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# Catholic Prophetic Sound after Vatican II

MIRIAM THERESE WINTER

Twenty-five years after the conclusion of Vatican II, a whole new sound resonates from the Catholic church in America: the sound of people singing—in choirs, in the pews, in ad hoc or more permanent groups dedicated to a less formal style or repertory; the sound of hymn, psalm, chant, song, antiphon, and acclamation in the language of the people, spontaneously composed or classically constructed, both complex and rudimentary, in unison or in harmonies either articulated or implied; the sound of full-bodied organ and steel-string guitar, of keyboard, woodwind, percussion, and brass; the sound of rhythmic clapping, of a community of believers come to life and open to making music. Not all the time. Not in every parish. But enough times in enough cathedrals, local churches, seminaries, schools, religious houses, and small Christian communities to confirm a paradigmatic shift in the character of music-making from what existed before the council. This century has seen in the Catholic church significant change—ecclesiological, liturgical, and social—and that change has occurred in association with music.

Sometimes music precipitated change, causing the church to reorder its practices in ways far beyond anything anyone could have anticipated. For example, the popularity of vernacular hymn and psalm singing in the dialogue or low mass of the fifties<sup>1</sup> helped influence the council to define liturgy in terms of the active participation of the people and to be open to the use of the vernacular. Before long, the categories of *high* and

*low* mass were eliminated as the vernacular language became the liturgical norm. The full participation of women in choirs for many years prior to the council led the church to recognize officially all church choirs and to accept the equal status of women within them, overturning an ecclesiastical law that had excluded women from membership in official liturgical choirs.<sup>2</sup> A singing congregation and a full choir were catalysts for the architectural redesign of parish churches from the long, narrow, spectator style with choir and organ in a loft in the rear to a circular, more inclusive orientation with the choir visible in front and with a less strong demarcation between narthex, body, and sanctuary, between laity and clergy. The free and informal folk style of the sixties, aided both by quick and easy access to new songs through parish duplicating machines and by inexpensive missalettes, became so widespread and so prolific that any attempt to enforce an officially approved repertory was useless and the practice was quietly discontinued. The use of guitar and even percussion precipitated a reclassification of musical instruments that had formerly been banned from liturgical use on both aesthetic and theological grounds. Today all instruments are potentially liturgical.

In a variety of ways the impact of music forced the Catholic church of this century to change, yet at other times music reflected changes that had already arisen in some other arena and then found their expression in musical form. For example, the liturgical emphasis on participatory acclamations has led to the proliferation of musical fragments in the eucharistic liturgy. Some celebrations now consist solely of musically disconnected amens, alleluias, antiphons, hosannas, and an anaphora acclamation. The emergence of the responsorial psalm as the primary people's response during the liturgy of the word has given rise to various collections of sung psalms and refrains, establishing a responsorial relationship between cantor and community that remains to this day. The liturgical decision to promote active participation through musical means opened the door to all manner of composers who brought to the ritual all kinds of music. The length of time it took to complete the revision of all liturgical books meant that the music of the

immediate postconciliar period was guided by no firm criteria, and the result was a musical pluriformity historically uncharacteristic of the institutional church.

Without a doubt the struggle for musical literacy in the American Catholic church has coincided with a ritual and social reformation. An initial stage of liturgical and musical reform precipitated a period of genuine renewal. The people were claiming their church. From the perspective of the hierarchy and the average American parish, some sense of stability exists at present. The genius of past experimentation has been absorbed into the mainstream of the tradition. It is possible once again to describe and define what is essential to Catholic liturgical music.

From a liturgical point of view three guidelines have emerged: (1) it is essential that the people sing whenever it is possible and appropriate for them to do so, for through song and the act of singing people experience a sense of community and express the presence of God among them; (2) it is essential that the singing be ritually integrated within the given liturgical moment and that the musical expression be appropriate to the ethos of the liturgical action taking place; and finally, (3) it is essential that the music be pastorally sensitive to the celebrating assembly, reflecting a style and level of difficulty appropriate to those participating. These guidelines leave room for considerable differences on aesthetic matters, with critics taking contrary positions, for instance, on what is musically essential. Some have made a concerted effort to return to a set of uniform aesthetic values, if not a uniform musical praxis, that reflects the ethos of a "lost" tradition. Yet parishes continue to have differing standards of performance, interpretation, and style. Although parishes differ significantly according to region, religious majority/minority status, urban/rural location, ethnicity, size, structural complexity, and the dynamism of programs and loyalties,<sup>3</sup> the Sunday morning liturgies of many American Catholic churches reflect an emerging "American way" of doing the liturgy, even as diversity persists. Parishes have begun to model preconiliar hopes and decretal definitions. The institutional church in our day seems finally to have found its voice.

