

EIR Document

A new Renaissance in the concept of Church music

by Steven Simon

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's address, "Liturgy and Church Music," was delivered on Nov. 17, 1985, to an obscure audience in Sicily, and published in the English weekly edition of the official Vatican publication, *Osservatore Romano*, on March 4, 1986. Even at the highest levels of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, Cardinal Ratzinger's friends and enemies have just begun to understand the momentous character of this intervention: It has no precedent in Church doctrine since Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa's writings in the mid-15th century. He proposes to reconstruct liturgical music on the strength of the great classical composers, whom the Holy Alliance banished from Church music 180 years ago.

Cardinal Ratzinger has spoken out on this subject for two decades, i.e., since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, but his present address takes on historical importance in the context of the results of the Synod of Bishops in December.

Although Cardinal Ratzinger situates his view carefully within the continuity of Church doctrine concerning liturgical music, friends and enemies in the Church familiar with these issues recognize in his speech, a new commitment to a broad shift in cultural values, centered in the capacity of classical music to exalt the human spirit.

Rumblings of a great change in liturgical music could be heard in Rome last summer, when Pope John Paul II sponsored the performance of Mozart's *Coronation Mass* at St. Peter's, the first performance of an orchestral mass in the Basilica. In December, the performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* at the conclusion of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops confirmed the new direction. Writing in this publication, Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. described the Extraordinary Synod as the most important event in our civilization

since the Council of Florence in 1439. If we take music as a measure of our civilization's capacity to exalt the spirit, Cardinal Ratzinger's speech confirms this judgment; he has revived in the Church the outlook of the statesmen of Florence, for the first time in centuries.

He rejects both the "traditional" straitjacket imposed upon liturgical music at the Council of Trent in 1563, as well as the liberal reading of the results of the Second Vatican Council two decades ago, in favor of the Cusan outlook of the Golden Renaissance, mediated to the present day through Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert.

It is not surprising that Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith (once known as the Holy Office, or the Inquisition), would denounce rock music. He describes it, with perfect accuracy, as a modern version of the orgiastic Dionysian (i.e., satanic) cults. Remarkable is that he rejects the central thesis of the 1563 Council of Trent, the underpinning of Church musical doctrine since the time of Beethoven. Even more remarkable is the standpoint from which he attacks it.

Since 1563, the inflexible criterion for the acceptability of liturgical music, has been the "intelligibility of the text." That was the pretext for the attack on the polyphonic "Flemish school" of Josquin des Prez (d. 1522) and his followers. Counterpoint before Bach had found its high point in the work of Josquin des Prez, who sang at the same Milanese court that patronized Leonardo da Vinci, and da Vinci's friend, Franchino Gaffori, author of the first printed book on music, and a proponent of the equal-tempered musical system. The "Flemish" school, transplanted to the headquarters of the Italian Renaissance, proceeded from Cusa's discovery of the equal-tempered system.

Leonardo, Gaffori, and Josquin died just before the disastrous 1523 Battle of Pavia and the 1526 Sack of Rome, which destroyed the Golden Renaissance. Venice became chief patron of the arts, and twisted the discoveries of the Renaissance to her own purposes. At least with regard to music, the great council of the Counterreformation at Trent became an instrument of the Venetian inquisition.

The Council of Trent at first leaned towards the abolition of polyphony altogether in favor of the monodic Gregorian chant of the Dark Ages for music. It compromised on a formula for simplifying polyphony such that the text might supposedly be "intelligible." The compromise gave the Gregorian chant and so-called strict polyphony a monopoly over liturgical settings; the gifted, unfortunate Palestrina had the task of composing with a ball-and-chain.

Cardinal Ratzinger continues to view the Gregorian chant and Palestrina polyphony as the foundation of liturgical music. But he insists that they should not bar other forms, and rejects the premise upon which they were imposed upon liturgical composers.

