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For a Via Pulchritudinis Musicalis. Some Notes for a Musical Spirituality

Abstract

To aim for the unspeakable divine, nothing beats the *via pulchritudinis musicalis*, the path of beauty advocated by Christian tradition, from Augustine to Luther and the recent popes, which contains parables to make the “unheard of” of the Spirit heard and to reconcile the disagreements between humans. The article deploys twelve metaphors of musical spirituality, as so many different sounds available to seekers of meaning, singers and musicians of the infinite, playing on the numbers: the sound of silence; the three-tone Trinitarian chord; the seven notes of the divine scale; humanity and the believing community as a four-part choir; the five lines of the staff of existence; the righteousness (justice) of the six strings of the guitar; the transcendence of the Christ melody; the stereophony between heaven and earth; the novelty of the final biblical *Maranatha*; the two hands and ten fingers of the pianist; song and music for the spiritual journey and liturgy; the 144,000 voices of the hymns of Revelation. For nothing reaches the heart of God beyond words like perfect harmony when the final chord is sounded.

Keywords

music, metaphor, spirituality, silence, chorus, transcendence

1. Introduction – Prelude

When Pope Francis¹ and the recent *Directory for Catholic Catechesis*² refer to the “way of beauty”, not only in theological, pastoral and catechetical activity, but also for the relationship of every being to God, it is in order to establish that life in the Holy Spirit makes human existence more coherent, just and authentic – according to the transcendentals of the one, the good and the true – and also more beautiful and filled with an unequalled splendour.³ The beauty of the Spirit at work in human achievements and in the splendours of creation has an eminently salvific significance.

Among the various arts that can manifest the spirituality of the Gospel, through heritage works, contemporary productions⁴ and cosmic realities, we have opted in this interdisciplinary contribution⁵ for the *via pulchritudinis*

¹ François, *Evangelii gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world, Rom 2013.

² Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, *Directoire pour la catéchèse [Directory for Catechesis]*, Rom 2020, n. 106–109.

³ Cf. François, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 167. On the *via pulchritudinis* for Christian spirituality, see in particular: Dominique Ponnau, *La beauté pour sacerdoce [The beauty for priesthood]*, Presses de la Renaissance, Paris 2004; Card. P. Poupard, Pontifical Council for Culture, *La voie de la beauté. Document de l’Assemblée plénière du Conseil pontifical de la culture de 2006 à Rome [The Way of Beauty. Document of the 2006 Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture in Rome]*, Salvator, Paris 2006; Collective, *L’expérience artistique. Un enjeu spirituel [The artistic experience. A spiritual issue]*, « Christus » 211 (2006); J. Cottin, *La mystique de l’art. Art et christianisme de 1900 à nos jours [The mystique of art. Art and Christianity from 1900 to today]*, Cerf, coll. Cerf Histoire, Paris 2007; R. Pousseur, Jean de Montalembert, J. Teissier, *Les cultures contemporaines, demeures de Dieu [Contemporary cultures, homes of God]*, DDB, Paris 2008; J. Cottin, W. Gräß, B. Schaller, (eds.), *Spiritualité contemporaine de l’art. Approches théologique, philosophique et pratique [Contemporary Spirituality in Art. Theological, philosophical and practical approaches]*, Labor et Fides, Genève 2012.

⁴ On the relationship between today’s artistic works and Christian reflection, see in particular Jérôme Alexandre, *L’art contemporain, un vis-à-vis essentiel pour la foi [Contemporary Art, an Essential Counterpart for the Faith]*, Parole et Silence, coll. Collège des Bernardins – Cahiers de l’École cathédrale 92, Paris 2009.

⁵ For which we rely on our fundamental reflection, “When art and faith come together”, in: F.-X. Amherdt, C. Rohner, *Arts et spiritualité en dialogue [Arts and spirituality in dialogue]*, Academic Press, coll. Théologie pratique en dialogue 46, Fribourg 2017, pp. 13–32. See also our two other books on this subject: F.-X. Amherdt, *Culture et foi en dialogue [Culture and Faith in Dialogue]*, Médiaspaul, coll. Vatican II pour tous, Paris 2015; and F.-X. Amherdt, P. M. de Marolles, J. Burin des Rozières, (eds.), *Pour une foi quelle culture?!*, Actes de la semaine interdisciplinaire de la Faculté de théologie de l’Université de Fribourg – 8 au 11 avril 2013 [For

musicalis,⁶ according to our own experience as guitarist, singer and choir director.⁷ In the midst of the cacophony of our world, we would like to identify some musical metaphors which, according to the pedagogy of Christ,⁸ paradoxically point to the “unheard of” of God,⁹ through images taken from the instrumental or vocal register.¹⁰ In this way, we would like to follow the tradition of Saint Augustine, who, from the 4th century, valued the impact of music in the exercise of worship and the role of sacred song in bringing us closer to the Transcendent, through and beyond the pleasure of the senses;¹¹ in that of Gregory the Great and Benedictine tradition; then in that of the Protestant liturgy from Martin Luther onwards,¹² granting polyphonic choral singing a place of choice for the affirmation of faith; and therefore in that of the parabolic language, both vocal and instrumental, which the preceding pontiffs in particular, encouraged

a faith which culture?!, Proceedings of the interdisciplinary week of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg – 8 to 11 April 2013], Academic Press, coll. Théologie pratique en dialogue 43, Fribourg 2015.

⁶ On the path of musical beauty in its specificity, see among others M. Collins, D. Power (eds.), *La musique et l'expérience de Dieu [Music and the Experience of God]*, “Concilium” 222 (1989); Collective, *Liturgie, beauté, sens du sacré [Liturgy, beauty, sense of the sacred]*, “La Maison-Dieu” 233 (2003); and the teachings of Benedict XVI, *L'esprit de la musique [The Spirit of Music]*, Artège, Perpignan 2011.