Such an overall impression, while true, is also somewhat

misleading. Radical fringe elements in music and in ritual have not really disappeared. They have simply changed location. While designated liturgical rites remain relatively normative for the average American parish, rituals rehearsed in indigenous base communities scattered around the globe and existing here and there in America have begun to presage a new social order within and beyond the church. There are rumblings beneath the surface of structured religious practice that bear a striking similarity to preconciliar disenchantment. Then and now, prophetic individuals and communities have intuitively sensed an integral relationship between the elements of authentic ritual and the way people order their lives. Then and now, music appears to function as the sign and symbol of a transformative vision experienced or proclaimed. Who we are is how we pray, and how we pray is who we are becoming.

This is essentially why we sing: to express who we are and are becoming. When Vatican II took its decisive step in the direction of a search for meaning, it boldly—albeit, no doubt, unwittingly—invited local churches to discern their culturally conditioned identity and to discover how to pray authentically and contextually. Any journey into meaning, culture, context, and self-understanding is necessarily open ended. The church in America is still in the process of becoming. Its roots are cross-culturally so complex that no one has yet been able to say exactly what it means to be an American Catholic. If we do not yet know who we are, how can we be so absolutely certain about what we ought to sing and how we ought to pray? A second-generation postconciliar church is experimenting with alternative ways of being in community and is searching for opportunities to transform the social order into a foretaste of the new creation. Its ritual and social behavior, rooted in the spirit of justice and equality, is modeling on the margins of institutional life what may one day be a legitimate expression of the Catholic church in America. Nonterritorial parishes, house churches, and alternative communities of faith and inspiration determined by gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, broad ecumenical perspective, religious vows, or comprising other types of Catholics who feel excluded from full participation in the church, meet to discern the Word of God and make eucharist together



as they experiment with styles of leadership and participation and with images, language, and forms. The songs that arise from such liturgical celebrations may well be paving the way for yet another institutional upheaval.

Although the Catholic church has moved beyond an emphasis on reform into a condition of renewal, it has not gone far enough. The institutional church has made significant changes but has stopped short of a radical systemic change that would ensure the inclusion of all of its people—women, people of color, gays and lesbians, those who have divorced and remarried—as full participants in the fullness of its life and meaning. Nevertheless, once the church stepped out of its archaic past into a dynamic present, seeds were sown for a future time of radical transformation. Those seeds are beginning to germinate; signs of spontaneous growth are popping up all around. This may be neither what the council fathers intended nor what seasoned liturgists and professional musicians would even recommend, but the worldview of the Holy Spirit often clashes with institutions and their plans.

## EXPERIENCING A MUSICAL REFORMATION

Immediately after Vatican II, Catholics were inundated with change. A rigid, inflexible, impersonal tradition suddenly adopted a pastoral orientation, with the result that people were caught up in the pragmatics of how-to, what-to, and when-to do what had never been done before. Music bore the brunt of the changes. Latin gave way to the vernacular language, liturgical chant and classical polyphony were replaced by congregational song, musical leadership shifted in many instances from the professional to the inexperienced, and good will replaced credentials when it came to the dynamics of implementing the spirit of Vatican II. Some communities of faith flourished. Others were devastated by a sense of loss and a feeling of having been betrayed. Hundreds of years of musical tradition were replaced by unfamiliar pieces and by a new set of musical values.

Participation, not aesthetics, was the criterion by which one measured failure or success. Relevance, not longevity, was a primary principle informing musical selection. Local adaptation, not universality, guided the development of repertory. Individuals charged with helping the congregation find its voice asked a different set of questions, such as, Will it work?—not, Will it last?

Rites were revised to recover ancient forms that predated centuries of accretion. Ritual books were rewritten; rubrics, simplified; rules, changed. New ministries were identified and established, among these, the ministry of music. Choirs moved from the edge to the center. Women not only participated in the liturgical choir but in some cases directed it. Cantors led musically illiterate assemblies into some semblance of congregational response. Slowly repertoires began to grow and, even more slowly, to become familiar.

Toward the end of this period of intense reform, further experimentation of a systemic nature was officially discouraged. Innovations were more carefully channeled to enhance, and not restructure, existing liturgical forms, and music was once again at the service of the designated rites.

For professional musicians the period of reform was a time of personal crisis, as all that they held precious seemed to be threatened with extinction. Talent, training, and years of experience were suddenly insufficient for the job. Instead, amateur musicians with folk-style songs, guitars, and enthusiastic support groups enabled an immediate realization of the council's key liturgical principle: active participation. Their less formal style and repertory encouraged people to get involved, and the sound they brought with them left a permanent mark. Eventually, however, the professionally trained again took charge of the musical agenda, and as they did so, they made friends with the participatory people's song and pushed it to new possibilities, adding genres of their own. Vocal and instrumental arrangements gave the vernacular sound a well-deserved legitimacy. Compositions proliferated, reflecting a variety of styles and forms for the congregation and the choir. Songbooks featuring individual composers, anthologies of contemporary songs, psalm

settings with seasonal antiphons, and revised hymnals for congregational use are among the scores of publications that have been produced in the postconciliar years.