However, as one of Cardinal Ratzinger's bitterest enemies in the Church emphasized in private discussion, the Council of Trent was motivated not by religious, but by secular considerations. The emphasis upon monody and supposed "intelligibility of the text" came not from the Church, but from the Venetian and Florentine oligarchy which had dug the grave of the Golden Renaissance, in alliance with the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V. Closely associated with the Catholic Counterreformation, this oligarchy identified itself with the most degenerate paganism of the Roman Empire. Its chosen composer in the generation after the Council of Trent was Claudio Monteverdi, author of the only sympathetic representation of Nero (*L'Incoronazione di Poppea*, 1642) in modern literature.

Monteverdi's early form of expressionism was first defended in the tracts of Girolamo Mei and Vincenzo Galilei (father of Galileo), on the basis of a willful misreading of the ancient Greek musical sources. It is not surprising that their faction in the Counterreformation Church adopted the same view, except with reference to medieval monkish chants.

"Strict counterpoint," the other side of the Council of Trent compromise, has roots as pagan as the revived monodic chant. The families of the Venetian oligarchy, who had sponsored the Counterreformation through Ignatius Loyola, promoted "strict counterpoint" as the "alternative" to Galilei's monody. Venetian counterpoint, as taught by Ludovico Fogliano and Gioseffo Zarlino, rejected the equal-tempered system of Nicolaus of Cusa, and the musicians of Leonardo da Vinci's circle in Milan. Zarlino, a self-professed Cabbalist, offered a sort of number-magic to explain the supposed pleasure-giving properties of consonances based on simple ratios of vibrating strings. His "rules of counterpoint" were published in 1558 as an intervention into the debate at Trent.

Palestrina composed *despite* the "rules of Palestrina

counterpoint." These "rules" were revived in the 18th century by the enemies of J. S. Bach, i.e., Fux, Rameau, and Padre Martini of Bologna, to attack Bach's method of composition, and with the same pretext, i.e., that Bach's complex polyphony obscured the text. After the 1814 Congress of Vienna, the Holy Alliance restored Gregorian chant and "strict counterpoint," to conduct an inquisition against Beethoven and Mozart. Masses with orchestral accompaniment were excluded from the Church liturgy, banning the treasures of sacred music created by Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert. The revived Benedictine order increased its membership tenfold by the end of the 19th century, and became the standard-bearer of Venetian paganism against classical music.

Our miserable "contemporary music" springs directly from this pagan evil. The 12-tone composer Arnold Schoenberg, in whose music some Church specialists "detect the presence of the Devil," to cite one Benedictine writer, defended his horrible sort of musical numerology on the basis of the "laws of strict counterpoint," and not without reason: 20th-century serialism is the successor, in outlook and method, of 16th-century Venetian Cabbalism in music. Twentieth-century "neo-romanticism" descends, in turn, from Monteverdi's amoral expressionism.

Until the Second Vatican Council concluded two decades ago, the Holy Alliance ban against orchestral masses prevailed in the liturgy. The new Council liberated the liturgy from the old ban, but it opened a Pandora's Box. The worst excreta of degenerate 20th-century culture were admitted into the mass, including the updated Dionysian cult-rites which Cardinal Ratzinger abhors.

That is the origin of the crisis of our music, including liturgical music.

Now, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Faith has brushed aside the old, seductive formula concerning "the intelligibility of the text," and revived the standpoint of Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa. When we translate *Logos* from the original Greek of the New Testament, he teaches, we do not mean simply "word," but the "Word" that was "with God, and was God," as in the first lines of the *Gospel of St. John*. The "words" of the Nicene Creed are not the subject of nominalist literalism, as among the fundamentalist Protestants; they are the *Logos*, God's Word-made-flesh, which must be comprehended through the exaltation of the spirit in song.

Only the music of the West, Cardinal Ratzinger specifies, exalts the individual such that he may comprehend the Divine. The spiritual synthesis of the West reaches from Renaissance polyphony to the "late Baroque" (referring to J. S. Bach) "to Bruckner and beyond," including the liturgical works of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Schubert.

