

Does Folk Music Help Worship?

Catholic Press Features

St. Louis—A leading church music publication has criticized the use of folk music — in its present form — as harmful to community worship.

The magazine, "Church Music," called for a "fusion" of good folk music and traditional church music as the best way to achieve "a new, vital, and long-lasting liturgical style of real significance."

Although published by the Lutheran-operated Concordia Publishing House, the special issue devoted to "Popular Music in the Church" dealt with church music of all denominations.

The director of music of the Catholic St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in the Chicago Archdiocese, the Rev. Richard Wojcik, said in an article for the archdiocesan newspaper: "I wish there was

some way this issue could be made required reading for everyone in any way responsible for parish, school or small group liturgies."

While crediting the introduction of folk music into the church liturgy with giving many people "the first inkling they have had that the liturgy could be truly exciting, truly expressive, truly involving," the magazine nevertheless maintained that most of the folk music in use today is inappropriate for weekly use.

"The unsuitability of most present 'folk' settings for regular use is due in part to their one-sidedness," said "Church Music." "They can express very well the joy and freedom of God's people when gathered in His house in response to His promise, and God knows we need that in the Church today! But there is much more to the liturgy than this. The revelation of

the Godhead is no folksy, sentimental thing as Peter and the apostles found out on the Mount of the Transfiguration."

"How well do these folk settings communicate and express the sense of awe and wonder in the presence of the Divine and great God and His mighty acts?" the magazine asked. "In order for a setting of the liturgy to commend itself to the church for regular use, it must do a regular job of reflecting all the major facets of meaning which the liturgy possesses."

"Church Music" found folk-Masses wanting in a number of key areas. Foremost among the criticisms was "the lack of profundity." "Pretty" music or "catchy" music cannot carry the weight of meanings that the liturgy must convey," the report said.

"Many of the folk song renditions of the Mass are lit-

tle more than collections of folk or folksy melodies, often quite awkward in their adaptation of the text," the magazine added, although reserving some praise for such folk-style hymns as "Sons of God, Hear His Holy Name," "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," "Alleluia," and all of Father Clarence Rivers' "American Mass Program."

Another problem with constant use of folk music at Mass is that while "with the young people... there is an immediate surge of spontaneous singing, a real sense of lifting up the heart which is rarely audible in public worship," the magazine suspected that "this spontaneity is bought at a stiff price in terms of the total liturgical life of the Church."

"Church Music" also pointed out that frequently "the text is written to fit the music,

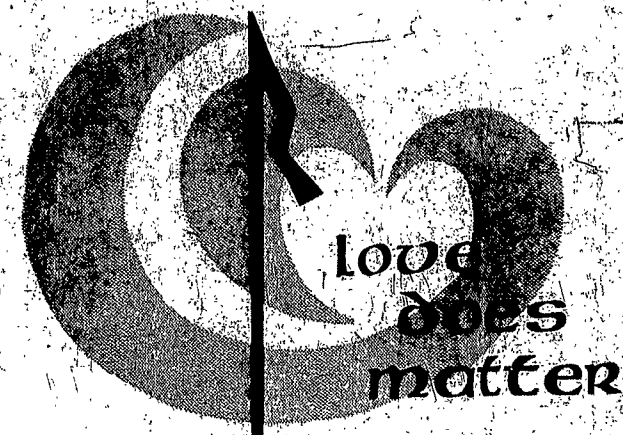
rather than vice versa, and the music does not really serve the text or its meanings particularly well."

Admitting that Luther "picked up folk tunes in the street and brought them into the church," and that Bach "borrowed freely" from secular opera and dance in composing his church cantatas, passions and oratorios, "it should also be added that both these men knew exactly what they were doing. They knew the liturgy intimately enough to know when they were fulfilling a real liturgical need

without creating a greater problem."

Also high on the list of the magazine's priorities was a need to "span the age spectrum" in producing new liturgical music.

