

SACRED MUSIC AND LITURGY

THE INSTRUCTION OF THE
SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES
CONCERNING
SACRED MUSIC AND SACRED LITURGY
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE
ENCYCLICAL LETTERS OF POPE PIUS XII
“MUSICAE SACRAE DISCIPLINA” AND
“MEDIATOR DEI”

Translated, with a commentary,
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Language of Liturgical Functions

(d) In exercises of piety any language suitable for the faithful may be used.

* 14. (a) In high Masses Latin alone is to be used not only by the celebrant and ministers, but also by the choir or the faithful.

“Where, however, there is a centennial or immemorial custom of interpolating, after the sacred liturgical text sung in Latin, some popular chants in the vernacular in the solemn Eucharistic Sacrifice [that is, in a high Mass]¹ local Ordinaries may allow this to be done, ‘if in the circumstances of places and persons they consider the custom cannot be prudently suppressed’ (can. 5), the law requiring that the actual words of the Liturgy may not be sung in the vernacular, however, remaining intact.”²

(b) In *low* Masses the priest-celebrant, his server, and the faithful who *directly* take part in the liturgical action with the celebrating priest, namely, who say aloud those parts of the Mass that concern them (cf. n. 31), must use only Latin.

If, however, in addition to this *direct* liturgical participation, the faithful wish to add some prayers or popular chants,³ according to local custom, this they may do also in the vernacular.

(c) The saying aloud, with the celebrating priest, in Latin or in a word for word translation, of the parts of the *Proper*, *Ordinary*, or *Canon of the Mass* other than those enumerated in n. 31, by all the faithful or by a commentator, is strictly forbidden.

At low Masses on Sundays and feast days, however, it is desirable that for the benefit of the faithful the Gospel, and also the Epistle, should be enunciated by a reader in the vernacular.

From the Consecration to the *Pater noster* a sacred silence should be inculcated.

From nn. 13-16 the Instruction deals with the very controversial subject of the use of the vernacular in the Liturgy. Here is a résumé of its directions:

Principle I: The language of liturgical functions is Latin (n. 13a) except otherwise provided for explicitly: (a) in the rubrics (e.g., the baptismal promises in the Easter vigil rite may be

¹ This parenthesis belongs to the Instruction.

² Encyclical Letter *Musicae Sacrae Disciplina*: A.A.S., 48 (1956), 16-17.

³ These should be suitable for the part of the Mass where they are said or sung (cf. nn. 29, 30, 33).

Use of Vernacular

renewed in the vernacular; local rituals provide for the use of some vernacular in the administration of sacraments or sacramentals), or (b) by special indults conceded to some countries, or (c) in this present Instruction.

Principle II: In any *sung* liturgical function no liturgical text may be *sung* in a verbatim translation (n. 13*b*), except by special indult.

* Accordingly: (i) **At high Mass** the only language allowed is Latin (the exception made on the ground of immemorial custom mentioned in n. 14*a* is not applicable to the British Isles, it chiefly concerns Germany) (n. 14*a*).

(ii) **At low Mass** for *direct* participation of the people, *i.e.*, when they say aloud with the celebrant any of the parts that belong to them (see nn. 31 and 14*c*), only Latin may be used (n. 14*b*).¹

* (iii) Latin is the only language allowed for singing Gregorian chant (n. 16*a*); and for liturgical processions for which Latin texts are prescribed (n. 15).

While the vernacular is not allowed (apart from special concession of the Holy See) in any *sung* liturgical function for a liturgical text (n. 13*b*), IT IS ALLOWED:

(i) during low Mass, if it is customary, to *add* prayers or popular chants to the direct participation by the recitation in Latin of the correct liturgical texts (n. 14*b*);

(ii) during low Mass—independently of any direct participation of the people (n. 14*b*)—for common prayers and chants, provided these are in keeping with the different parts of the Mass (nn. 30, 33);

(iii) for the reading by a lector of the Epistle and Gospel (n. 14*c*);

(iv) for all exercises of piety (n. 13*d*), including non-liturgical processions (n. 15).