There is already outrage among the Benedictines over Cardinal Ratzinger's "exclusionary" praise of the music of the West, and understandably so. Although he reveres Gre-

gorian chant as a "treasure of sacred music," the monody of the Dark Ages is an Eastern intrusion, based on the Byzantine modal system. The Benedictines, who foresee the crumbling of our musical edifice into the "omega point" simplicity of the monkish chant, readily admit this. They claim that the modal structure of the Gregorian chant derives from certain natural acoustical laws which characterized the music of Babylon and the Solomonic temple, and still characterize the music of primitive pagan peoples. They defend pagan primitivism against the "artificial" constructs of Cusa's equal-tempered system. The Benedictines are, in their own view, and in reality, the immediate heirs of the Venetian inquisition against the Golden Renaissance.

We do not wish to put words into Cardinal Ratzinger's mouth. He considers the Gregorian chant to be a moment in development of sacred music, which should no longer exclude the great composers from the liturgy. We differ, in viewing the reintroduction of Gregorian chant at the Council of Trent as an aberration, directed against the policies of the Council of Florence a century earlier. Nonetheless, he has brushed aside the empty rationalizations through which Gregorian chant returned, and through which polyphony was made lame. He has re-established the theological and philosophical criteria by which liturgical music may be judged. By reviving the Cusan outlook which founded the Golden Renaissance, Cardinal Ratzinger has given immeasurable impetus to the prospects for a new Renaissance in our time.

'The Word made flesh' and creative discovery in music

We print below a condensed version of an address originally titled, "The liturgy and Church music," and delivered by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger on Nov. 17, 1985 to an audience in Sicily. The full text appeared originally in the English weekly edition of the Vatican publication Osservatore Romano, on March 4, 1986.

1. Outstripping the Council? A new conception of the liturgy

The new phase of liturgical reform efforts is explicitly based not upon the texts of the Second Vatican Council, but upon its "spirit." As symptomatic of this view, I shall use here the informative and clearly conceived article on "Song and Music in the Church" which appeared in the "New Dictionary of the Liturgy" (*Nuovo Dizionario di Liturgia*). Let us attempt to familiarize ourselves briefly with the basic outlines of this new conception. The point of departure for the liturgy

(so we are told) lies in the assembly of two or three who gather in Christ's name. At first hearing, the reference to the promise of Jesus in Matthew 16:20 sounds harmless and quite traditional. However, it acquires a revolutionary impetus through the isolation of this one biblical text, which is viewed in contrast to the entire liturgical tradition. The "two or three" are now set up as the antithesis of an institution with institutional roles, as the antithesis of any kind of "codified programme." This definition of the liturgy therefore means that it is not the Church which takes precedence over the group, but rather that the group is more important than the Church. It is not the Church as a total entity which supports the liturgy of an individual group or congregation, but rather the group itself is the point at which liturgy begins in every instance. Hence, it also follows that liturgy does not grow out of a model shared in common, out of a "rite" (which as a "codified program" now becomes a negative image of constraint): Liturgy rather arises on the spot, out of the creativity of those assembled. On such a sociological view, the sacrament of priestly ordination appears as an institutional role which has created a monopoly for itself and which, by means of the institution (the Church), undoes the pristine unity and community of the group. In this constellation, we are told, both music and the Latin tongue have become a language of the initiates, "the language of another church, namely, of the institution and of its clergy."

It is evident that the isolation of Matthew 16:20 from the entire biblical and ecclesiastical tradition of the Church's common prayer has far-reaching consequences: The Lord's promise to those praying anywhere is transformed into the dogma of the autonomous group. The joint action of praying has been intensified to an egalitarianism which regards the development of spiritual offices as the beginning of a different Church. From this point of view, any guiding postulates derived from the Church as a whole are restraints which must be resisted for the sake of the originality and freedom of the liturgical celebration. It is not obedience to a totality, but rather the creativity of the moment which becomes determinative. . . .

(. . .)

3. The anthropological pattern of the Church's liturgy

The answer to our question is suggested by two fundamental statements in the *New Testament*. St. Paul coined the expression *logike latreia* in Romans 12:1, but this is very difficult to translate because we lack a satisfactory equivalent for the concept of *Logos*. It might perhaps be translated "logos-like worship" or "worship fixed or determined by the Spirit," which would also echo Jesus's statement about adoration in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). But it is also possible to translate it as "adoration stamped or marked by the Word," adding, of course, that in a biblical sense (as well as in the Greek meaning), "word" is more than mere speech or lan-