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Keys for Understanding the Musical Magisterium of Pope Saint John Paul II: Between a Retrospective Look and the Post-conciliar Challenges

Saint John Paul II's long pontificate (1978–2005) is known for having offered many opportunities for reflection on the topic of sacred music. This is made evident in the shorter documents, mainly homilies and addresses given in Rome at several celebrations and marking anniversaries of associations and musical institutes. Although a chronological analysis of these documents shows the more prolific period to be the one until 1990, the most relevant text on this subject on the whole is the Chirograph, published in 2003 to commemorate the centenary of the motu proprio *Inter plurimas pastoralis officii sollicitudines*, better known as *Tra le sollicitudini*.¹

Throughout these pages I would like to offer a panoramic vision of the Pontiff's thought, based on his own writings. In a synthetic way I intend to clarify the hermeneutical keys that facilitate the understanding of his musical teaching. With the perspective that the years have given us, re-projecting our gaze on this long chronological arc can enrich our perception and stimulate a theological reflection of greater depth on song and music in the liturgical celebration.

¹ Cf. John Paul II, Chirograph for the centenary of the Motu proprio *Tra le Sollicitudini* on sacred music, 22.11.2003, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2003/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20031203_musica-sacra.html (15.06.2021); J.A. Piqué, *El "Qui-rógrafo" de Juan Pablo II sobre la música sacra (2003)*, "Liturgia y espiritualidad" 35 (2004), p. 194–202.

1. A reflection on liturgical music after Vatican II

Interest in sacred music can be considered part of a wider reflection on beauty as a visible expression of the good² and on art, as a transcendent language and “path that leads to Christian perfection.”³ Among the manifestations of the human spirit, music has a “unique, elevated and irreplaceable function,” as, when it is truly beautiful and inspired, music talks about goodness, virtue, peace, holy and divine things, more than all other art forms.”⁴ It is from such premises that one understands the relevance of musical art at the service of the liturgical celebration. In fact, Pope Saint John Paul II expressed his conviction that this area was of “vital importance” for the spiritual life of the Church,⁵ given the fact that its specific aim is none other than “the glory of God and sanctification of the faithful.”⁶

Furthermore, music acquires an even greater relevance in the context of the new evangelisation and in the dialogue with the culture of the times.⁷ The Pontiff was indeed conscious of the fact that music “builds bridges between the message of salvation and those who, despite not fully accepting Christ, are sensitive to beauty, because ‘beauty is key in the mystery and a call to the transcendent’. Beauty makes a fruitful dialogue possible.”⁸

² Cf. John Paul II, Letter to Artists, 4.04.1999, n. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html (15.06.2021).

³ John Paul II, Homily in the Jubilee of Artists, 18.02.1984, n. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1984/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19840218_giubileo-artisti.html (15.06.2021).

⁴ John Paul II, Address to the members of the “Harmonici Cantores” choir, 23.12.1988, n. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1988/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19881223_harmonici-cantores.html (15.06.2021).

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 15.

⁶ Vatican Council II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the sacred liturgy, 4.12.1963, n. 112, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (15.06.2021).

⁷ About the context, marked by the crisis of the Latin language and the generalization of vernacular languages, the distancing of the new repertoire – lacking quality on many occasions – from the liturgical action, the loss of importance of the figure of the organist, the approach and appropriation of fashionable musical genres from pop culture, but also a reaction of returning to the classical repertoire, see chapter 9 of L. Garbini, *Breve storia della musica sacra. Del canto sinagogale a Stockhausen*, Milano 2005, p. 407–452.

⁸ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music, 27.01.2001, n. 4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010127_religious-music.html (15.06.2021).

