

Acta Sanctæ Sedis

Musicæ Sacræ (On Sacred Music)

Encyclical of the Servant of God, Pope Pius XII - December 25, 1955

Part - IV



33 St. Augustine, speaking of chants characterized by “beautiful voice and most apt melody,” says: “I feel that our souls are moved to the ardor of piety by the sacred words more piously and powerfully when these words are sung than when they are not sung, and that all the affections of our soul in their variety have modes of their own in song and chant by which they are stirred up by an indescribable and secret sympathy.”

34 It is easy to infer from what has just been said that the dignity and force of sacred music are greater the closer sacred music itself approaches to the supreme act of Christian worship, the Eucharistic sacrifice of the altar. There can be nothing more exalted or sublime than its function of accompanying with beautiful sound the voice of the priest offering up the Divine Victim, answering him joyfully with the people who are present and enhancing the whole liturgical ceremony with its noble art.

35 To this highest function of sacred music We must add another which closely resembles it, that is its function of accompanying and beautifying other liturgical ceremonies, particularly the recitation of the Divine Office in choir. Thus the highest honor and praise must be given to liturgical music.

36 We must also hold in honor that music which is not primarily a part of the sacred liturgy, but which by its power and purpose greatly aids religion.

This music is therefore rightly called religious music. The Church has possessed such music from the beginning and it has developed happily under the Church's auspices. As experience shows, it can exercise great and salutary force and power on the souls of the faithful, both when it is used in churches during non-liturgical services and ceremonies, or when it is used outside churches at various solemnities and celebrations.

37 The tunes of these hymns, which are often sung in the language of the people, are memorized with almost no effort or labor. The mind grasps the words and the music. They are frequently repeated and completely understood. Hence even boys and girls, learning these sacred hymns at a tender age, are greatly helped by them to know, appreciate and memorize the truths of the faith. Therefore they also serve as a sort of catechism. These religious hymns bring pure and chaste joy to young people and adults during times of recreation. They give a kind of religious grandeur to their more solemn assemblies and gatherings. They bring pious joy, sweet consolation and spiritual progress to Christian families themselves. Hence these popular religious hymns are of great help to the Catholic apostolate and should be carefully cultivated and promoted.

38 Therefore when We praised the manifold power and the apostolic effectiveness of sacred music, We spoke of something that can be a source of great joy and solace to all who have in any way dedicated themselves to its study and practice. All who use the art they possess to compose such musical compositions, to