⁷ We taught classical guitar professionally for 31 years at the Conservatoire cantonal de musique in Sion, our town; we sang for 33 years in the *Schola des petits chanteurs de Notre-Dame de Valère* in Sion and for 15 years in the mixed choir *Novantiqua* in Sion, and in 1976 we founded the *Octuor Vocal de Sion*, a double quartet of a capella men's voices, which we are still directing after 48 years, and which has produced 11 CD recordings.

⁸ See our work: F.-X. Amherdt, S. Mayoraz, *Parabole: Bible et pastorale. Les richesses de la pédagogie parabolique à l'image du Christ parabole [Parable: Bible and pastoral care. The riches of parabolic pedagogy in the image of Christ the parable]*, Saint-Augustin, coll. Perspectives pastorales 8, St-Maurice 2015.

⁹ See our book: F.-X. Amherdt, *Les 12 inouïs de l'Évangile. Impulsions pour notre être chrétien [The 12 unheard-of things in the Gospel. Impulses for our Christian being]*, Parole et Silence, Paris / Les Plans-sur-Bex 2022.

¹⁰ We ventured into the parabolic genre in a previous book, F.-X. Amherdt, *Dieu est musique. Chant et instruments comme parabole (Méditations III) [God is music. Song and Instruments as Parable (Meditations III)]*, Saint-Augustin, St-Maurice 2003.

¹¹ Saint Augustine, *De musica*, http://jesusmarie.free.fr/augustin_musique_traite.html (22.04.2023).

¹² See B. Reymond, *Le protestantisme et la musique. Musicalités de la Parole [Protestantism and Music. Musicalities of the Word]*, Labor et Fides, Geneva 2002.

to cultivate for the journey towards the sacred.¹³ In order to give right to the register of spirituality, this short article adopts a poetic and evocative literary genre, encompassing and surpassing the purely rational discourse. We therefore place ourselves in the school of Paul Ricœur, who regularly refers to the parabolic register when dealing with scriptural language which, through borderline expressions and vivid metaphors, opens up to the extravagance of the Kingdom.¹⁴

We will unfold this search for musical spirituality in twelve short paragraphs, the first three around the mystery of God: “The sound of Silence; as a Trinitarian agreement; the 7 notes of the divine scale”; the next three around the life of man: “Four voice of humanity; five lines, one staff, one key; the rightness (justice) of the six strings”; then three more about the dialogue between the Lord and humans: “Transcendance; a stereophonic octet; make something new”; finally, the last three according to ecclesial and eschatological aesthetics: “With both hands; song and music for the spiritual journey and the liturgy; at 144,000 voices”, each time through an explicitly musical illustration.¹⁵

2. The sound of silence

It is in “*the voice of a quiet silence*” that the Lord manifests himself to the one who represents prophetism at the Transfiguration (with Moses, the bearer of the Law),¹⁶ Elijah filled with a jealous zeal for God and his mission,¹⁷ but not in the

¹³ See Benedict XVI, *Discours à l’occasion de la projection du documentaire “Art et foi – Via pulchritudinis”* (25 octobre 2012) [Speech on the occasion of the screening of the documentary “Art and Faith – Via pulchritudinis” (25 October 2012)], “Osservatore Romano” (27 octobre 2012), p. 7.

¹⁴ See our two theses published in one volume: F.-X. Amherdt, *L’herméneutique philosophique de Paul Ricœur et son importance pour l’exégèse biblique. En débat avec la New Yale Theology School [Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical hermeneutics and its importance for biblical exegesis. In debate with the New Yale Theology School]*, Cerf / Saint-Augustin, coll. La nuit surveillée, Paris / St-Maurice 2004.

¹⁵ This article is based on our published book on the subject, François-Xavier Amherdt, *Évangile et musique. La pastorale en accords [Gospel and music. The pastoral in chords]*, Saint-Augustin, coll. Perspectives pastorales 15, St-Maurice 2021.

¹⁶ Matthew 17:4. We indicate only one Gospel reference, without systematically pointing out the parallels of the episode given in the other Synoptics or in the 4^{ème} Gospel, in order to lighten our discourse, which is not intended to be exegetical in the strict sense.

¹⁷ 1 Kings 19:11–12.

thunderous manifestations of the flashes of sensationalism, nor in the violent apparitions of the storms of intolerance, nor in the tumult of the (Russian-Ukrainian) wars. Beyond the hubbub of the universe, it is in the recollection of the deep heart that the ineffable groaning of the Spirit is received (in the chapter on life in the Spirit),¹⁸ and that the Father and the Son (who dwell in us together),¹⁹ dwell together in their inexpressible love. Just as it is from silence that the prelude and fugue spring, and it is in the intense silence that follows the final chord that the score culminates.

How much more should the liturgies, so often talkative and intellectual, leave room for spaces where the “real presence” of the Word in its resonance can be lodged! All spirituality is nourished in silent prayer, held in the secrecy of one’s room (not in an ostentatious manner),²⁰ or in a retreat of personal renewal, away from the crowd that oppressed him, like Jesus,²¹ where the Lord can teach his ways and unite hearts beyond all the distraction (Blaise Pascal) and amusement (the being unified by the fear of the Lord).²²

3. As a Trinitarian agreement

Few metaphors succeed in aiming at the mystery of one God in three Persons as pertinently as that of the single chord made up of three distinct sounds: the Father, tonic and creator; the Son, dominant (from *Dominus*, the Lord) and saviour; the Spirit, third and sanctifier. God is therefore music in himself, through his Trinitarian communion, and he infuses into the men he creates in his image (“Let us make man in our likeness”),²³ a triple love whose three notes have a similar importance: “You shall love your God with all your being and your neighbour as yourself.”²⁴ The third note of self-love, whether major or minor, is absolutely necessary in order for desire for the Lord and affection for others to be possible. God encourages people to develop their mental, physical

¹⁸ Cf. Romans 8:26.

