

What are Children Learning about New Liturgy

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This is the third of a series of articles on church music. Sister M. Benedict is supervisor of vocal music for the Sisters of Mercy, vocal and instrumental instructor at St. John the Evangelist School, choir director of St. John the Evangelist Church in Humboldt St., and a member of the Diocesan Music Commission.



The first two articles in this series treated liturgical music in a general fashion. The first explored the nature of the changes which have been introduced into the Catholic churches during the past few years. It also analyzed some of the current attitudes to these innovations. The second article described the experimentation with new musical forms for the liturgy which are being made in Europe.

THIS THIRD article will directly confront the particular problem of church music on the level of the elementary school.

An obvious starting point for the present discussion is the fact that any universal change of attitude or any sweeping reformation of the way people react to important things in their lives can only be successfully accomplished after many years. The reform will probably be satisfactorily achieved only after a generation of trial and effort.

In this regard, then, the Catholic elementary schools are a decisive factor since they have within their walls the power to bring about the change. The students will be fully the Church of the agglomeration. They are the ones who will grow up in the new climate of liturgical awareness and full participation at worship.

For this reason many probing questions can be asked about the liturgical and musical formation which is provided in our parochial schools.

What are the students between the ages of six and thirteen taught about the liturgy and music? Are they better informed Christians because of the Vatican Council or because of the influence of the parochial school? Are they offered a genuine opportunity to participate as fully as possible in the new liturgy so that they will have a meaningful grasp and living of their Christian faith? These, and many other questions, come readily to mind.

School Music Program

The music program in the elementary schools of the diocese is a very diversified one. It encompasses many phases of musical education. The student is given a rudimentary understanding of music theory, modern and gregorian, which embraces note reading and sight singing. There is an extensive training in music appreciation which covers the works and lives of composers from J. S. Bach to Howard Hanson. There is also ample opportunity to lis-

ten to and sometimes sing their music. The students are thus given knowledge of all periods of music history and a general cultural formation.

Materials for singing instruction in this program are taken from a series of music readers called "We Sing & Praise." Its contents include a wide range of hymns and songs of all kinds. The psalms and hymns used in the parish services thus form a part of the instruction as does the training of children's choirs for both boys and girls. The program is augmented by the teaching of piano and instrumental music lessons for those who wish it, and many schools even have their own orchestras or bands.

In general the purpose of the elementary school program is to give the students a cultural background of patriotic, religious and art songs as well as a finer appreciation of the beauty that the human mind has created in music. The student is thereby enabled to appreciate the aesthetic side of life along with the great artistic treasures of the world.

Perhaps, at first glance, this may not seem to have much to do with the question of liturgical music. But it is essentially related since the attitude that a child brings to hymn singing in church is developed in large part through his participation in the regular music classes. It is there that he is exposed to a rich variety of musical expressions and has his mind and spirit opened to the possibilities which music offers. If variety and balance are lacking, if only one phase of music is emphasized, then there is no enthusiasm for any kind of music as a rich means of human expression.

This was observed in one school where the children sang only hymns for a whole year so that they could help with the singing in church on Sunday. Of course the children should help the parish program, but not to the detriment of their overall musical formation.

A simple illustration was provided by one third grade class which had received a sound and enthusiastic instruction in both music and religion. When it

was announced that they would sing "God is Love" at the First Friday Mass, they happily clapped their hands as children do. When they were asked to explain their reaction, they replied that this hymn talks about love, and that's what you talk about when you go to Communion. They knew what it is to pray and sing.

This is the spiritual harvest which comes when the teacher has sown the seeds properly. Put in crasser, modern terms, this is success achieved through the whole-hearted selling mentioned in an earlier article.

To be a whole-hearted salesman, one has to be completely convinced that what he or she is selling is not only valuable, but the very best. This gives rise, however, to a twofold problem in our elementary schools.

The first is the inadequacy that many teachers, both lay and religious, feel when faced with the prospect of teaching music in general — not only any part of it, but all of it. At times this feeling is well grounded since many teachers have neither the ability nor training to teach it. This problem can be met, with the help of the administration, by scheduling classes so that a qualified teacher can take the music classes, and the other teacher can take her academic classes. By "qualified" is meant a grade teacher with adequate musical competence to teach grade school music.

The second problem is related to the liturgy itself, and it is not quite so easy to solve. It arises from the fact that many of our teachers are not enthusiastic over the new liturgy either because of lack of time or their failure to become informed. For this reason they cannot give wholehearted instruction. Children are influenced by the teacher's attitude indirectly. Thus success will depend largely on the cooperation of teachers and administration in both the school and church.