The vernacular is expressly prohibited at the Conventual Mass (n. 36) and for *Pater noster* at low Mass (n. 32).

St Pius X laid down the fundamental principle about the liturgical language in these words²: “The language proper to

¹ A few writers have expressed the view that it is permissible—it is certainly undesirable—for the congregation to recite in the vernacular, *while* the celebrant is saying them in Latin, in a low Mass, such liturgical texts as the *Gloria in excelsis* or *Credo*. Only S.R.C. can give an authoritative decision on this question. By earlier decisions (3537^b, 4235^b) S.R.C. had forbidden the singing of a verbatim translation of a liturgical text during low Mass.

² *M.P.*, §. 7.

Antiphons at High Mass

tion of the faithful in solemn Mass undoubtedly applies to sung Mass also.

For smaller churches or chapels, sung Mass is the more popular form of high Mass, especially when sacred ministers or a number of capable servers are not easily available. It differs from solemn Mass only in ceremonial¹; musically it is the same, but—with goodwill—it can be carried out with a congregation trained to communal singing, led by a few competent singers. These even if they cannot sing the more difficult parts to the correct plainsong melodies can at least sing the text (which is of obligation) to a psalm tone or even in a monotone (as n. 21c suggests).

27. In high Masses these points should be noticed:

(a) If the priest with his ministers enters the church by a longer way, there is no reason why after the singing of the *INTROIT ANTIPHON WITH ITS VERSE*, other verses of the same psalm should not be sung. In this case after every one or two verses the antiphon may be repeated, and when the celebrant has arrived at the altar, the psalm is, if need be, interrupted, the *Gloria Patri* is sung, and finally the antiphon is repeated.

(b) *AFTER THE OFFERTORY ANTIPHON* it is permissible to sing the old Gregorian melodies of those verses which used formerly to be sung after the antiphon.

If, however, the Offertory antiphon be taken from a psalm, it is lawful to sing other verses of this psalm. Then after each verse or two verses of the psalm the antiphon may be repeated, and when the Offertory is finished, the psalm is concluded with *Gloria Patri* and the antiphon is repeated. But if the antiphon is not taken from a psalm, a psalm suited to the solemnity may be chosen. When the Offertory antiphon is finished, a *Latin motet* may be sung, one, however, suitable for this part of the Mass, and it must not be prolonged beyond the *Secret*.

(c) Ordinarily, the *COMMUNION ANTIPHON* should be sung while the celebrant receives the most holy Sacrament. If, however, the faithful receive Communion, the singing of this antiphon is begun

¹ Many dioceses have an indult for the use of incense at sung Mass (cf. O'Connell, *Celebration of Mass*, p. 652).

Silence at High Mass

when the priest distributes Holy Communion. If this Communion antiphon is taken from a psalm, it is permissible to sing other verses of this psalm; then after each verse or two verses the antiphon may be repeated and, when the Communion is ended, the psalm is finished with *Gloria Patri* and the antiphon is repeated. If, on the other hand, the antiphon is not taken from a psalm, a psalm suited to the solemnity and the liturgical action may be selected.



When the Communion antiphon has been finished, especially if the Communion of the faithful be long continued, it is lawful to sing also another brief Latin motet suitable for the sacred action.

Moreover, the faithful who are about to communicate may recite, thrice, with the celebrating priest, *Domine, non sum dignus*.

(d) If the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* are sung to the Gregorian settings they are to be chanted without a break between them; otherwise *Benedictus* is to be sung after the Consecration.

(e) While the Consecration is taking place all singing must cease, and also the sound of the organ or any musical instrument, where this is customary.

(f) After the Consecration, unless the *Benedictus* has yet to be sung, a sacred silence up to *Pater noster* should be encouraged.

(g) While the celebrating priest blesses the faithful at the end of Mass the organ is to be silent; and the celebrating priest should so pronounce the words of the Blessing that they may be understood by all the people.

