

Music in the liturgy: another view - for 'Open House' in 2006

Dear Ian,

I am so glad that your journal has made room for an article drawing attention to the importance of music in the liturgy. The liturgy and its music is at the heart of the Church's life, and I think that we all know that its renewal can scarcely be expected to be miraculously more advanced than the rest of the church's life! However, the subject does deserve fuller treatment, and the progress made by the community at prayer in the past 40 years could usefully be acknowledged.

In 1965 when the vernacular was introduced it was a daunting task that the Church had set itself. The **population** was already declining, people were being re-housed from the city centres and so parish **communities** were being dramatically affected, all kinds of **organisations** were faltering or breaking down. The renewal of the **Holy Week liturgy** in the 1950s had encouraged some fresh thinking, and there had been efforts to involve the congregations in the Latin '**dialogue mass**' - but with very limited success, and when parishes were encouraged to use **hymns** it was soon realised that, in the main, the hymns were designed for public devotions and not for the liturgy. Furthermore, as Cardinal Wiseman had pointed out in the late 19th century a great many of our devotional hymns were of a very poor quality however popular they were!

The **Gregorian** repertoire was even then substantially confined to some religious houses, seminaries, cathedrals, and the 12.00 o'clock Mass in better supported parishes. Lots of parishes had **choirs** which enjoyed a choral repertoire but, for a variety of reasons they were already struggling to keep members. Then, with the new expectations that such choirs should also have the role of involving and supporting the congregation it became increasingly difficult for them to sustain themselves. In 1968 alone it was reported that 48 parish choirs in the Archdiocese of Glasgow had folded up!

There was no ready-made **vernacular repertoire** to hand— **Anglican Chant** didn't seem to be attractive enough (except to those with an Anglican background), and **Gelineau** psalms seemed to lose their initial widespread popularity.

The **clergy** had been trained to function in the old liturgy and it would take years before they would generally find ease in the new. Many **musicians** who had rejoiced in the works of the great masters of music had difficulty coping with the fresh demands made on them to focus on music as primarily a tool of public prayer. Many **parishioners** everywhere had continued to attend the liturgy showing more of a sense of duty than of joy and with little urge to be involved.

I look round now in 2006 and while I am a bit disappointed in some of what I see, I have to express my admiration for the strength shown in our community, and the willingness of so many to commit themselves to the church and its prayer life, accepting their own limitations and respecting those of others.

Some of the background to our present situation is demographic: In the Archdiocese of Glasgow, our population is now about 600000 less than it used to be, and yet since the 2nd World war there have been 30—40 new parishes started. In our anxiety to accommodate people we have increased the number of masses in parishes—but that

can divide the community instead of gather it, and it makes the provision of ministers—Priests, Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, Cantors, Psalmists, Organists, Instrumentalists, Servers, Passkeepers etc—for each Mass more difficult to supply.

Despite that, **the survey the Archdiocesan Music Committee organised in Glasgow** 4 years ago indicated that in a great many parishes there are organists and instrumentalists, psalmists, cantors and choirs and that the clergy seem more able now to support singing than they did in previous years, and to sing themselves! In many parishes the **Mass parts** are even sung on weekdays, and sometimes the psalms too! Some even have a form of **Morning Prayer** as well, and **Vespers or Evening Prayer** is making some, albeit slow, progress. We need more cantors, choirs and organists but there is a Scottish Federation of Organists, and SCOTS is doing great work in training and supporting organists. In Glasgow and Edinburgh, Motherwell, Galloway and Argyll – to mention the ones I know of - there are organisations which beaver away at promoting music and supporting musicians with courses, new material, arrangements and events, and despite the pressure of curricular development our Catholic schools are generous in responding to initiatives.

There is an increasing repertoire of **psalm settings** available now, with books being supported by CDs. St Mungo Music (Archdiocese of Glasgow) produced 2 volumes of a large core repertoire entitled 'In the name of God' and between them they sold 1700 copies of the organ edition. Kevin Mayhew published a new Psalmbook for St Mungo Music two years ago and he is publishing a new collection of music from the Sanctus to the Communion Rite in January. St Andrew's and Edinburgh are making great strides musically and have begun publishing new compositions for children, parishes and for organ.

The **Funeral liturgy** has been transformed and the Holy Week and Easter services are better attended now than ever.

Hymns are still used in our parish liturgies mainly because many parishes don't yet have an adequate repertoire of psalms and mass parts. Even there, the quality of the hymns has shown much improvement with an increasing number being based on scripture. James Quinn SJ made an outstanding contribution in this. It is worth noting that **ecumenically** we have been enriched by accepting many of the great hymns of the other churches, while **Taize** and **Iona** have made valuable contributions to our repertoire.

More attention is being given to introducing **music styles that suit young people and children**, and while we have much to do to improve what we have, the work does go on. (Perhaps there could have been more local involvement in Scotland when the music for Alive O was accepted!) The **Children's Eucharistic Prayers** are increasingly being used, though not yet sufficiently, and in Glasgow we have had annual **Festive Masses and School Cantatas** for almost 30 years involving between 20 and 68 Primary Schools with an average of 30 children from each! It should be noted that these school cantatas are celebrations, not polished performances, and they have to accept the variable resources of talent and time available

You will notice that I haven't yet mentioned **musical styles**. This is probably because my professional understanding of how music in the liturgy is meant to work inclines me

to use styles that make the words accessible and enriching and respect the dignity and pre-eminence of the words— as a rule. No, we do not want to lose our musical heritage, but there is a priority in promoting public prayer and in what is achievable. To have people raise their voices in song is what matters, not whether they do so in one style rather than another.

I must express some wonder that after only 40 years the Church in English speaking countries is changing the texts of the Dialogues and Acclamations that belong to the congregation at Mass — to do so now seems a bit puzzling! However, it does give us a fresh opportunity of working together and surely the skills gained in working with the ICEL Missal of Paul VIth will be used with even greater fruit in facing the challenge of the new Missal. As we become more familiar with contemporary technology we should be able to provide more CDs and tapes as teaching aids not only so that psalmists may learn new settings and vary their repertoire, but so that choirs, congregations and clergy can be supported in renewing a their repertoire which will indubitably include Gregorian and polyphony as well as contemporary settings.!

The background to problems and growth in the liturgy and its music is not just demographic and cultural. It is about **faith, and prayer, a sense of the presence of God**, an awareness of a faith community caught up in a dizzyingly changing world, with responsibilities to affect that world. Music cannot be held responsible for the depth or shallowness of our faith but it can help us to express our awareness of the holy.

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