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LITURGICAL MUSIC, CHRISTIAN SERVICE, AND MINISTRY

The title "Minister of Music" has been used by Protestants for many years. Only recently is it being used by more and more musicians in the Catholic Church. There is no doubt that music can be ministerial to liturgy and worship; however, there is some question concerning whether or not one who assumes leadership in liturgical music should also assume the title of "minister of music." The Universal Church has not instituted a formal "ministry of music", even though the Vatican II documents and post-consiliar documents refer to music as being "ministerial" to the liturgy.

Although there is not an official music ministry in the Universal Church, the local bishops are empowered to institute ministries within their own dioceses, in accordance with the Church's traditions. The twofold question posed is: "Should there be an official music ministry, and, on whom shall the title "minister" be conferred?"

The Church has always taught that every baptized member of the faithful has a vocation related to the priesthood of Christ. We are all a priestly people. In the DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF LAY PEOPLE (Vat. II, Apostolicam Actuositatem Chap. I, art. 2, par. 2, 18 Nov. 1965) one reads:

But the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God.

The same document goes on to state:

Every activity of the Mystical Body with this in view goes by the name "apostolate"; the Church exercises it through all its members though in various ways. In fact, the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well. (DECREE ON APOSTOLATE, Chap. I, art. 2, par. 1)

All the faithful have a vocation to achieve sanctity. In the DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH (Vat. II, Lumen Gentium, 1964, Chap. IV, art. 33, par. 2) we read: "The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church." Moreover, there are those whose work in the Church is more specific and specialized in terms of an apostolate.

Referring to the CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH:

..... the laity can be called in different ways to more immediate cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy, like those men and women who helped the Apostle Paul in the Gospel, laboring much in the Lord (cf. Phil. 4-3; Rom 16:3ff). They have moreover, the capacity of being appointed by the hierarchy to some ecclesiastical offices with a view to a spiritual end. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, art.33, par.3)

The DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF LAY PEOPLE (Chap. I, art. 2, par. 3) offers further definition: "In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission." One may conclude from all of this that as members of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, we are all called to the apostolate, and that every activity of that Mystical Body is the apostolate. In every state of life and all of its actions all people are called to give witness to Christ, and as the Decree continues "to make of their apostolate, through the vigor of their Christian spirit, a leader in the world."

There can be no doubt that the position of the Church musician is, or should be considered as "appointed by the hierarchy to some ecclesiastical offices with a view to a spiritual end." No one assumes the position without being appointed. The question is, "When does this Christian service become an official ministry?"

While concern for this may seem to be like "splitting hairs" or overly cautious, it is extremely important to define any ministry in relationship to the magisterium of the Church.

The references to the ministerial nature of music to the liturgy are numerous:

Sacred Scripture, indeed, has bestowed praise upon sacred song (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). So have the Fathers of the Church and the Roman pontiffs who in more recent times, led by St. Pius X, have explained more precisely the ministerial function exercised by sacred music in the service of the Lord. (Constitution on the Lit. Chap. VI, par. 112)

.....the arrangement of the Sacred rites and the active participation of the faithful have given rise to several problems regarding sacred music and its ministerial role. (Inst. on Mus. in the Lit., 1967, art. 2)

Liturgical services are celebrations of the Church under and directed by the bishop or priest... the priest and his ministers, because of the sacred order they have received, hold a special place in these celebrations, as do also - by reason of the ministry they perform- the servers, readers, commentators and those in the choir. (Inst. 1967, art. 12) (The above quote is based upon Art. 29 of the Constitution on Liturgy.)