Yet not all are satisfied. Liturgist Mark Searle says: "The reason that Catholic congregations do not sing at Mass is not that they do not *want* to sing; it's because what they are given to sing *they do not like*."<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, Searle reports:

The church's ideal of a sung liturgy with full and active congregational participation appears most often to be realized in those parishes which provide hymnals rather than missalettes, which make careful selection of the music to be sung and which judiciously deploy the music between choir or folk group, cantor and congregation.<sup>5</sup>

Searle is correct in concluding that people ordinarily sing when they like the music and refuse to sing when they do not. What people like to sing, however, is not necessarily found in hymnals or in missalettes. The issues are not hymnals or missalettes but control, mainstream values, the continuity of a particular tradition over against freedom and spontaneity, an openness to the Spirit making all things new. Ironically, contemporary congregational song was born from liturgical need because traditional music was so rigid and so removed from the realities of everyday life. Yet some liturgists, particularly those with a monastic bent, long for a return to the sounds and symbols of a more reasoned rite, and they support musicians who share that view.

Decisions about what and how much people sing are based not only on liturgical criteria but also on sociological realities. The pace of reform, the depth of renewal, and the level of satisfaction among American Catholics are related to the sociological profile of the parish and conflicting models of parish identity. Today's "upwardly mobile but very heterogeneous U.S. Catholic population . . . has reached a level of educational, social, and economic development where it has all the capabilities to be a participating people" and consequently has a lot in common with the mainline confessional and sacramental Protestant population.<sup>6</sup> Yet these middle-class American parishes are not the only parish model.



Alongside the post–World War II generations and the post–Vatican II parishes are the working-class peoples . . . the “immigrant church” . . . educated Catholics in their 40s and 50s who . . . have a yearning for the order, the legal clarity or the devotional comfort of the church as it was—“growing up Catholic.” Enough with experimentation, enough with pluralism! Back to the one way. . . . There is a sense of community in the knowledge that all around us share the same spiritual folkways and rules.<sup>7</sup>

The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life points out that “pluralism and heterogeneity are found not only between parishes” but also “within the same parish.”<sup>8</sup> Some parishes are more prophetic than others, and even within a single parish there are a variety of visions. Music inevitably reflects these differences.

Sociological diversity often means pluriform perspectives on music expressed, not only in terms of genre and style, but often as a preferential bias toward either the traditional heritage or contemporary innovations. Both emphases are supported by the institutional church. While conciliar documents give theological priority to a cathedral liturgy, with its attendant formality, tradition, and emphasis on transcendence, the council’s pastoral challenge to cultivate and communicate a sense of community lies with the liturgy of the local parish. These two types of liturgy imply two radically different styles and conflicting expectations with regard to liturgical song.

Two streams of music, rooted in diverse theological orientations and validated by the legislation, now coexist in the Catholic Church. Both are affirmed by *Sacrosanctum concilium* and are clearly represented there. The first is promoted by chapter one in all those liturgical principles and norms that call for active participation and imply the value of pastoral song. The second is supported by chapter six and calls for a continuation of the Church’s rich musical tradition, both in the preservation of its precious heritage and by transmitting its values through future compositions. Nobility and solemnity, celebrational modes more appropriate to a cathedral liturgy, and the kind of religious singing where the voices assembled ring out, are qualitative criteria that meet and clash in the average parish liturgy. Later legislation shows that these tensions

surface in regard to music quality and style. The music given priority in chapter six has vestiges of “only the best for God.” . . . The music promoted by chapter one is music of and for the people. It can be any style or genre and respects a culture’s songs.<sup>9</sup>

Some musicians have helped to diffuse this conciliar dualism by incorporating both past and present forms into their parish music programs. Others have made peace with types of music they once opposed and now concentrate on selecting what is liturgically appropriate for the season and the ritual moment and what is pastorally appropriate for those who are assembled to sing. But even as mainline Catholicism allows itself to be shaped by the first fruits of its internal reformation, seeds of transformation sown by that same council, but not predicted by it, are quietly taking root both inside and outside the parish structure. Once again, those seeds are deeply embedded in contemporary liturgical song. They await a nurturing environment in order to spring fully into life.

## SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION

The church in America awaits an *American Manifesto* around which good, faithful musicians can rally and throw off the trappings of unthinkingly monarchical and moribund liturgical music. This will be the beginning of a new age of the Western church, because American music, nurtured in pluralism and crafted by an ancient faith nuanced by twentieth-century theological insight, will form the next generations of Christians.<sup>10</sup>

From the fourth century onward, the church tried to control its song through its leadership and its legislation. That control ended officially after Vatican II, and in the view of those who cherish tradition, everything fell apart. Professional church people—bishops, clergy, musicians, liturgists—are by institutional definition the guardians of tradition. They control the ritual’s song and, consequently, the continuity of the tradition in the life of the institutional church. But another revolution is in the making.

What are the seeds of transformation that are already becoming a viable force for further systemic change in the institutional Catholic church? They are sociological and ecclesiological perspectives that are taking root in the experience of faith-filled people and are slowly but surely maturing. Central to these are (1) a change in ritual language, (2) a change in the church's foundational image and in its overall perception, and (3) a whole new experience of church. The development of all of these is related to the evolution of contemporary song.

### *Ritual Language*

In the decades prior to Vatican II, advocates of the liturgical movement promoted the singing of Gregorian chant. Sociologically, it was an impossible task. Most members of the average American Catholic parish did not know Latin, so they refused to sing. As the problem seemed to be a matter of comprehension, liturgists lobbied for the use of the vernacular, and a change in the language of the liturgy was one of the outcomes of the council. At the same time, a new repertory developed to replace the music of the past, and most Catholics settled into the change. Some, however, did not. The use of the vernacular precipitated a new set of problems at each end of the liturgical spectrum. Supporters of the Tridentine tradition mourned the loss of the sense of mystery associated with a hieratic language that they did know and comprehend. Proponents of the vernacular were surprised to discover that the sense of the sacred that had been transmitted by traditional texts was lost to them in translation. An overwhelming experience of irrelevance and the discovery of ecclesiastical error triggered a deeper dissatisfaction among those who had advocated change. The issue was no longer textual comprehension but the content of the rite. Some pursued textual revision while others began a lengthy search for a new symbolic language and text that would speak to the pluriform, broadly inclusive reality of today.

### *Image of the Church*

The shift in language, however, traumatic as it was for some, was not the most major innovation. A change in the founda-

tional image or metaphor of church from *Body of Christ* to *people of God* was the paramount breakthrough, in that it heralded a paradigmatic shift from the static to the dynamic, from uniformity to unity-in-diversity, from centralization to decentralization, from rigid universal application to local and particularized adaptations. This ecclesiological change has become a seed of transformation.

Just as seeds grow in the right environment, the climate was right for the concept *people of God* and for the people themselves to grow and develop far beyond anyone's expectation. The new image affirmed individuality. Already in the early days after the council, the image undergirded the right of individuals to sing their own songs. The people felt no need for credentials or permissions. Had not the council demonstrated that the Spirit was vitally alive in our midst, surprising us all with radical new insights, speaking through unexpected channels? In this spirit of freedom that was the spirit of the sixties, the early folk singers absolutely believed that they were singing the Spirit's songs, and many others who shared that conviction sang along with them. Although institutional leaders of the church have continued to resist individuality and freedom, these seeds already have given rise to irrepressible new growth.

### *New Experience of Church*

Thus has arisen the third of the radically new perspectives listed above: a novel experience of church itself. Ecclesio-logically, the image *people of God* validated the laity as primary to the definition of *church*. Eventually, designated groups within the laity began to assert themselves, namely, the young, cultural and ethnic minorities, and those disenchanted with the system, particularly women. Bringing with them the concerns and the agendas of their world, laypeople integrated these with a newly emerging consciousness that they were the church. This shift from "going to church" to "being church" has also been a seed of transformation, as is the understanding of church as

*sacramentum mundi*, a sacrament in the midst of the world and for the world, God's Word made flesh and visible now. Catholic laypeople have changed much since Vatican II, and they are still in the process of changing. They are changing not only within themselves, and consequently altering the reality of church experienced through them, but they are also affecting the institutional church, which is still uneasy with its newly inherited images and their implications. As such, the people are bound to precipitate further change.

Lay leadership and lay presence remain an unpredictable source of energy and power within American parishes. In many instances laity surpass the clergy in their understanding of issues that significantly influence the development of faith and commitment, such as human love and sexuality, gender and racial equality, family life and professional life, the economics of survival, and the politics of war and peace. The people are growing in their ability to interpret and articulate a position, and in their openness to hear divergent views, and they are claiming their place in the parish. By 1984, 83 percent of the leadership within Catholic parishes were laypersons. Shared responsibility for ministries was then and still is a fact of parish life.<sup>11</sup> Today, scores of priestless parishes are being administered by a layperson, while other parishes have lay associates as part of their pastoral team. Today's Catholic laity is less estranged from other Christian traditions. Through education, intermarriage, and participation in ecumenical programs, classical divisions between Catholics and Protestants have blurred. One result has been a substantial sharing of one another's music. The rich heritage of vernacular Protestant hymns is now available to American Catholics. The laypeople are also establishing among themselves communities of support and inspiration in the form of the house church or small Christian communities within or beyond the territorial parish. There they can more freely sing songs of their own choosing and test their creative and theological limits. These deeply committed and faith-based communities are significant seeds of transformation. Theologian Leonardo Boff calls them a new experience of church:



We have witnessed the creation of communities in which persons actually know and recognize one another, where they can be themselves in their individuality, where they can "have their say," where they can be welcomed by name. . . . This phenomenon exists in the church as well: grassroots Christian communities, as they are known, or basic Christian communities. . . . The laity carry forward the cause of the Gospel here, and are the vessels, the vehicles of ecclesial reality even on the level of direction and decision-making. This shift of the ecclesial axis contains, in seed, a new principle for "birthing the church," for "starting the church again" . . . a genuine "ecclesogenesis."<sup>12</sup>

### CULTURAL DIVERSITY

When first raised by Vatican II in its pastoral constitution on The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), the question of culture did not seem particularly pertinent to the church in America. Culture and the need to indigenize were considered third-world issues. But we have come to an acute awareness that American culture consists of a variety of subcultures and ethnic particularities and that the Catholic church in America is in dire need of enculturation. Prior to the council, subcultural diversity flourished in America in so-called national churches but was factored out of the ritual experience of mainline American Catholicism. The revised Roman ritual reflected a universal sameness that fit no particular culture but was intended instead to be supracultural. Ritual music was the universal church's song, not the people's song. Now authentic ritual, even in America, is understood to be rooted in culture, and it has been recognized that a variety of cultures related to age and ethnicity are what make up America. The church continues to search for ways to incorporate into its liturgical expression some of the characteristics of its cultural diversity. The most persistent examples stem from the demands of various age groups, as well as from ethnic and racial minorities.

Children, particularly the very young and teenagers, have their own culture. The church has been liturgically sensitive

to its young ones. As early as 1973 the United States' bishops issued a *Directory for Masses with Children*, suspending a number of its regulations in order to accommodate children. However, it has been far less sensitive to the particular needs of teenagers. Parents often complain that their teen-aged children stay away from the liturgy because it has little meaning for them. The world of today's teenager is very different from the world of the past, and many teenagers have little patience with what they feel are archaic sounds or old-fashioned forms. What was radical music to our generation is past history to young people today, yet the principle of incorporating appropriate secular music still remains relevant. Secular songs of the sixties and seventies found their way into experimental liturgies and were sacred to those who espoused them. The generation that canonized Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and a host of other secular composers should not deny the youth of today their own secular/sacred songs. Today's sound is the sound not exclusively, but certainly, of a chaotic world—loud, intense, rhythmic, with a hard, driving beat. And some of the texts are acceptable. Our youth are questioning our supposedly more enlightened understanding of *musica sacra* and challenging our definitions of sacred and secular song. Not to include their expressions in the collective voice of tradition is to suggest once again that culturally specific and time-conditioned forms have no liturgical or pastoral possibility. Even more tragic is the silencing yet another time of the voice and the creativity of some of the people of God. Today's youth can certainly learn to share and even love repertoires different from their own, but not if the church categorically denies the validity of their own experience in its sacramental rites, especially in its music.

The concerns of ethnic and racial groups are critical to any consideration of culture. African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans are just a few of the groups seeking a liturgical identity. Here again the people of God bring with them the agendas of the world in which they live. The scars of second-class status, poverty, lack of opportunity, and discrimination drive African-American Catholics to remain attuned to their collective struggle for liberation, first of all as African-Americans

with a shared social and political agenda, secondarily as Catholic Christians. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” they sing. Where? In Selma. Harlem. Soweto. “We shall overcome,” they sang back in the turbulent sixties, and they continue to sing today. We shall overcome all forms of racial discrimination, in the world and in the church. African-Americans bring an authentically American musical tradition of spirituals sung into life by the slaves of society and religion, as well as a repertory of Gospel music that has given rise to some of America’s best secular genres, notably jazz and the blues. People of this rich heritage are looking for these culturally conditioned sounds in their liturgical life as well.

Hispanic Catholics, a minority moving quickly toward the majority, have an invisible status as far as the liturgy is concerned. They, too, are beginning to find their voice and are starting to demand their own distinctive sound—not simply songs translated into Spanish, but truly Hispanic music arising out of their creative midst. While there have been some efforts to meet their cultural needs, no obvious, organized plan integrates their influence into the mainstream.