¹⁹ Cf. John 14:23.

²⁰ Cf. Matthew 6:6.

²¹ Cf. Matthew 14:23.

²² Cf. Psalm 86(85):11.

²³ Genesis 1:26.

²⁴ Cf. Mark 12:28–31.

and psychic potential, to allow themselves to be generated to their human and spiritual identity,²⁵ provided that they use this happiness as a springboard to decentre themselves and to love.

As the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*²⁶ makes clear, humanity is called to the pastoral care of harmony and balance, in social friendship and universal brotherhood. If one voice in a choir is not well balanced, the whole harmony suffers. Community relations have a truly therapeutic value, according to “the ‘mystique’ of living together, of mixing, of meeting, of hugging, of supporting one another.”²⁷ Authentic faith in the Incarnate Word is intrinsically associated with reconciliation with the flesh of others and with community service. “Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of sound communion or of the ecclesial community”, we can exclaim, imitating the cry of the Argentine pontiff!²⁸

4. The 7 notes of the divine scale

Just as there are seven days in the week, seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, seven (+1) beatitudes,²⁹ seven sacraments, seven colours in the rainbow of the Covenant, seven branches of the candelabra, seven stars in the constellation of the Pleiades, so the scale has seven notes with which it is possible to compose all the concerts in the world. Of course, it would also be possible to mention the pentatonic scale

²⁵ According to the perspective of the so-called “Life-giving pastoral.” See the two founding works edited by the Jesuit theologians P. Bacq and Ch. Theobald, *Une nouvelle chance pour l'Évangile. Vers une pastorale d'engendrement [A new chance for the Gospel. Towards a pastoral of engenderment]*; and *Passeurs d'Évangile. Autour d'une pastorale d'engendrement [Passers-by of the Gospel. Around a pastoral of engenderment]*, Lumen Vitae / Novalis / L'Atelier, coll. Théologies pratiques, Brussels / Montreal / Paris 2004 and 2008; as well as our book F. X. Amherdt and M.-A. de Matteo, *S'ouvrir à la fécondité de l'Esprit. Fondements d'une pastorale d'engendrement [Opening ourselves to the fruitfulness of the Spirit. Foundations of a life-giving pastoral]*, Saint-Augustin, coll. Perspectives pastorales 4, St-Maurice 2009.

²⁶ François, *Fratelli tutti*, Encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship, Rom 2020.

²⁷ François, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 87.

²⁸ Cf. François, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 88; 92.

²⁹ See for an association between these three septenaries our book: F.-X. Amherdt, *7 jours – 7 dons – 7 béatitudes. Vivre le bonheur dans l'Esprit au quotidien. En contact constant avec le Seigneur, notre trésor [7 days – 7 gifts – 7 beatitudes. Living happiness in the Spirit in daily life. In constant contact with the Lord, our treasure]*, LIT, coll. Recherches pastorales 4, München / Münster / Vienna / Zürich 2020.

used in the music of many Asian and African countries, in addition to the seven-note diatonic scale, in order to take into account musical universalism without continental borders. These are the seven notes of the call to unity in Ephesians: one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord (Christ), one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, above all, through all and in all.³⁰ These are the seven terms of the song sung by the whole of earthly and heavenly creatures to the First from the dead in the last book of Revelation: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and praise.”³¹

Let us spiritually spell out the seven words of the Trinitarian scale: Do (C), as in *Dominus* (already mentioned), the Most High and Master of all, on whom the building rests, without whom we can do nothing (like the branch without the vine);³² Re (D), as the tireless repetition of musical groups, from the Latin *re-petere*, to ask unceasingly until men open themselves to the divine will, in the perseverance that obtains life (beyond all false anxiety);³³ Mi (M), as miracles, that of Mozart’s genius, or those of the wonders that the Spirit accomplishes by attesting to the spirit of human beings that they are children and heirs of the Abba-Father;³⁴ Fa (F), as families of the choirs and ecclesial communities, from Nazareth and everywhere, of the baptised invited to the banquet of the Eucharist (according to the parable of the feast)³⁵ and to the wedding supper of the Lamb;³⁶ or Sol (G), as soloists, like Abraham, Moses, David and John the Baptist; or as solfeggio, so patiently learned by apprentice musicians; or as solicitude of the Good Shepherd who recognises each sheep by its particular timbre (in the chapter on the Good Shepherd);³⁷ or as sunshine like Christ, the new star that comes to visit us (in Zechariah’s canticle, the *Benedictus*);³⁸ La (A), as latitudes beyond borders, those of Argentina, where the Bishop of Rome hails from, those of Ukraine, which suffers with all of Europe, those of India, China or Japan, of Africa, Australia and the Americas; in the image of the Church that

³⁰ Ephesians 4:4–6.

³¹ Revelation 5:12.

³² Cf. John 15:5.

³³ Cf. Luke 21:19.

³⁴ Cf. Romans 8:15–17.

³⁵ Luke 14:16–26.

³⁶ Cf. Revelation 19:19.

³⁷ Cf. John 10:3–4.

