and music in Christian worship*, n. 8.



In this regard, I like to tell an anecdote – an episode lived during many years of service as organist and assembly guide in various communities – in memory of the many new songs spread in the post-conciliar era. Among these a graceful song made its way entitled *The time has come*, written taking inspiration from an *English folk* style melody, but substantially compatible with the hymnodic form. The text written by Luciano Scaglianti said: “*The time has come / Father for me. / To my friends / I said that / this is life / to know you / and your Son / Christ Jesus*”.

A clear reference to the episode narrated by John 12 in which Philip and Andrew tell Jesus that some Greeks have asked to meet him (“The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified”).

The “misfortune” of this melody, after decades of happy liturgical use, is that it was used in support of a pressing television advertisement.

After, at the end of a Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, during which I had proposed this song to accompany Communion, a distinguished middle-aged lady hurried to join me to say: “The communion song is really beautiful, *that of the Robiola Osella cheese*”, I realized that this song – albeit of proven validity from a musical, textual and ritual pertinence point of view (a hymn with a modern flavor linked to the evangelical episode proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word) – it could no longer be used as a liturgical chant: it had evidently changed its “reputation” and lost its fundamental *function*: that of being a melody at the service of the *word* and in support of the ritual<sup>14</sup>.

## 7. The National Repertoire of songs for the liturgy

It is a collection of 384 pieces chosen during a long and meticulous selection process carried out by a commission of musicians and liturgists commissioned by the *Italian Episcopal Conference*, job that lasted a total of 10 years. In 2009 the Repertory was presented to the Bishops, printed and promoted for its diffusion in all the Dioceses of Italy.

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<sup>14</sup> I came to these reflections thanks to the texts of authoritative scholars who have made a huge contribution to the evolution of liturgical music in Italy. In particular: J. Gelineau, *Song and Music in Christian Worship – principles, laws and applications*, LDC, Turin 1963; J. Gelineau, *The chants of the Mass in their ritual roots*, Ed. Messaggero, Padua 2004; F. Rainoldi, *Traditio Canendi – Notes for a history of Christian rites*, Centro Liturgico Vincenziano Edizioni Liturgiche, Rome 2000; F. Rainoldi, *Psallite wiser – historical liturgical notes and pastoral reflections on the chants of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours*, Centro Liturgico Vincenziano Edizioni Liturgiche, Rome 2008.

Its use is not yet extended uniformly on the Italian territory. The hope is that, gradually, the numerous Dioceses that are continuing to use the local Repertoires will move towards the goal of a uniformity of musical proposals to be made available to those ministers who are engaged to make the celebratory choices.

With the Repertoire we can count on a collection of chants which for text, musical form and stylistic writing can be considered “liturgical chants” to all intents and purposes: not chants juxtaposed to the rite, but chants that form a whole with the rite same.

## 8. The need for training

Having made available a repertoire of selected pieces and proven compatibility with the liturgy, does not exonerate those who are called to direct celebrations from the need for an adequate and continuous spiritual, liturgical, musical and pastoral formation.

The Italian Episcopal Conference has been promoting for the past thirty years the *Musical Liturgical Specialization Course (Co.per.li.m)* which offers those who possess liturgical-musical skills and are already engaged in the liturgical service of singing and music, a theoretical study and practical in order to the ministry performed. The didactic proposal is articulated over an academic two-year period and the fields of study are: composition for the liturgy, organ improvisation, the organ for the liturgy, the guitar for the liturgy and the zither for the liturgy. The courses common to all areas of study cover the “general introduction to the liturgy, liturgical musicology, insights into liturgical-musical pastoral care” as well as “practical animation and musical direction workshops for celebrations”.

For those who do not possess liturgical-musical skills, a *three-year course* is offered to be followed in *e-learning* mode with in-depth studies aimed at the minimal training required of musical animators of liturgical celebrations.

There are numerous Italian dioceses that locally promote the **Diocesan Schools of Sacred Music**. Among these, the Archdiocese of Milan which with its school called *Te Laudamus* offers a training course which intends to offer the basic tools for liturgical-musical animation not only in the Ambrosian area, but also in the neighboring Dioceses in which there is not a local school. The current academic year sees the participation of about one hundred students who, among the various courses inherent in the liturgical, musicological and pastoral areas, will also be invited to go to different communities to actively participate in some celebrations and compare their experience with that of other liturgical-musical animators.

## 9. The task of the composer of liturgical music

Evidently forming good liturgical-musical animators is not enough. Liturgical music needs constant renewal, continuous artistic and spiritual growth that allows it to increasingly enhance its important celebratory function. In this regard, our attention is focused on the task of the composer for the liturgy.

On this subject, the words of St. John Paul II which we read in the aforementioned Chirograph dedicated to liturgical music are very precious:

Only an artist deeply understood by the *sensus Ecclesiae* can attempt to perceive and translate into melody the truth of the Mystery celebrated in the Liturgy. In this perspective, in the Letter to the Artists I wrote: “How many sacred compositions have been elaborated over the centuries by people deeply imbued with a sense of mystery! Countless believers have nourished their faith with the melodies that have blossomed from the hearts of other believers and have become part of the Liturgy or at least a very valid aid to its decent development. In song, faith is experienced as an exuberance of joy, of love, of trusting expectation of God’s saving intervention”.

A renewed and more in-depth consideration of the principles that must underlie the formation and dissemination of a quality repertoire is therefore necessary. Only in this way it will be possible to allow musical expression to serve its ultimate purpose in an appropriate manner, which “is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful”.

I am well aware that even today there is no shortage of composers capable of offering, in this spirit, their indispensable contribution and their competent collaboration to increase the patrimony of music at the service of an ever more intensely lived Liturgy. To them goes the expression of my trust, combined with the most cordial exhortation that they make every effort to increase the repertoire of compositions that are worthy of the height of the mysteries celebrated and, at the same time, suitable for today’s sensibilities<sup>15</sup>.

## Conclusion

These simple words of Saint John Paul II, a pastor very dear to all of us – and whom, with great emotion, today I would like to remember and honor here in the land who has long savored his pastoral zeal and his holiness – seem to me the best synthesis

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<sup>15</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Chirograph for the centenary of the Motu Proprio “Inter sollicitudines”*, 2003, 12.

of the topic that we wanted to address today and which, in gratitude to the organizers of this interesting International Congress, I hope I have helped to examine.

## Abstract

### The Liturgical Music in the Italian Church

The modern era of liturgical music in the Church in Italy has favored a situation in which a multiplicity of languages, styles and genres that probably characterize its uniqueness in the world scene coexist. We certainly cannot say that we live such a happy era from this point of view. After almost 60 years in which a false concept of *liturgical creativity* has been operating almost undisturbed, we are faced with an immense variety of situations within which – even in the presence of virtuous and significant experiences – a sort of generalized mediocrity is imposed which is almost all The cornerstones dictated by tradition and redefined by Vatican II. It is more than ever necessary to rediscover some fundamental concepts: the functionality of liturgical music; the music that wears the word; musical forms; the choice of the repertoire; the need for training; The task of the liturgical music composer.

**Keywords:** Functionality, word, forms, repertoire, rituality, training, composition

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