In a time also influenced by the post-conciliar liturgical reform and the challenges that this reform presented, the great references in John Paul II's teachings were, in order of relevance, the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on sacred liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (1963) and Pope St. Pius X's *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini* (1903). Nearly all addresses on music cite chapter six of the council document. This is a clear proof that John Paul II was a Pope of the Council "not only because he took part in it as a key player, but also because he understood all his magisterium as a deepening and pastoral application of the council's teachings."⁹ His syntony with the great beliefs of the post-conciliar liturgical renewal must extend to the musical sphere.¹⁰ Vatican II, in his opinion, had the courage to underline "with great strength the ministerial character attributed to sacred music."¹¹ As a consequence, in the Pope's mind, art and functionality must go hand in hand giving rise to a music with its own identity, able to respond to its needs, without being at the service of other experiences, above all the profane.¹²

2. The Theological paradigm of sacred music

In order to understand the underlying principles of John Paul II's theological discourse, in the first place music must be considered as *pars integralis* of the liturgical action. On this principle, taken from point n. 112 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, it is worthwhile focusing our attention on two documents dated from the year 2001. Indeed, before teachers and pupils of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music the Pope declares that "music and song are not merely an ornament or embellishment added to the liturgy. On the contrary, they form one reality with the celebration and allow for a deepening and interiorization of the divine mysteries."¹³ But the Pope goes a step further by affirming *tout court* that "sacred music is an integral

⁹ P. Morandé, *Claves de lectura del magisterio de Juan Pablo II*, "Estudios Públicos" 101 (2006), p. 8.

¹⁰ That syntony has been shown by the Pope in his documents as well as his spiritual life, his pastoral initiatives and his way of celebrating, according to P. Tena, *Juan Pablo II intérprete de la renovación litúrgica*, "Notitiae" 24 (1988), p. 830.

¹¹ John Paul II, Letter to the Archbishop of Cologne on the occasion of the 7th International Congress of Sacred Music, 25.05.1980, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/la/letters/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19800525_cardinale-hoffner.html (15.06.2021).

¹² Cf. V. Donella, *La musica nella liturgia dal Concilio Vaticano II ad oggi*, Verona 2012, p. 128 and 133.

¹³ John Paul II, Address to the professors and students of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, 19.01.2001, n. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010119_musica-sacra.html (15.06.2021).

part of the liturgy,”¹⁴ omitting the adjective “solemn,” which is not exempt from leading to misconceptions.¹⁵ Based on this, the Pontiff points out the need for an integration of three aspects: “full adherence to the text it presents, synchronization with the time and moment in the Liturgy for which it is intended, appropriately reflecting the gestures proposed by the rite.”¹⁶

Related to the aforementioned, we can consider the Pope’s reference to the Word. In his homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of Artists, he remembered Blessed Angelico for whom “the Word of God was, for his life as well as for his creative activity, a fountain of inspiration.”¹⁷ The Pope wished that the themes of Christian revelation would be inspiration for contemporary composers.¹⁸ And, at the same time, that music became the interpreter, hermeneutic and proclaimer of the Word. Hence, his view of Gregorian Chant as “a unique and universal spiritual heritage which has been handed down to us as the clearest musical expression of sacred music at the service of God’s word.”¹⁹

Melody, united to the Word, acts as a moving discourse that favours the experience of beauty. In fact, in one of his first documents, John Paul II explains that, through song, words “stand out even more and receive a special expression of solemnity, beauty and dignity that enable those present to feel somehow closer to the mystery acting in the liturgy.”²⁰ Oftentimes, the Pope emphasises the expressive capacity that musical art has in order to transform faith, mystery and the divine into a perceptible and audible reality. Along these lines, he declares that “sacred music is an expression and manifestation of faith,”²¹ that is “called

¹⁴ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music, n. 3.

¹⁵ Cf. D.A. Escobar Portillo, *La preparación de los diáconos y presbíteros al ministerio de la música*, in: Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura, *Musica e Chiesa. Culto e cultura a 50 anni dalla “Musica Sacram” (Roma, 2–4 marzo 2017)*, a cura di C.A. Moreira Azevedo, R. Rouse, Roma 2017, p. 266–267.