³⁸ Cf. Luke 1:78–79.

is jubilant because it is truly universal; finally, Si (B), as (once again) silence, that of the middle of the night that envelops all things, where the powerful light that envelops the earth arises (according to the sapiential meditation on the history of salvation),³⁹ the silence in which the singers are suspended before their director gives them the impulse.

With this Trinitarian scale, it is possible to compose the melody of the specific happiness of each person, since no one is a photocopy but an original, says the Bishop of Rome to young people.⁴⁰ Each one has a personal vocation, a white stone on which is written the name that only the one who has received it knows (in the 3^{ème} letter to the Church of Pergamum),⁴¹ a particular mission.

5. Four voices of humanity

After these three touches which are focused on God, here are three more which focus upon man. First, the number 4 of humanity (the four cardinal points, the four winds of the prophets,⁴² the four elements or the four seasons) which, added to the number 3 of the Trinity, gives the fullness of the number 7 mentioned above. A choir usually has four voices, a symphony orchestra four registers (strings, winds, brass, percussion).

These are the four voices of humanity and of the Church: first, the lower ones that ensure the solidity of the building, like the creative light that illuminates the cosmos (in the first creation story):⁴³ the founders of associations, the pioneers of companies, the fathers and mothers of families, the leaders of communities; then the tenors, a word that comes from “tenue”, the voice that in polyphony holds the theme, like the peace between nations towards which history tends,⁴⁴ the peace of harmony resulting from the palavers and interethnic national conferences after a conflict; then the altos, low, humble and self-effacing, sometimes enigmatic and disturbing, but absolutely necessary, like the freedom so often

³⁹ Cf. Wisdom 18:14.

⁴⁰ François, *Christus vivit*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Youth and All the People of God, Rom 2019, n. 106–162.

⁴¹ Cf. Revelation 2:17.

⁴² Zechariah 2:10.

⁴³ Cf. Genesis 1:3.

⁴⁴ In the eschatological oracle of Micah 4:1–5.

swallowed up, but characteristic of human dignity; finally the sopranos, the crowning glory of the sound construction, like the cry of divine mercy that prevails over hatred, a limpid timbre that brings together love and truth, concord and peace, and gives the fruit of the earth when heaven leans towards it.⁴⁵

In the harmony of Christmas, Emmanuel, ‘God with us,’ takes on human flesh in order that man and woman may become God (so that we may share in the divine nature).⁴⁶ *O admirabile commercium, o magnum mysterium*, to use the title of many Latin motets.

No parable is more evocative of the communion between generations than that of an ensemble, bringing together singers and musicians of all ages for a single concert. It is the family of those who listen to the Word and respond to it with their art,⁴⁷ beyond differences of gender and condition, denominations, churches and traditions.

6. Five lines, one staff, one key

The term is also evocative: to let oneself be “carried” by the *Amen* of truth, for example at the end of prayers, which means: “Yes, I adhere, it is solid and it holds”, like the melody that only makes sense if the notes that make it up, are inscribed on the five lines of a staff. Five lines like the five scrolls of the divine Law (the Pentateuch) or the five speeches of Jesus, the new Moses, in the 1st gospel, to sing to the Lord from all parts of our being, under the baton of the Spirit.

1st line: the body. The action of the Holy Breath passes through our mouths, our chests, our hands, our legs: “You shall sing and play to the Lord your God with all your strength, with all your vigour, with all your energy and with all your body.”⁴⁸

2nd line: the heart. In addition to technique, phrasing is needed, the finesse of execution “by heart”, masculine or feminine suppleness, that delicacy which brings a sequence to life with gentleness and impetus: “You shall praise the Lord with all your heart.”

⁴⁵ Cf. Psalm 85(84):11–13.

⁴⁶ Cf. 2 Pet 1:4.

⁴⁷ Cf. Mark 3:31–37.

⁴⁸ Like the great Gospel commandment in Luke 10:27.

3rd line: the spirit. Moreover, much depends on the spirit of the choir or instrumental ensemble: all members should pull the same rope – if it is possible to express it that way – and seek to serve the dynamics of the group: “You shall praise the Lord with all your spirit.”

4th line: the soul. However, the essential is still missing, that “supplement of soul” that makes an exceptional training, that ideal that polarises the commitment of each person. For in the end, expressing oneself, playing, is a question of “faith”, one must believe in it to touch others: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul.”

5th line: the director. All the vital energies mobilised are only crystallised if they are channelled by the director or conductor, to whose gestures all the musicians are attached. It is he/she who, from the multitude of choristers and instrumentalists, makes one heart and one soul (as in the primitive communities).⁴⁹ This is what is achieved by the grace of the Spirit, who gives all anthropological potentialities their coherence, protects beings from the beginning to the end of their individual and community work (the Lord, our guardian)⁵⁰ and guides their artistic impulses.

The key: Something else is obviously missing, without which the written notes would not sing: it is the key of Sol (G), Fa (F) or Do (C), written at the beginning of each system. Would it be possible to affirm that this key is Jesus Christ who gives existences their correct pitch?

From the score to the performance, there is interpretation. For song, as for the Bible, it is the Spirit who makes it possible to ‘incarnate’ the written work and who, on the skeleton of notes and letters, adds the flesh of the chords, waking them from their sleep and making the living music ‘rise’ in a kind of (re) surrection. Music makes us live and brings us to life.

For it is the same inspiration that drives today’s scriptural writers, commentators and congregations, just as it is the same breath that rests on the composer, fills the performer and inhabits the listeners. The power of music in this respect is impressive. How many instrumentalists have experienced this, with interludes offered for groups during the confinement of the recent pandemic? The musical flow of love, put into notes, moves even the most indifferent listeners and literally sets them in motion (*ex-movere* in Latin).