This provision for the extension of the three processional chants is a return to a primitive practice. There can still be a dignified procession through the church at the beginning of Mass (as the new *Ordo* of Holy Week suggests for the evening Mass on Maundy Thursday and for the Good Friday service), and at Masses where Holy Communion is administered there is still at least an informal procession to and from the altar.

The extension of the Introit had already been allowed by a decision of S.R.C. (29 January 1947)¹ with permission of the Ordinary (no longer needed); and that of the *Communio* is embodied in the new rite of Maundy Thursday, where a choice

¹ At the coronation Mass of Pius XI in 1922 the Introit psalm was chanted in full.

Motets at Mass

of five psalms suitable for chanting during the Communion of the people is given.

Another liturgical rule is exemplified in this extension of the processional chants and in the new Holy Week *Ordo*, i.e., that whenever antiphonal psalmody accompanies a ritual action, when the latter comes to an end the psalm is interrupted and the singing terminated by *Gloria Patri* and the repetition of the antiphon.

The new legislation allows a motet at the Offertory¹ provided it is (i) in Latin, (ii) suitable for that part of the Mass, (iii) short, so that it does not continue beyond the Secret. Similarly, a suitable Latin motet may be sung if the distribution of Holy Communion is prolonged. St Pius X had permitted (*M.P.*, § 8) a motet to the Blessed Sacrament, according to Roman custom, after *Benedictus*. This is no longer to be sung (cf. nn. 14c, 27f) since immediately after the Consecration the prayers of the Canon are not in salutation to the new sacramental Presence but an offering of the Sacrifice.

It is, obviously, appropriate that those about to receive Holy Communion should recite aloud their special *Domine, non sum dignus* (mentioned also for low dialogue Mass in n. 31b), as the Roman Ritual (V, iv, 19) directs a sick person to do before his Communion. One day, perhaps, it may be permitted, as more becoming since this prayer concerns only the communicants, that, when they know the prayer, it may be recited by them alone and not with the celebrant as the Instruction directs.

N. 27d settles a long-standing dispute about which S.R.C. (4364) had in 1921 given a different decision—that was much criticized by specialists—and had ordered a correction in the rubric of the Roman Gradual.

N. 27e alters a rubric of the Ceremonial of Bishops (II, viii, 70) which, while directing the cessation of singing at the Elevation, added: *organum vero, si habetur, cum omni tunc melodia et gravitate pulsandum est*. And this playing became the common usage in some places.

N. 27f suggests silence of song, and n. 29c silence of instrumental music between the Consecration and *Pater noster*; it is the time for offering silently with the celebrant the Sacrifice, as the three prayers immediately following the Consecration show.

N. 29g emphasizes the rubric of *Ritus Missae*, XII, 7, which

¹ Cf. *M.P.*, § 8.

PAPAL DOCUMENTS ON SACRED MUSIC *

FROM THE 14th TO THE 20th CENTURY

including the Motu Proprio of Pope Pius X (November 22, 1903) and

THE NEW APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION

"Divini Cultus Sanctitatem" of Pope Pius XI (December, 1928)

* Excerpts from the pamphlet
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XXVII
Canon Law

Canon 1264 of the New Code has the following on Music:

"All kinds of lascivious or impure music, whether accompanied by the organ or other instruments, or rendered vocally, must be entirely eliminated from the Churches—and the laws concerning sacred music must be observed."

OTHER DECREES OF THE SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, CONCERNING SACRED MUSIC

HYMNS IN THE VERNACULAR AT HIGH MASS

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites—3975-5.

"It is not permitted to sing hymns in the vernacular alternately with liturgical hymns at a Solemn Mass when the distribution of Holy Communion, lasts a long time, nor in Solemn Procession with the Blessed Sacrament."

Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites—No. 3994.

"The custom of singing in Latin only the responses 'Amen' and 'Et cum Spiritu tuo' at High Masses while during the rest of the time hymns in the vernacular fostering devotion in the people are sung is forbidden."