¹⁶ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 5.

¹⁷ John Paul II, Homily in the Jubilee of Artists, n. 5.

¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Homily in the Holy Mass for the “Scholae Cantorum”, 29.09.1985, n. 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19850929_scholae-cantorum.html (15.06.2021).

¹⁹ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music, n. 3.

²⁰ John Paul II, Letter to the Archbishop of Cologne.

²¹ John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, 21.09.1980, n. 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1980/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19800921_santacecilia.html (15.06.2021); John Paul II, Letter to the Pontifical Musical Chapel Master on the occasion of the 400th Anniversary of Palestrina, 2.02.1994,

to express the truth of the mystery celebrated in the liturgy,²² and whose dignity “demands an effort to express the divine through a rich collection of sounds.”²³ This central idea in the Pontiff’s mind is also found in the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, where we read that “sacred art must be outstanding for its ability to express adequately the mystery grasped in the fullness of the Church’s faith and in accordance with the pastoral guidelines appropriately laid down by competent Authority.”²⁴

Nevertheless, musical expression does not arise simply from being inserted in the *actio liturgica*, but it is born from the *sensus Ecclesiae*. This concept encompasses the action of both composers and interpreters. This becomes evident when the Pope says that “the criterion that must inspire every composition and performance of songs and sacred music is the beauty that invites to prayer,” that fosters “communion with the Trinity.” For this reason “singing in the liturgy” must flow from *sentire cum Ecclesia*.²⁵ Only an artist who is “profoundly steeped in the *sensus Ecclesiae* can attempt to perceive and express in melody the truth of the Mystery that is celebrated in the Liturgy.”²⁶ In an analogous way, one can refer to the “sense of mystery,” which must imbue those who put their artistic talent at the service of divine worship:

How many sacred works have been composed through the centuries by people deeply imbued with the sense of the mystery! The faith of countless believers has been nourished by melodies flowing from the hearts of other believers, either introduced into the liturgy or used as an aid to dignified worship.²⁷

https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19940202_mons-bartolucci.html (15.06.2021).

²² John Paul II, Homily in the Holy Mass for the “Scholae Cantorum”, n. 1.

²³ John Paul II, Address on the inauguration of the new site for the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, 21.11.1985, n. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1985/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19851121_musica-sacra.html (15.06.2021).

²⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* on the Eucharist in its relationship to the Church, 17.04.2003, n. 50, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_eccl-de-euch.html (15.06.2021).

²⁵ John Paul II, Address to professors and students of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, n. 3; John Paul II, Address on the inauguration of the new site for the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, n. 2.

²⁶ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 12.

²⁷ John Paul II, Letter to Artists, n. 12.

The sacramental dimension completes the group of essential notions in the magisterium of John Paul II. To this effect, it is eloquent to find it included in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Song and music fulfil their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are “more closely connected... with the liturgical action,” according to three principal criteria: expressive beauty of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and the solemn character of the celebration. In this way they participate in the purpose of the liturgical words and actions: the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful.²⁸

Here lies a vertical dimension geared towards the praise of God and communion with Him, to prepare the faithful to welcome the grace that flows from the sacred mysteries. Interpreting and expressing the profound sense of the sacred text, music is able “to add greater efficacy to the text, in order that through it the faithful may be (...) better disposed for the reception of the fruits of grace.”²⁹ At the same time, the horizontal dimension of sacred music looks, above all, to bringing people closer and make them feel like a community of prayer, as “singing is a higher language that favours the communion of hearts.”³⁰

With this mission of leading to contemplation and wonder at the mystery of God which is celebrated, Pope Saint John Paul II underlines sacredness as the specific quality of liturgical expression. Despite the difficulty in drawing the line between “secular” and “sacred,”³¹ the Pontiff believes that it is the “sacred” quality that enables music to be an integral part of the *actio liturgica*. Therefore, much more than in other fields, one must demand from it, as it is

one of the highest outward signs of liturgical sacredness; thus, (the Church) wishes that this music may have an adequate predisposition to the sacred and sacramental aim, with specific characteristics, that set it apart from

²⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 15.08.1997, n. 1157, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P38.HTM (15.06.2021).