⁴⁹ Cf. Acts 4:32.

⁵⁰ Cf. Psalm 121(120),7–8.

Hence the call to the composers of the 21st century to apply themselves, as in previous eras, to enhancing the liturgy. Inspired, they become inspiring, as much to arouse shared joy as to accompany pain (unlike the children of the Gospel, cf. Matthew 11:16–19). May prophets arise who are capable of writing pieces that turn us towards him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life!⁵¹ Music will save humanity; it is divine music that carries it.

7. The rightness (justice) of the six strings

Just as the six strings of a guitar each have their own sound, and the tuning of all of them is indispensable for the sound of the chord to be correct, and tuning requires extreme precision, takes a great deal of time, and must be repeated day after day, especially when the temperature varies, in order that the members of the body, according to the Pauline metaphor evocative of mankind,⁵² each have their own value, even the weakest and most hidden ones: harmony between them benefits the good of the whole organism, and understanding is always to be sought. We are all the body of Christ, each in his own way.⁵³

The names of the strings must be learned from the beginning of the work with the instrument, so that the other notes can be memorised; in the same way, the good Shepherd knows each sheep by name and they know him, because he goes so far as to give his life to lead them to the promised pasture (unlike the bad shepherds).⁵⁴ Each person has his or her own unique sound, which even the most perfect imitators cannot reproduce perfectly. Elvis Presley is not Johnny Halliday, Patricia Kaas does not sound like Jane Birkin, if such allusions to the *hit parade* of English or French songs, are permitted.

It is in the depths of being that the particular melody of existence is discovered, the “vocation” in the sense that it is God himself who calls (*vocare* in Latin, like little Samuel, cf. 1 Samuel 3), and that human life consists of responding

⁵¹ Cf. John 14:6.

⁵² 1 Corinthians 12.

⁵³ Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27. See Paul de Surgy and Maurice Carrez, *La Bible. Les épîtres de Paul*, vol. I: *Corinthiens* [*The Bible. Paul's epistles*, vol. I: *Corinthians*], Bayard / Centurion / Novalis, coll. Commentaires, Paris / Outremont 1996.

⁵⁴ Cf. John 10:1–18.

to him, of co-responding to his voice, of assuming its “responsibilities.” In order for the central commandment of Israel, “Listen to the voice of the Lord your God”⁵⁵ to be fulfilled, it is necessary for megaphones, loudspeakers, prophets who speak in his name before the people (this is the meaning of *pro-phèmi* in Greek) to appear.⁵⁶

The awakening of every vocation, is therefore eminently sonorous and musical. It is a question of resonance in echo, in “catechesis”, as is the beautiful Greek etymology of the term *kate-echô*, or in “sympathy”, like guitars that begin to vibrate because a sound is emitted in their presence on the same wavelength as them, without even plucking the strings (from the Greek *sun-pathein*, to experience with). It is by cultivating an intense interior life in the midst of the Babel of postmodern noise, that the man of today succeeds in perceiving the melody of the Lord, who has always sought to sing in each one.

The voice of beauty is indeed that which brings beings into “con-sonance” through the emission of the Spirit and its energy, in the original sense of working within (*en-ergon*). “At the heart of this world, the breath of the Spirit puts new energies to work today”, sing the poet Didier Rimaud and the composer Jacques Berthier.⁵⁷

8. Transcendence

“Sing to God with all your heart in Psalms, hymns and free praises. And whatever you may say or do [whether you play the trombone or join a choir], let it always be in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father God through him.”⁵⁸

As the two cymbals clash for the brilliance of the rhythms, as the two hands clap together for the cries of joy, so do God and man join together to communicate grace and “give it back”, the three following bursts say it in their own way. The crystalline timbre of a little singer or the flight of a violin leads beyond

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4.

⁵⁶ See for example Jean-Pierre Prévost, *Pour lire les prophètes [To read the prophets]*, Cerf / Novalis, Paris / Ottawa 1995.

⁵⁷ D. Rimaud and J. Berthier, *Messe pour un rassemblement [Mass for a gathering]*, Studio SM, Paris.

⁵⁸ Colossians 3:16.

words: “Brothers, let us sing so that we may look up to heaven a little”, exhorts the prayer of the *Pueri cantores*. Music leads us to the “unseen” of God, to “what the eye has not seen, what the ear has not heard, what has not come to the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him.”⁵⁹

“*Via pulchritudinis musicalis*”: the flash of a chord, the seizure of a melody, thanks to volatile sounds – unlike the other arts which are all inscribed in matter – trace a path towards God and let us prefigure the eternal plenitude, in the music of the Spirit accompanying the beatific vision, humans facing God, similar to him and seeing him as he is.⁶⁰

Already in everyday life, God’s holiness clothes people with his glory, as the halo of the men and women saints suggests. Children’s voices have the power to open the heavens, to let the Father’s voice speak to us, as in the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, and to make the Spirit descend like a dove upon our heads.⁶¹ Ah, if you were to tear the heavens apart, if the clouds were to rain down the cessation of fighting, honesty and respect, if the earth were to open up and produce the seeds of a happy future for the multitudes:⁶² behold, when a choir of toddlers gives its all, the prophecy is already coming true!

It is the heavenly music of the melodious harp which, as in the Psalms, captures the divine intimacy with its myriad of low and high strings.⁶³ It is the song of the Spirit who pacifies the soul (the promise of the Paraclete who bears witness to Christ),⁶⁴ who intercedes for all human beings when they do not know what to say: the Father understands (for the Spirit speaks the divine language).⁶⁵ It is the dynamics of the dance, on the two legs of the body that follow the parallelism of the Psalms, that turn like the great David, the singer of the divine hymns, to the sound of all the cypress wood instruments, zithers, harps, drums, sistrums and cymbals,⁶⁶ that move as the Lord of the universe

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:9. To quote from the opening of our other book mentioned above: F.-X. Amherdt, *Les 12 inouïs de l’Évangile. Impulsions pour notre être chrétien [The 12 unheard-of things in the Gospel. Impulses for our Christian being]*.