Likewise, the art and experience of Asian and Native American cultures must be taken into account. The music of all people who make up North America, once validated, must enrich and energize our shared liturgical life. Emphasis on culture plants a seed of transformation. Popular culture is surely “a theological place—the locale in which one may encounter God.”<sup>13</sup>

If one believes . . . that people are sacraments of God, that God discloses Himself/Herself to us through the objects, events, and persons of life, then one must concede the possibility that in the sacramentality of ordinary folk, their hopes, their fears, their aspirations represent a legitimate experience of God, legitimate symbols of God, and legitimate stories of God.<sup>14</sup>

Opening up our rites to receive the gifts of other cultures means making our church big enough to embrace all of God’s people. It means taking seriously our belief that the church is the people’s church. It means opening ourselves to the Spirit,

welcoming one another's aesthetic, and not dismissing what we do not understand.

### INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS: THE COMING RADICALIZATION OF THE NORM

Among the disenchanteds who are part of parish liturgy are persons sensitive to forces of oppression and deeply concerned about social justice. They are one in spirit with the people of other nations who are struggling for liberation, and they are aware that third-world Christians, particularly those in base communities, have done a better job of integrating their agendas for justice with their liturgical life. For example, the Nicaraguan Mass, *La Misa campesina nicaraguense* by Carlos Mejia Godoy sings to "a God who sweats in the street . . . the worker God, the worker Christ." The entrance song says of God: "You stand in line in the camp so that they may pay you your wage. And you even protest for justice when they don't give you enough to eat." The Kyrie cries out: "Identify yourself with us, *Christo Jesus*, not with the oppressive class that squeezes and devours the community, but with the oppressed."<sup>15</sup> South African freedom songs offer similar illustrations of the integration of spirituality, justice, and liturgy. American liturgical music often lacks the honesty and the intensity of third-world songs of justice because American liturgy has denied victims of injustice their voice. Music that derives from middle-class values sings at best *about* the poor or on behalf of the poor but does not begin from the poor person's perspective. It rarely sings of justice with any specificity.

Secular songwriters and performers have stirred the consciences of many in the world and even within the church, supporting human rights issues and giving impetus to agendas for social justice within the Catholic church.<sup>16</sup> In 1984–1985, when it became known that famine threatened to decimate Ethiopia, rock stars sang the world to concerted action while the churches continued to sing in their separate assemblies, unable or unwilling to coalesce their own global constituencies in a similar

way.<sup>17</sup> In 1986 alone, rock stars rallied on behalf of the hungry in Africa; the homeless, farmers, and AIDS victims in America; the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa; and the imprisoned around the globe. Contemporary musicians sang of the sanctuary movement, while some worshipers gathered in their sanctuaries and sang comfortable songs.

Clearly, it is not easy to change liturgical structures or influence the texts of ritual song. Some determined Catholics, dedicated to the vision of the gospel, continue to sing their liberation songs and to proclaim equity and equality on the margins of the church's designated rites. Women, for example, meet as women-church and sing Carolyn McDade's "Coming Out of Exile," Holly Near's "We Are a Gentle, Angry People," M. T. Winter's "A New Day Dawns." Women and men together struggle to overcome the homelessness, hunger, and poverty that stalk the streets of our nation's cities as they sing South African freedom songs: "We shall not give up the fight, we have only started"; "Freedom is coming, oh yes, I know. . . . O God give us power and make us fearless, O God give us power, because we need it."<sup>18</sup>

Together with a number of rock, folk, country, Gospel, and other secular music superstars, church people committed to social justice are convinced that the arbitrary line between the sacred and the secular needs to be erased. Two points are becoming clear: first, if the institutional church is to be an effective presence in the world, it must become more actively involved in the pain and suffering of the world; second, that kind of radical realignment of priorities and programs will happen only if we sing and pray about it together. Such a shift is critical for the well-being of the church as well as for the well-being of God's disadvantaged people. Noted sociologist Robert Bellah, coauthor of *Habits of the Heart*, said in his 1990 address to the American bishops:

If the church is to be the church, it must not only practice its beliefs within the community, it must show forth what they imply for the larger society, not to coerce acceptance and not to be swept up into activism at the expense of spirituality, but to hold up an alter-



native vision of reality, to give witness to what, as best we can discern it, God is saying to the world today.<sup>19</sup>

The church must learn to integrate its experience of the world into the core of its sung prayer and praise. Justice-oriented individuals are pushing the church to rethink its militaristic images in light of its pursuit of peace and its symbols of abundance in a world of abject poverty and overwhelming need. A propensity to focus on other-worldly emphases; an avoidance of current issues and idioms, notably in liturgical texts, exclusive language, images, and practices: these are no longer acceptable in an institution that defines itself in terms of its people. Some ecclesiastics see these concerns as just so much political turbulence, signifying nothing, at least in religious terms. Those committed to justice see things differently and many feel that music is an agent of social change.