Hymns at Low Mass.

If the custom obtains, the singing of prayers or hymns in the vernacular, e.g., in honor of the Mystery or the Saint whose feast is celebrated, is permitted at Low Mass; but not at Solemn or High Mass. (Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites 3880; 3496-1.)

Hymns in the Vernacular during Procession with the Blessed Sacrament.

Sacramental hymns, from an approved hymnal, may be sung in the vernacular. The Sacred Congregation of Rites (Sept. 27, 1864) declared "that the custom of singing hymns in the vernacular before the Blessed Sacrament exposed and in Sacramental Processions may be retained." Repeatedly the same Congregation has declared "that IMMEDIATELY BEFORE Benediction no hymns in the vernacular are permitted"; the *Tantum Ergo* and *Genitori* must always precede Benediction. It is praiseworthy to sing appropriate hymns in the vernacular after Benediction. (Rev. Dom Gregory Huegle, O.S.B.)

2124. The custom of singing hymns in the language of the country during exposition or Benediction may be tolerated (Sept. 27, 1862, Nicaragua).

3113. The custom of singing an *Aria* in the national language during High Mass is an abuse and to be eliminated (March 22, 1862, St. Hyacinthe, Canada).

3230. Hymns in the vernacular during solemn liturgical functions and offices are not to be tolerated—outside liturgical functions whatever is customary it to be followed (June 21, 1879) (Madagascar).

3537. Can the priest, before and after Mass, when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, recite prayers or hymns in the vernacular?

Answer—Yes, as regards prayers only. Generally speaking, hymns in the vernacular may be sung at exposition; except the *Te Deum* and other liturgical prayers, which are only to be used in the Latin. (Feb. 27, 1892) (Leavenworth, Kansas).

3827. *General Decree Concerning High Mass.*

1. Hymns in the vernacular are forbidden during all high or sung Masses. Nothing is to be added to or mingled with the Liturgical Chants prescribed by the Rubrics.

2. Those parts which are alternated with the organ are to be sung or recited in integrity. The Credo to be sung throughout.

3. No singing during the Elevation. Between the *Benedictus* and *Pater Noster*, something may be sung; provided that all the prescribed portions of the Liturgy are sung; that the celebrant be not kept waiting and that what is sung refers to the Blessed Sacrament (May 22, 1894).

Hymns in the Vernacular before or after High Mass.

It is absolutely forbidden to sing in any language other than Latin during High Mass. Latin is the liturgical language; all who follow the Latin Rite are strictly bound to keep to the Latin language. Hymns may, however, be sung in the vernacular before or after High Mass.

Continuing the Mass during the Singing of the "Credo."

1936. The celebrant may not go on with the Mass during the singing of the Credo. (Dec. 17, 1695) (Genoa).

Tubular Chimes.

In answer to a question put in this way to the Sacred Congregation of Rites: "Whether tubular chimes are allowed for liturgical purposes in conjunction with the organ?"—the answer was in the negative, and attention was called to the provisions of the *Motu Proprio* VI. 18 and 19, Sacred Congregation of Rites, 4344, May 18, 1917.

2994. *Regarding the Recitation of the Proper of the Mass.*

The Offertory and Communion may be recited quietly in sung Masses while the organ is playing, but should not be omitted. (Jan. 16, 1852) (Montepulciano).

2051. *The Organ at the "Ita Missa Est."*

The organ may accompany the *"Ita Missa Est."* (Sept. 11, 1847) (Flascala).

3108. *The Libera at the Absolution.* The "Libera" is not to be begun until the priest and subdeacon are in position by the bier. (Sept. 7, 1861) (San Marco).

The "Veni Creator" before the Sermon.

There is no objection to the singing of one or two stanzas of the VENI CREATOR before sermon during High Mass. The sermon is a legitimate interruption of the liturgical function. The Chant of the VENI CREATOR is not an unlawful addition to the liturgical text of the Mass. It is simply a short and lawful preparation for the sermon itself. It is