"The young people 'dig' it; the older people, for the most part, either tolerate it or abhor it," the publication said of folk music. "But there comes a time when young and old must celebrate the liturgy together with equal involvement or the meaning of the Sacrament is tragically attenuated."



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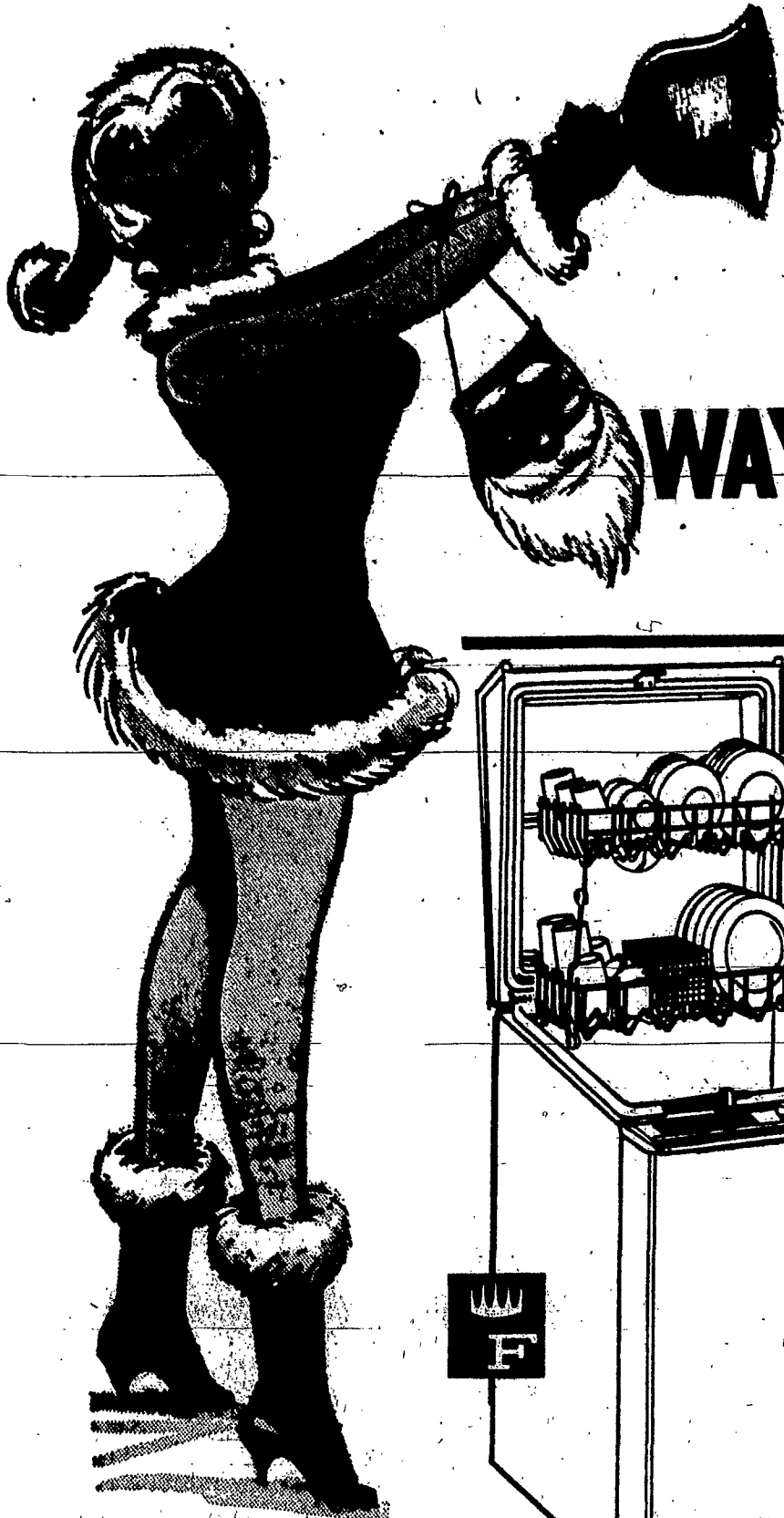
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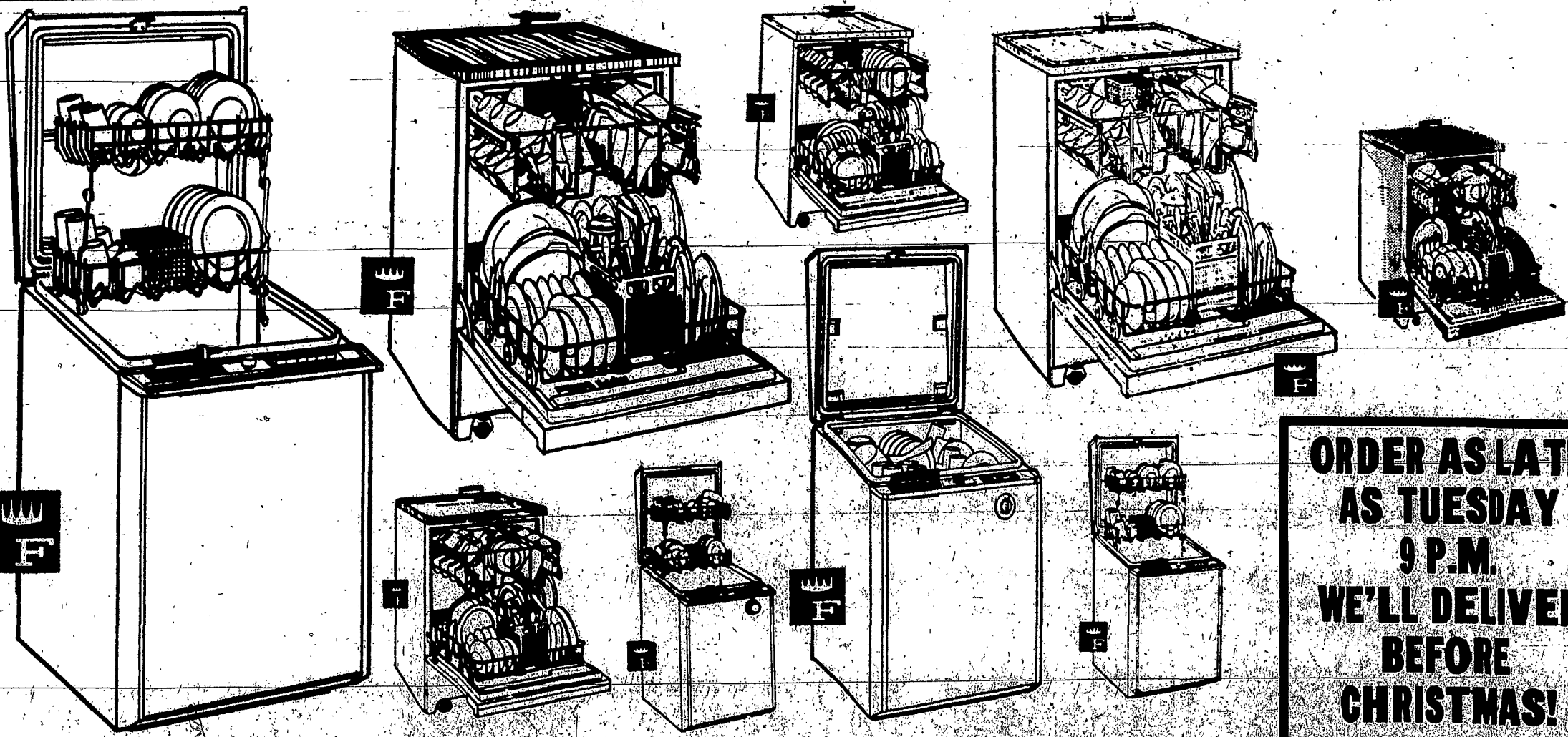
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