²⁹ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 1.

³⁰ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the 26th International Congress of the Pueri Cantores, 31.12.1993, n. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1993/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19931231_pueri-cantores.html (15.06.2021).

³¹ Specifically, he points out that sacred music is a true art, it is for the celebration of divine worship (it serves the liturgy) and it is endowed with holiness and goodness of form; U.G. Sciamè, *La musica sacra nella liturgia oggi*, Palermo 1983, p. 18–20.

music destined for enjoyment, evasion or even a wider religiosity understood in a generic way.³²

Finally, it is interesting to note the theological discourse that develops the metaphorical sense of the verb to sing and the act of psalmody, inspired by St. Augustine.³³ In every Christian life it is not only the voice that must sing but also the heart, life, deeds.³⁴ The Pope renews the call to take part in the hymn that Christ has given to his Church by his incarnation, and to become “a new song” in Christ to the heavenly Father. Through the witness of fidelity to the Gospel, the life of each believer must be transformed into “a song of adoration and praise of God.”³⁵ This desire to reach union between song and life³⁶ leads us to a constant teaching in the liturgical magisterium of John Paul II: “the invitation to live deeply the mystery which is celebrated, not only in the rite but also in the vicissitudes of daily life.”³⁷

3. The recurring themes: from the hermeneutics of continuity to popular religious song

As well as the central theological notions inherited from previous magisterium, there are a number of subjects which Pope Saint John Paul II addresses quite regularly and we can classify as recurring. Among them there is one that stands out: continuity with tradition, which is considered to be a patrimony of inestimable value, open to the contribution of each generation of the faithful.³⁸ That contribution can only be made possible through a deep knowledge of the history

³² John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, n. 4. Hence the fact that it must be distinct from music for other purposes; cf. John Paul II, Homily in the Holy Mass for members of the Santa Cecilia Italian Association, 25.09.1983, n. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1983/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19830925_santa-cecilia.html (15.06.2021); John Paul II, Homily of the Holy Mass for “Scholae Cantorum”, n. 4.

³³ “Cum laudatis Deum, toti laudate; cantet uox, cantet uita, cantent facta”, Augustinus Hipponensis, *Enarratio in Psalmum CXLVIII*, 2, eds. E. Dekkers, I. Fraipont, Turnhout 1956, p. 2166 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 40).

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Homily in the Holy Mass for members of the Santa Cecilia Italian Association, n. 3.

³⁵ John Paul II, Homily of the Holy Mass for “Scholae Cantorum”, n. 4.

³⁶ Cf. John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, n. 5.

³⁷ M. Augé, *La obra litúrgica del Papa Juan Pablo II (1978-)*, in: *Cien años de renovación litúrgica. De San Pío X a Juan Pablo II*, Madrid 2004, p. 127.

³⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music, n. 2.

of Christian music. Thus, in his letter to the Archbishop of Cologne on the VII International congress of sacred music, the Pope already suggests that comparative study of contemporary and old musical forms be made. The new repertoire should “look for the highest inspiration, the quality of the sacred and the legitimate religious sentiment in the preexisting melodies, above all in Gregorian chant.”³⁹ The latter, far from being a simple mimesis, was presented as the inspirational model *par excellence*: “It is not, of course, a question of imitating Gregorian chant but rather of ensuring that new compositions are imbued with the same spirit that inspired and little by little came to shape it.”⁴⁰ With that same hermeneutic of continuity the Pope asks composers to give to the Church and the liturgy new works “following the steps of so many musicians that have been able to maintain their artistic inspiration in perfect and fruitful harmony with the high expectations and demands of Catholic worship.”⁴¹ That being said, valuing “the vast heritage which Christian civilization, art and culture have produced in all these centuries” is not a *desideratum* that concerns musicians exclusively, but a challenge for everyone.⁴²