⁶⁰ Cf. 1 John 3:2.

⁶¹ Cf. Mark 1:9–10.

⁶² In the oracle of 2ème Isaiah, cf. Isaiah 45:8.

⁶³ Cf. Psalm 150:3.

⁶⁴ Cf. John 15:26.

⁶⁵ Cf. Romans 8:26–27.

⁶⁶ Cf. 2 Samuel 6:5.

gives the example: “Do not be afraid, Zion! The Lord your God is in you; he is the hero who brings salvation. He will have his joy and his gladness in you [...]; he will dance for you and rejoice.”⁶⁷

To counter the postmodern siren song, the composition of “humanising music” must prevail: “Your great duty,” Francis tells young people, “is to respond to the paralysing refrains of *cultural consumerism* with dynamic and strong choices, with research, knowledge and sharing.”⁶⁸

9. A stereophonic octet

To the music of the divine will, the beings here on earth are invited to respond like a double choir by Gabrieli on the two galleries of St Mark’s Cathedral in Venice. Like a vocal octet divided into two quartets, the first representing the song of the angels, and the second exactly replicating it, with humanity, in an *Alleluia* by Jacobus Gallus. Like Joseph, who does not say a word in the four Gospels⁶⁹ but who is fully attuned to the word of the divine messenger speaking to him through the melody of sounds: he effaces himself before the mystery of the Presence and offers an immediate and absolute echo.⁷⁰

It is beautiful, these choirs called “L’Écho”! They respond to the Trinitarian invitation to bring people to join them in unanimous praise. A vocal – or instrumental – octet resembles a Carthusian convent: each performs his or her part as a soloist but seeks to merge, like monks living as communal hermits, so to speak. All are Thomases, ‘Didymus’ or twins of Christ (the apostle Thomas, unbelieving but believing),⁷¹ called to resemble him even in his tone, to be

⁶⁷ Zephaniah 3:16–17.

⁶⁸ François, *Discours de la rencontre avec les étudiants et le monde académique sur la Piazza San Domenico à Bologne (1er octobre 2017)* [Address at the meeting with students and the academic world in Piazza San Domenico in Bologna (1er October 2017)], in: *Christus Vivit*, n. 223.

⁶⁹ See P. Lefebvre, *Joseph. L’éloquence d’un taciturne* [Joseph. The eloquence of a taciturn], Salvator, coll. Bible en main, Paris 2013.

⁷⁰ See François, *Patris corde*, Apostolic Letter for the year 2020–2021, dedicated to the adoptive father of Jesus. Rom 8 December 2020.

⁷¹ Cf. John 20:24.

drawn to the Father's house where there are many singing dwellings (in Christ's testament after the washing of the feet).⁷²

It is the marvel of complicity, like that of the English group *The King's Singers* from London, from which the Vocal Octuor of Sion humbly draws its inspiration: they arrive on stage, and without giving each other a tone, without looking at each other, they start at exactly the same time; they breathe together, they pronounce the last syllable at exactly the same moment. All this with a dazzling casualness, a fascinating inner emotion, a very *British humour*, of course.⁷³ It is the splendour of multiple voices, such as the forty-two voices of Thomas Tallis' motet "*Spem in Alium*", the "hope in this Other", which gives breath and cohesion! When a full cathedral resounds thanks to the singers spread around it or to the "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*" of the "Angels in our countryside", at the midnight mass of the Nativity, the Kingdom is really already present!

10. Make something new

"Make something new today! This is the call of life. In your hands has blown a wind of freedom. Make something new today." This invitation from a song by the French composer Patrick Richard⁷⁴ urges today's actors to change their wineskins, since at Christ's wedding with the Church, the wine is always new (according to Jesus' teaching to the Pharisees).⁷⁵ All the more so, since the end of the Covid-19 crisis requires us to "reinvent" ourselves everywhere, according to the expression that has become commonplace, including for choral and instrumental groups.⁷⁶

The Bible ends, or rather opens with a final cry, an imperative: "*Maranatha, come Lord Jesus*",⁷⁷ hence the attitude required at all times: to watch over and

⁷² Cf. John 14:2.12.

⁷³ <https://www.kingssingers.com/> (22.04.2023).

⁷⁴ P. Richard (music) and M. Goutagny (lyrics), *Fais du neuf [Make something new]*, in: *Chantons en Église*, n. 10047, Studio SM, Paris.

⁷⁵ Cf. Mark 2:21–22.

⁷⁶ See H. Derroitte and C. Chevalier (eds.), *La crise de la Covid et ses impacts en pastorale [The Covid Crisis and its Impact on Pastoral Care]*, "Lumen Vitae" 76 (1/2021), pp. 1–120.

⁷⁷ Revelation 22:20.

cultivate one's musical, vocal, personal and community talents.⁷⁸ Choirs also act as “committees of vigilance”, like watchmen at the battlements of history (according to the posture of the prophets),⁷⁹ to build up their reserves of melodies for the future, like the wise virgins (according to the parable of the last eschatological discourse in the first Gospel):⁸⁰ “to maintain” a repertoire, “to sustain” the hope of the assemblies and “to keep alive” the desire for the eternal wedding. We are looking forward to new popular gatherings, spiritual “Schubertiades”, such as the new World Youth Days, national, continental and international, where, as in the case of the ecumenical community of Taizé in France, the canons are raised, the refrains are repeated endlessly in *ostinato*, without weariness, to match the breath of bodies and hearts.