Because of the liturgical ministry it performs, the choir - or the Capella musica, or schola cantorum - deserves particular mention. (Inst. 1967, art. 19)

The "diversity of ministry, but unity of mission" finds its scriptural source in Col. 3:17, "Whatever you are doing, whether speaking or acting, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

The apostolate precludes a sound lay spirituality as its premise, and from that spirituality stems the motivation and inspiration for apostolic action. There is no fear of engaging in an apostolate, for personal spirituality also recognizes the personal gifts granted by the Holy Spirit. In the Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (Vat. II, Apostolicam Actuositatem, 18 Nov. 1965) (Art. 4, par. 7) it states:

This lay spirituality will take its particular character from the circumstances of one's state in life...from one's state of health and from one's professional and social activity. Whatever the circumstances, each one has received suitable talents and these should be cultivated, as should also the personal gifts he has from the Holy Spirit.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit must be developed and used as a part of the "salvific mission of the Church" heretofore mentioned. Jesus said: "Your light must shine so brightly before men that they can see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mat. 5:16)

It has been established that the Church considers music to have those qualities which can be directed so that it can be ministerial to the liturgy. She has also determined that those who participate in liturgical music leadership, i.e. choir directors, organists, cantors, choirs, share in a true ministry. Nevertheless there remains the question of the title "minister of music" and to whom it should be granted.

All laymen share in the priesthood of Christ, and are a priestly people; however, we are not priests. All who participate in the performance of liturgical music in one form or another share in its ministry through Christian service, but not all are ministers of music.

In order to define the title of "minister of music" and decide upon whom it should be conferred, the nature and development of ministers in the tradition of the church must be reviewed. In that tradition the entrance into ministries precludes a "call" to them. This "call" is twofold. There is no clearer explanation of this than in the scripture passage: "Many are called but few are chosen."

All Christians who aspire to the Church's ministries must feel "called" by the Holy Spirit. This is very personal, and must be taken seriously as the aspirant makes known that "calling" to the proper superiors. Those "called" are the "Many." The second "call" is extended by the proper authoratative

superiors to the "few" who are "chosen". They are called from the People of God to represent and lead them in a given way dictated by the nature of the ministry. Between the personal call and the extended call there is a formation period designed to determine the suitability and training of the candidate.

This preparatory program, when completed, offers some indication that the aspiring candidate has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the given ministry. In the case of a liturgical ministry there is also the question of the predisposition of the candidate in terms of commitment and personal spirituality. Not to be overly simplistic in the analysis of the nature of a liturgical ministry, one might say that the ingredients are: musical talent, proper formation and education, a commitment to Christian service, and most of all, an exemplary evident and practical spirituality steeped in Catholic faith and doctrine.

Only through this procedure can the "seal" of authority be placed upon the conferral of an official ministry and the title "minister." This is not an attempt to feign a kind of "ordination"; rather, it affords the People of God the assurance that the one called "minister" in a given area of the apostolate is properly suited and qualified.

While the documents do not speak of a training and formation program for a ministry of music, they do state:

All higher schools of Church music should be kept up and encouraged in every way where they already exist, and as far as possible new ones should be founded. It is most important that the Church should herself provide instruction for her own choirmasters, organists, and singers, so that she may inspire them with the true principles of their sacred art. (Motu Proprio, Art. 28, St. Pius X, 1903)

It is desirable also that higher institutes of sacred music be established whenever possible. (Const. on Sac. Lit., Chapter VI, Art. 115, Vat. II 1963)

These schools and institutes would be the logical places for a ministry of music formation and training program and could serve as one of the determining factors for the institution of the ministry and the conferral of the title "minister of music" by a local ordinary.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that liturgical music, which St. Pius X called "the highest of the arts in the Church", and the Vatican II documents and post-conciliar documents identify as being "ministerial" deserve an ideal leadership worthy of the title "minister of music"; however, the title cannot be automatically assumed by musicians, however qualified they are in talent and skills, who fill church positions. To do this would be analogous to talented musicians assuming academic titles without having acquired them through a course of study, and from legitimate

authority. A carefully planned formation and training period must be a prerequisite for the resulting title of "minister of music", which in turn must be conferred by proper ecclesiastical authority.

In 1981 the Philadelphia Institute for Ministerial Music (not "Ministers of music") was founded under the patronage of the Archbishop of Philadelphia, John Cardinal Krol. It is a fully accredited program in the Religious Studies Division of St. Charles Seminary, and is designed to educate church musicians in applied music, liturgical music, liturgy, and the documents of the Church which pertain to liturgical music. It could well serve as a formation and training program for Ministers of Music, when and if the Universal Church or the local ordinary institutes a formal Ministry of Music.

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