A second recurring theme in the texts of John Paul II is the effort and preparation required for the composition and musical performance, as much in the artistic as in the spiritual and liturgical plane.⁴³ Thus, he expresses it in his speech to the Pueri Cantores in 1993, specifying that “it is a gratifying effort that elevates the spirit, making it more sensitive to spiritual values,” especially when the songs favour growing in closeness and intimacy with God in the liturgical celebrations.⁴⁴ That effort is also worthwhile due to the pedagogical value of musical art.⁴⁵

In the third place, attention should be given to popular religious song, a repertoire that grew more popular in the liturgy especially since the pontificate of Pius XII.⁴⁶ Saint John Paul II regards it particularly appropriate “for the par-

³⁹ John Paul II, Letter to the Archbishop of Cologne.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 12.

⁴¹ John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, n. 3.

⁴² Cf. John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, n. 5.

⁴³ Cf. John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, n. 5.

⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the participants in the 23rd International Congress of the Pueri Cantores, 31.12.1987, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/december/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19871231_pueri-cantores.html (15.06.2021); John Paul II, Address to the participants in the 26th International Congress of the Pueri Cantores, n. 3.

⁴⁵ Let us remember that for John Paul II, as well as for his predecessor Paul VI, the liturgy was a *locus educationis christianae*, according to A.M. Triacca, *Paolo VI e Giovanni Paolo II: continuità tra due stili pastorale. Evangelizzazione – Catechesi – Liturgia*, “Notitiae” 24 (1988), p. 647.

⁴⁶ Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Musicae sacrae disciplina* on sacred music, 25.12.1955, n. 19, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_25121955_musicae-sacrae.html (15.06.2021).

ticipation of the faithful, in devotional practices as well as the liturgy itself.”⁴⁷ But besides praising it, he tries to find a balance between this song and the rest of the sacred repertoire. This should be done in such a way that participation of the faithful in the liturgy should not undermine the old musical heritage and the search for new forms, that in any case must contribute to “express the sacred and touch the religious sensitivity of men and women of our time.”⁴⁸

4. The Pope’s concerns in the face of “arguable experiences”

In certain cases, the tone and style of the Pontiff seem to show some worry or concern. Indeed, the reception of the post-conciliar reform led to a pronounced change of direction in some churches, explicable to a certain extent by the subjectivity that characterised the cultural moment and by a misunderstood concept of creativity and adaptation;⁴⁹ in many spheres, traditional repertoire such as Gregorian chant and polyphonic song, was ostracized. In 1980, in his homily to the members of the Italian Association of Santa Cecilia, John Paul II referred to “the people who look with certain worry at the dubious phenomena and experiences, concerning musical expressions in certain liturgical celebrations.”⁵⁰ Five years later, he would make an urgent call to “act according to the wise principle of preserving and promoting” and to make an effort in the musical formation and performance, with the aim of “finding the synthesis between liturgy and music, between liturgical science and musical praxis, between scientific research and pastoral efforts.”⁵¹ In his address to the members of the “*Harmonici Cantores*”, he also reminded them that “it is necessary to rediscover the forgotten treasures” and to act with intelligence, taste and stylistic rigour without “forgetting how much value great composers of the past have left us as a legacy.”⁵²

The Pope’s concern is also related to quality. In his Chirograph, he emphasises the need to “purify worship from ugliness of style, from distasteful forms of expression, from uninspired musical texts which are not worthy of the great act

⁴⁷ John Paul II, Address to the participants in the International Congress of Sacred Music, n. 4.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, Address on the inauguration of the new site for the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, n. 5; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1158, and the Chirograph, n. 11.

⁴⁹ Cf. Augé, *La obra litúrgica del Papa Juan Pablo II (1978-)*, p. 111–113.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, Holy Mass for the Centenary of the Saint Cecilia Italian Association, n. 2.