Of course, this melody resounds “like a fragile breath” in the midst of the tumult of the powerful.⁸¹ The wind of the Spirit blows where it will, we hear its melody without knowing where it comes from or where it is going (in the conversation with Nicodemus).⁸² But he constantly and courageously inspires that “*new song*” which the Psalms exhort us to compose.⁸³ The Virgin of the Annunciation and the Assumption experienced this by risking the revolutionary canticle of her *Magnificat*:⁸⁴ Mary, the soloist, leads behind her, the humiliated who are lifted up, the hungry who are satisfied and the poor who are fulfilled. She provokes the invention of new songs, the writing of the 151st Psalm, and new creations, such as the mass for the consecration of the new bishop of Sion, composed by the deacon musician and director of “Nov-antiqua”, Bernard Héritier. To draw upon, as the name of the Nov-antiqua choir indicates, “*new and old*” from the treasure of humanity.⁸⁵ To make the litanies of the saints resound across the planet, as I had the chance to experience during my own

⁷⁸ Cf. Matthew 25:14–30.

⁷⁹ Cf. Jeremiah 6:17.

⁸⁰ Cf. Matthew 25:1–13.

⁸¹ According to the text of the assembly song *Comme un souffle fragile*, Pierre Jacob (lyrics), Gaëtan de Courrèges (music) and François Rauber (harmonisation), *Comme un souffle fragile [Like a fragile breeze]*, U45, Éditions musicales Auvidis, Paris.

⁸² Cf. John 3:8.

⁸³ Psalm 33(32),149.

⁸⁴ Luke 1:39–56.

⁸⁵ Cf. Matthew 13:52.

priestly ordination at Sion airfield, with the Polish *pontifex* John Paul II and 50,000 faithful gathered at the moment of prostration.

11. With both hands

Finally, three final musical flashes turned towards the ultimate Kingdom. First, the two hands coordinated to make a sound on the guitar, two hands that complement each other on the piano keyboard, the hand of the Son and the hand of the Father that unite in the same musical gesture of welcome, since they are both one.⁸⁶ Ten fingers to remember the ten commandments “by heart” (according to the Law of Sinai)⁸⁷ and to forbid man to make idols in his own image, for these have mouths and do not speak, ears and do not hear.⁸⁸ While the Lord of the Covenant alone liberates, he speaks to all as to Moses and hears the cry of the suffering, such as that of the Israelites (or Palestinians and Ukrainians) in their misery (under Egyptian oppression, at the beginning of the book of Exodus).⁸⁹ And freedom can be hummed and danced to: “Listen, Lord, have mercy on me! You have turned my mourning into a dance, my funeral clothes into an ornament of joy. Let not my heart grow weary, let it celebrate for you.”⁹⁰

What are *show business* stars and *bel canto divas* but human beings made of flesh who can hardly bring salvation? Look at the manner in which the ‘god’ Michael Jackson sadly ended up. The Psalms laugh at idols and use sensory and aural comparisons to ridicule human-faced deities. “The idols of pearl, gold and silver: a work of human hands. They have mouths and do not speak, they have eyes and do not see, they have ears and do not hear, hands but do not touch, feet but do not walk, from their mouths not a murmur.”⁹¹

The biblical God enters into dialogue with people, he needs their contribution, he “is with them” (Emmanuel) in their concerts and celebrations, but he never

⁸⁶ Cf. John 10:30.

⁸⁷ Cf. Exodus 20:1–17.

⁸⁸ Cf. Psalm 115(113B):4–7.

⁸⁹ Cf. Exodus 3:7–10.

⁹⁰ Psalm 30(29):11–13.

⁹¹ Psalm 115(113B),4–7.

sings in their place, he hopes for their voices and desires their requests. The *via pulchritudinis* passes through the spirituality of true prayer.⁹²

12. Song and music for the spiritual journey and the liturgy

“Shout for joy to the Lord, you righteous men! Praise the Lord, you righteous men! Give thanks to the Lord on the zither, play for him on the ten-stringed harp. Sing to him the new song; with all your art sustain the ovation.”⁹³

It is not only the organ – so admirable – that is used in liturgy: strings, flutes, zithers, drums and cymbals are also required. In regions where fanfares and harmonies flourish, why not make more use of these ensembles or of small groups (trios, quartets and quintets) to enliven festive celebrations, at Christmas or Easter, at weddings and funerals? The “Semaine romande de musique et de liturgie” at the Abbey of St-Maurice in Switzerland has, for years, offered workshops on “guitar and instruments” or “dance in liturgy.”⁹⁴

The Psalms deserve to be sung much more in the liturgy than is currently the case, supported by instruments, since this is the etymology of the Greek term *psalmos*, as expressed in the headings of many of the poems (e.g. the series from Psalm 51(50) to Psalm 69(68)): “From the Master of Song. On stringed instruments. Song of David. Half-voiced”).

All the rituals, as the classical and recent Masses remind us, are punctuated by song, from the *Kyrie* (“Jesus Master, have mercy on us”) to the *Gloria* (the tenth Samaritan leper who returns and glorifies God aloud, unlike the nine others who were also healed);⁹⁵ from the *Sanctus* (the song of the *seraphim* in Isaiah’s vision (on the occasion of his calling)⁹⁶ taken up by the living in the Apocalypse (before the throne of the Ancient One)⁹⁷), to the *Agnus*, the paschal lamb⁹⁸ who

⁹² See in particular M. Rondet, *Petit guide de la prière [A short guide to prayer]*, DDB, coll. Prier, Paris 2000.