One solution would be to invite a guest speaker to a faculty meeting. The talk could provide background necessary for understanding the new liturgy or handling the specific problems of the particular school. This

would also provide opportunity for honest discussion.

In this way, the people who are not informed could acquire valuable knowledge, and perhaps a more sympathetic attitude toward his whole new phase of instruction. Those who are enthusiastic would have a chance to help others. This could, in turn, stimulate further reading and research, and lead ultimately to a much needed liturgical awareness.

Another solution would be to invite one of the parish priests to faculty meetings for discussions on the various aspects of the liturgy in the parish. They could also be asked to visit individual classrooms and there, priest, teacher and children could discuss not only the principles of liturgy and music, but also the texts of the hymns being used.

Obviously the texts have different meanings for various age levels. Thus a good deal of instruction should focus on the meaning of the texts for children. Through the hymn "O carry one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ," for example, it could be pointed out that Jack should carry home his sister's books or help his mother with household chores. For Jack's teacher, on the other hand, the same text might mean involvement in a civil rights project or working with a group in the inner city.

On Sundays and often on a weekday the school children have the opportunity for liturgical participation. Then they can put into action, as a group, what they have been taught. Some schools have a sung Mass, others have a low Mass with hymns. In many places the psalm settings of Father Joseph Celineau and Stephen Somerville are used. These are simple and beautiful, and the children find them easy to sing. As a contrast to these, the more modern rhythmic settings of Father Clarence Rivers and Ray Repp are also used in some schools.

Often it is possible for the celebrant to introduce meaningful liturgical actions which will heighten the significance or meaning of hymns sung; for example, offertory processions, prayers of the faithful, introductory comments at appropriate points of the Mass.

This is the type of liturgical instruction that the children need in order to relate their singing which is a prayer to their everyday living. This brings us to another important factor in their instruction; that is, their home environment.

Liturgy and Home

By the very fact that parents send their children to Catholic schools, concern is shown for their spiritual formation and welfare. Necessarily, this concern has to be continuing process. If the education of their children is to bear fruit, parents have to provide the proper attitudes and atmosphere for them in their own homes. This means that they will encourage their children's liturgical involvement by participating themselves, and by showing themselves open to all of the new liturgical happenings and seasons as they occur.

Family discussions on the liturgy, held perhaps during a meal and in a wholesome atmosphere of acceptance, would stimulate and increase interest for all concerned. It will also help them to pray better and sing more heartily.

Parents ought to show interest in the other areas of their children's musical formation by encouraging attendance at the various concerts held in the Rochester area. Making available the hearing of good serious musical recordings in the home is another way to sustain and develop interest and appreciation.

If the child never hears this kind of music except in school, then he will unconsciously dismiss it as being just another school subject. If he is given



the opportunity to hear it at home and in the concert hall, however, his cultural background will develop more fully. Music becomes a part of his life, and a normal means of personal expression at home and in church.

The end result of this program will not be the same for every child, of course. To some

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Teilhard Conference

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London (RNS)—Observers here see bright prospects for an expanded dialogue between Christians and Communists as a result of the recent first annual conference of the newly formed Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Association of Great Britain and Ireland.

The two-day gathering brought together 400 persons — priests and nuns, Protestant clergymen, politicians, doctors and students — to honor the life and work of the famed French Jesuit who died 11 years ago. He was hailed variously as an evolutionary thinker comparable with Darwin and Marx and as the first mystic visionary to attempt a reasoned synthesis between science and theology since St. Thomas Aquinas.

These characteristics set the tone of the meeting here. A feature was the standing ovation accorded a leading French Com-

munist who paid an hour-long tribute to Teilhard's life and work.

He was Professor Roger Garaudy, Marxist philosopher and official of the French Communist Party, who said Father Teilhard's work constituted "a decisive ground for meeting and dialogue between Christians and Marxists."

"Father Teilhard," he added, "has opened up for our age the respect of another form of Christian spirituality which bids the faithful not to renounce the world but, on the contrary, to bend all his energy towards transforming the world into a more human world—a world at once more conscious, more unified and more personal."

Professor Garaudy added: "We Marxists are materialists. That is to say, we try to answer the questions of man without

bringing in the postulates of the 'other world.'

"Christians have made another choice. Our dialogue will only be fruitful if the answers which each of us give do not evade the real questions put by the other."

Another speaker was M. Claude Cuenot, Teilhard's French biographer, who said he thought that Teilhard's *Le Milieu Divin* would become the classic of Christian spirituality. It was addressed exactly to the modern situation, he said.

One Catholic observer said later, "The whole dialogue often seems glibly used to gloss over vital differences, but suddenly, as Cuenot and Garaudy were speaking, one could see how it could indeed be a genuine technique enabling men of different dogmatic beliefs to work together."

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