⁵¹ John Paul II, Address on the inauguration of the new site for the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, n. 3.

⁵² John Paul II, Address to the members of the “*Harmonici Cantores*” choir, n. 2.

that is being celebrated to guarantee dignity and excellence to liturgical compositions.”⁵³ In the same way it is also advised that the celebrations may not be left to “improvisation or to the arbitration of individuals but must be well conducted and rehearsed in accordance with the norms and competencies resulting from a satisfactory liturgical formation.”⁵⁴

Another sphere that produces some concern is that of adaptation and inculturation. Number 6 of the Chirograph explains that “any innovation in this sensitive matter must respect specific criteria such as the search for musical expressions which respond to the necessary involvement of the entire assembly in the celebration and which, at the same time, avoid any concessions to frivolity or superficiality.” In this very point the most categorical expression of the Pontiff is found: “the sacred context of the celebration must never become a laboratory for experimentation or permit forms of composition and performance to be introduced without careful review.”⁵⁵ That careful review is linked to the goodness of traditional forms whose paradigm is Gregorian chant and classical polyphony. In addition, he suggests that the new musical languages be closely examined, “to ascertain whether they too can express the inexhaustible riches of the Mystery proposed” and thereby encourage “the active participation of the faithful in celebrations.”⁵⁶

Finally, the abusive practice so widespread in the context of the post-conciliar reform had to be remedied by examining to what extent they share the same aim as the liturgy.⁵⁷ This should be made specific in the aforementioned triple integration and in ascertaining whether they truly create a language of transcendence, where the faithful experience and celebrate the beauty of salvation with their song.⁵⁸

5. Dispositions of a practical nature

The directives aimed at solving the problems and obtaining greater fruits in the field of liturgical music touch on three fundamental aspects: the choir, formation and the competent commissions. The choir’s function or *schola cantorum* suffered

⁵³ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 3. The central idea is taken from his General Audience on 26th February 2003, n. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2003/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20030226.html (15.06.2021).

⁵⁴ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 8.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 6.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 7.

⁵⁷ Pope Saint John Paul II reacted immediately trying to eradicate the abuses in liturgical matters, as pointed out M. Garrido, *La reforma litúrgica después del Vaticano II*, Madrid 1988, p. 65–66.

⁵⁸ Cf. J.A. Piqué, *El “Quirógrafo” de Juan Pablo II sobre la música sacra (2003)*, p. 199.

a decline during the post-conciliar period as a result of considering the participation of the faithful in absolute terms. Now the Pope urges that the choir be promoted, reaffirming the validity of its function, as “it plays a role of guidance and support in the assembly and, at certain moments in the Liturgy, has a specific role of its own.”⁵⁹

With regards to formation, a constant in the papal magisterium of the 20th Century treating of music, it is expounded with an urgent promotion and solid formation “of pastors as well as the lay faithful”. The Pope wishes “that future pastors may acquire sufficient sensitivity also in this field”, a task for which sacred music schools are of special importance.⁶⁰

Finally, in the Chirograph we see how John Paul II appeals different parts of the Church, and at all levels, so that they carry out careful and efficient supervision. Competency of specialised commissions, at a national, diocesan or interdiocesan level, is to make “a precious contribution to preparing local repertoires, seeking to practise a discernment that takes into account the quality of the texts and music.”⁶¹ At the same time the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments must “increase its attention, in accordance with its institutional aims, in the sector of sacred liturgical music availing itself of the competencies of the various commissions and institutions specialized in this field as well as of the contribution of the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music.” The Bishops’ Conferences must carefully examine texts destined for liturgical chant and devote special attention “to evaluating and encouraging melodies that are truly suited to sacred use.”⁶² We can conclude by saying that, almost at the end of his pontificate, the Pope makes a last call to coordinate all available ecclesial means in favour of the musical principles laid out by Pope St. Pius X and brought up to date later by Vatican II.