⁹³ Psalm 33(32):1–3.

⁹⁴ <http://www.srml.ch/> (22.04.2023).

⁹⁵ Luke 17:11–19.

⁹⁶ Isaiah 6:3.

⁹⁷ Revelation 4:8.

⁹⁸ Cf. Exodus 12:1–28.

bears the sin of the world (as John the Baptist designates him).⁹⁹ All vigils, prayer meetings and community celebrations are punctuated by instrumental pieces to clothe the soul and fit into the inner spiritual process. When analysed, the great works of the repertoire lead to an understanding of the mystery in a literally “mystagogic” process (from the Greek *ago*, to bring). The groups memorise the songs, especially if they are woven with biblical words, like the cantilenas of Joseph Gélineau, for example.¹⁰⁰

The refrains and *alleluias* taken up as echoes of Scripture spring from the lips of children, even in the playground, on the way to school or in the shower. A hymn with several stanzas can recapitulate a catechetical sequence. There is no substitute for the word being chewed, ruminated upon, and taken up in chorus, in order to make it one’s own, or for instruments being brought together, xylophones, percussion instruments, recorders, in order to form a group around Christ.

13. At 144,000 voices

It is no longer with 42, but with 144,000 voices (12 x 12 x 1,000, the number of infinity), under the baton of the glorified Lamb, near the throne of the Ancient One, inhabited by the seven spirits of the Holy Trinity, that the multitude will exclaim in heaven. It is an immense crowd that no one can count, of all nations, races, peoples and languages (the four terms of humanity) that will constitute the “eschatological” choir. This is why the Apocalypse is full of hymns, with the 12 + 12 elders of the Old and New Testaments (4,11).¹⁰¹ The *Prayer of the Present Time* (the old Breviary) regularly proposes them at vespers.¹⁰² What will the risen ones do in Paradise? They will all sing, at last and for ever, with the myriads of angels, for the definitive triumph over evil and death.

⁹⁹ Cf. John 1:29.36.

¹⁰⁰ J. Gélineau, *Les cantilènes bibliques pour la catéchèse [Biblical canticles for catechesis]*, CD of 28 songs and 72 page booklet, Studio SM, Paris 2010.

¹⁰¹ See the collective work we edited: F.-X. Amherdt (ed.), *L’Apocalypse révélée [The Revelation of the Apocalypse]*, Saint-Augustin, coll. Les Cahiers de l’ABC 10, St-Maurice 2022, especially chapter 3 by J.-M. Poffet, *Les Cantiques de l’Apocalypse. Ou comment garder les pieds sur terre en étant branchés sur le ciel... [The Canticles of Revelation. Or how to keep your feet on the ground while being connected to heaven...]*, pp. 62–82.

¹⁰² Revelation 5:9–12; 11:17–18; 12:10–12; 15:3b–4.

The catastrophes and plagues, similar to the ten plagues of Egypt, under the influence of the Babylonian mother of all prostitutes, are only the prelude to the nuptial canticles that nothing can ever interrupt. “For he has taken possession of his kingdom, the Lord God, the Lord of all. Let us be glad and rejoice, let us give glory to God, for this is the marriage of the Lamb, and his bride has been made beautiful: she has been clothed in bright white linen.”¹⁰³ This is a reason to rejoice in joining the Jerusalem that has come down from on high,¹⁰⁴ in the final Zion with the twelve gates,¹⁰⁵ in the new heavens and the new earth.¹⁰⁶ As victors over death, the elect will receive all the gifts promised by the faithful witness, the Alpha and Omega, the New Adam, in the letters to the seven Churches (2–3): the fruit of the tree of Paradise; the crown of life; the hidden manna and the personal name engraved on the white stone; the morning star; the white of victory; the temple with the pillars engraved with the name of the divine city; and the throne of the Father next to the victorious Son. What an enchanting prospect!

14. Conclusion – Postlude

“What you sing with your lips (or play with your hands), believe in your heart; and what you believe in your heart, prove it by your actions.” The motto of the Little Singers (*Pueri Cantores*) sums up this journey of musical spirituality. The *via pulchritudinis musicalis* seeks to express the mystery that has been hidden for centuries, but which has now been made manifest to humanity (according to the finale of the great Pauline epistle),¹⁰⁷ so that the melody of the lips and instruments may penetrate the innermost depths of our being and mark out the holiness of all in our daily lives (cf. *Gaudete et exsultate*).¹⁰⁸

“But we Christians”, declares the South American pontiff, “cannot hide the fact that if the music of the Gospel ceases to vibrate in our hearts, we will have

¹⁰³ Revelation 19:6–8.

¹⁰⁴ Revelation 21:2.

¹⁰⁵ Revelation 21:12–13.

¹⁰⁶ Revelation 21:1.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Romans 16:25–27.

¹⁰⁸ François, *Gaudete et exsultate*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in the Present World, Rom 2018.

lost the joy that springs from compassion, the tenderness that is born of trust, the capacity for reconciliation that finds its source in knowing that we are always forgiven and sent.¹⁰⁹

Those who bear the name of Christ cannot claim any prerogative. On the contrary, they are responsible for the advancement of the Kingdom, carried by the ultimate fundamental note of the loving adoration of God,¹¹⁰ of that universal musical brotherhood which will make it possible to compose the symphony of “that new world where we shall all be brothers [and sisters], where there will be room for each of the outcasts of our societies, where [the songs of] justice and peace will shine forth.”¹¹¹

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¹⁰⁹ François, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 277.

¹¹⁰ Cf. François, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 272.

¹¹¹ François, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 278.

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