Jacques Attali associates music with power and speaks of “three strategic usages of music by power”:

Music is used and produced in the ritual in an attempt to make people *forget* the general violence. . . . It is employed to make people *believe* in the harmony of the world. . . . It serves to *silence*, by mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises. Make people Forget, make them Believe, Silence them. In all three cases, music is a tool of power.<sup>20</sup>

Catholics are well aware of music used as a bureaucratic power to silence the opposition. For fifteen centuries liturgical legislation tried to keep music under tight ecclesiastical control. Why control the music? Because music has always been perceived as power—power to liberate or to enslave, power to shape the minds and hearts of the participating community. To lose control of the music is to lose control of the people. “We will become what you sing of us Tortuga!” So writes Rudolfo Anaya in his liberation novel, *Tortuga*. “Isn’t that great! To become what you will make us in your songs!” The official church has finally relinquished its determination to legislate its music. Those committed to justice know that we can now sing the new world

into being. It has been done before, and it can be done again. What we sing is what we will become.

The unrelenting persistence of women to speak and be heard signifies change. For women, music is indeed an agent of revolution. Women sang "I Am Suffragette" (1867) as they marched for the right to vote; "Bread and Roses" (now considered traditional) as they struggled to survive the injustices surrounding female labor at the beginning of this century; and more recently Judy Small's "Mothers, Daughters, Wives" (1984) as a protest against our propensity for war. Today a growing number of women are translating all songs into inclusive language and addressing God in female imagery, as *Bakerwoman*, *Mother*, *Shechinah*. More and more women are beginning to believe that what is sung will one day come to pass.

In her introduction to the field of women, music, and culture, Ellen Kossoff insists that "we must also begin to address the valuative role music plays in defining and reflecting established social and sexual orders and in acting as an agent in maintaining or changing such orders."<sup>21</sup> Bruno Nettl notes that the world of music is heavily weighted toward male musical practices and suggests that "this may result from the dominant role of men in determining approaches and methods."<sup>22</sup> Not only music is male-oriented. The exclusive patriarchal structures, rites, images, language, and general practices of the Catholic church are pushing many women toward more congenial communities, such as women-church and similar feminist collectives where they can find and express themselves without fear of intimidation or discrimination. Carol Robertson speaks of "social and ritual repertoires appropriate to the needs of women in transition" that are part of emerging cultures within complex societies: "As women's groups move from their culture of birth to their culture of choice they must recast notions of *value* that undergird musical interpretation, organizational styles, and habits of interaction."<sup>23</sup>

Women remain an oppressed group within institutional Catholicism, and liturgical ritual perpetuates that oppression. Women know from experience that "the *kinds* of power that exist within a social setting and the ways in which they are

assigned to each gender establish order,'<sup>24</sup> and that ritual prayer and song confirm the established social order within the church. If, as Robertson states and many others would agree, "women perform to create a catharsis of the spirit, both for themselves and their communities,"<sup>25</sup> then the Catholic reformation of this century has not been nearly receptive enough to women's intrinsic song. Many women who remain part of the institutional church are courageously defecting in place, forming the nucleus of the Spirit church which struggles to bring about an ecclesiological transformation, so that ageism, racism, sexism, classism, cultural discrimination and all other forms of patriarchal oppression will no longer be perpetuated by the forms and the content of the liturgy and its music. Such ecclesiological dissatisfaction is a multifaceted seed of transformation.

### MUSIC: A CONTEMPORARY SACRAMENT

The Second Vatican Council enabled the Catholic church to open its windows to the Spirit and its doors to the world. Together the Spirit and the world broke down some of the walls separating Catholics from other people. Today the Spirit-church in the midst of the world and the institutional church on the margins of the world are trying to build a new structure together, a sacramental structure deeply rooted in both the sacred and the secular and therefore capable of bridging both realities. In biblical song the sacred and the secular have always been integral to one another, and in incarnational terms, they are one. Now contemporary song is testing the possibilities of recovering such a systemic integration.

Prior to the council, the liturgical focus was on the song itself, as legislation tried to protect the sacral quality of a designated repertory. Shortly after the council, when attention focused primarily on the act of singing, much energy went into facilitating the active participation of assemblies and, to some extent, cantors and choirs. More recently, the focus has shifted to the singers and the quality of their response. Music can be, and often is, a vehicle of personal and social transformation when

the singer, the song, and the singing are inseparable, just as the proclamation of the Word, the proclaimer of that Word, and the very act of proclaiming were one Spirit-filled reality in the church of the New Testament. What was true of the *kerygma* can also be true of song, and such an integration is clearly sacramental.

To achieve this integration, we must be more concerned about the spirit and the meaning of what we are singing, more sensitive to its impact on the celebrating community, and less literal about preserving and transmitting the tradition (e.g., biblical and liturgical texts). We must also be as concerned about the quality of integration within the individual and the assembly as we are about the quality of the composition and its rendition. Grace truly abounds when the singer, the song, and the singing are one. Such integral harmony is a genuinely kerygmatic and, without doubt, a sacramental experience.