Conclusion

This brief overview of the thought of Pope St. John Paul II on liturgical music helps to explain not only the framework in which he places his discourse, but also the principles that support it and certain accents that derive from the ecclesial context. The interest in this subject, to which he attaches the greatest importance in the spiritual life of the Church, is part of the reflection on beauty as a visible expression of good and on art, as a transcendent language able to give the impulse to the

⁵⁹ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 8.

⁶⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 9.

⁶¹ John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 13.

⁶² John Paul II, Chirograph, n. 13.

pursuit of Christian perfection. With *Tra le Sollecitudini* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as the main references, the Pontiff tries to harmonize art and functionality in order to promote music with its proper identity, which is adequately integrated into *actio liturgica* and whose specific note is sacredness. At the same time, the reference to the Word and the melody, as its hermeneut and difusser, lies at the heart of the art called to foster an aesthetic experience, especially when it is born of an authentic *sensus Ecclesiae*.

On the other hand, we have detected the reiteration of certain themes, such as continuity with tradition, the preparation required by musical activity, be it compositional or interpretive, and popular religious song. Through them we perceive, to a certain extent, the Pontiff's vision of ecclesial reality, especially when he alludes to the abusive practices and ostracism to which a large part of the traditional musical repertoire is subjected. Naturally, the theoretical orientations are accompanied by practical guidelines, which involve various ecclesial levels and cover three areas in a very direct way: the choir, musical training and the competent commissions. He asks the latter for more attentive and effective supervision of texts and melodies.

English translation: Reyes Lora, Fergus Ryan OP

Abstract

Keys for Understanding the Musical Magisterium of Pope Saint John Paul II: Between a Retrospective Look and the Post-conciliar Challenges

The pontificate of Saint John Paul II (1978–2005) was prolific in speeches and homilies on liturgical music, delivered on the occasion of different celebrations and events of musical associations and institutes. This article tries to expose in a systematic way, based on these texts, the main lines of the Pope's theological thought, as well as the recurring themes, the concerns about the abusive practices of the moment and the main practical provisions. All this without losing sight of the uniqueness of a context marked by the application of the post-conciliar liturgical reform and the challenges it entailed. The author underlines Pope's consideration of music as a sector of "vital importance" in the spiritual life of the Church, and his thought as a part of wider reflection on beauty as a visible expression of the good and on art, as a transcendent language and "path that leads to Christian perfection".

Keywords: Saint John Paul II, Magisterium, Liturgy, Music, Theology, Chirograph

Abstrakt

Klucze do zrozumienia muzycznego magisterium papieża Jana Pawła II: między spojrzeniem retrospektywnym a wyzwaniem posoborowymi

Pontyfikat św. Jana Pawła II (1978–2005) obfitował w przemówienia i homilie na temat muzyki liturgicznej, wygłaszane z okazji różnych uroczystości oraz wydarzeń organizowanych przez stowarzyszenia i instytucje muzyczne. Niniejszy artykuł stara się w sposób systematyczny, opierając się na tych tekstach, ukazać główne linie teologicznej myśli papieża, a także powracające tematy, niepokoje związane z nadużyciami chwili oraz główne postanowienia praktyczne. Wszystko to bez utraty z pola widzenia wyjątkowości kontekstu naznaczonego zastosowaniem posoborowej reformy liturgicznej i związanych z nią wyzwań. Autor podkreśla namysł papieża nad muzyką jako sektorem o „żywotnym znaczeniu” w życiu duchowym Kościoła, a jego myśl wpisuje się w szerszą refleksję nad pięknem jako widzialnym wyrazem dobra oraz nad sztuką jako transcendentnym językiem i „drogą prowadzącą do chrześcijańskiej doskonałości”.

Słowa kluczowe: św. Jan Paweł II, Magisterium, liturgia, muzyka, teologia, historiografia

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