The conciliar effort to link liturgical ritual to its biblical tradition was, and still is, a turning point for liturgical music. The biblical psalm is the key to this transformation. We have not felt its transformative power because we have misunderstood the nature of the psalms and their primary message to us from their situation in the canon. The biblical psalms were songs of life before they were sacred songs, songs of the people in all their rugged humanity and in all their human secularity. Too often we have denied their secularity, editing them to fit our assumptions of what sacred songs should be. We will not allow secular songs to penetrate our praise. We have arbitrarily redefined these ancient songs of praise and then, on the basis of our redefinition, we have denied the entry of similar secular praise songs—chants, hymns, spirituals, Gospel, folk and folk-style songs—into our liturgical rites, thereby limiting our own access to ourselves and to God. In the cultic laments, curses, songs of trust, hymns of praise and thanksgiving that comprise the biblical psalter, the sacred and the secular, the word of God and the people of God merged through the medium of music. The astounding truth is that the inclusion of these songs of the people in the canon says to us that such songs can be sacred. We must learn to worry less about preserving the cult and our



cultic traditions and more about affirming channels for God's word to permeate our culture.

For fifteen centuries the Catholic church told its people what to sing or not to sing as it legislated them into silence. The council's most radical action was to liberate its people and, perhaps inadvertently, give credence to their song. Once the people began to sing, the church could no longer designate the song, for the sound of people singing in the churches meant that some of the people some of the time would be singing their own songs.

Musically, socially, and liturgically, the Catholic church in America has moved from uniformity through diversity toward pluriformity; from adaptation toward indigenization; from reformation toward transformation. One day it may recognize that two streams of music emerging from Vatican II are really one, single, Spirit-inspired response arising from the people of God. Both the professional song and the popular song, the traditional repertory and contemporary compositions, are part of the church's precious heritage. Both modes of expression are, or can be, artistic. All song is the people's song. Some of the people are professional musicians, some of the professionals and nonprofessionals are artists who from time to time push human creativity to its limits and reveal to us a piece of ourselves we had never known before. The capacity to create truly sacramental music that liberates, integrates, and transforms individuals and society is a God-given gift. It can come from anyone, anywhere. It belongs to no single culture, nor does it require a particular style. When the song is the individual's best effort, when the singing is the community's best effort, then the best is still given to God. In fewer than twenty-five years, Catholic church music in America has undergone a paradigm shift in aesthetics, rendition, and theological understanding. What remains the same are its capacities to be a vehicle of prayer and praise and to call out in a prophetic voice within the tradition. The essentials have not changed.

## NOTES

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1. *The People's Hymnal* (World Library, 1955); *Our Parish Prays*



and Sings (1958); and the Psalms and Canticles set by Joseph Gelineau (1955–1956) were popular resources.

2. Pius X, *Tra le sollecitudini, motu proprio* on the restoration of church music, 22 November 1903, article 13.

3. “U.S. Parishes Today,” the first report of the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, *Origins* 14 (27 December 1984): 461.

4. Mark Searle, past-president of the North American Academy of Liturgy, is cited by Linda Clark of Boston University School of Theology in report 1 of her *Music in Churches Project* (27 June 1990), p. 1.

5. “Report on Parish Liturgical Celebrations,” Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, *Origins* 15 (31 October 1985): 340.

6. “Who Participates in Local Communities?” Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, *Origins* 15 (13 June 1985): 51.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Miriam Therese Winter, *Why Sing? Toward a Theology of Catholic Church Music* (Washington, D.C., 1984), pp. 240–41.

10. Rory Cooney, “American Liturgical Music: Toward a Manifesto,” *Modern Liturgy* 17 (October 1990): 23.

11. “U.S. Parishes Today,” Notre Dame Study (1984), p. 465.

12. Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1986), pp. 1–2.

13. Andrew Greeley, *God in Popular Culture* (Chicago, 1988), p. 9.

14. Ibid., p. 17.

15. Published by the Ministry of Culture, Managua, Nicaragua.

16. A partial list of the many whose music does more than entertain and may be potentially sacred because of its meaning and message would include the following performers and composers: Peter, Paul, and Mary; Joan Baez; Bob Dylan; Pete Seeger; Paul Simon; Harry Chapin; John Denver; Bruce Springsteen; John Cougar Mellencamp; U2; Tracy Chapman; Rosa Marta Zárata Macias; Mercedes Sosa; Sylvio Rodriguez; Pablo Milanés; Sara González; Victor Jarra; Sweet Honey in the Rock; Joan Armatrading; Aretha Franklin; Richie Havens; Ladysmith Black Mambazo; Holly Near; Pat Benatar; Cris Williamson; Meg Christian.

17. Cf. British rock star Bob Geldof’s Band Aid and his consciousness-raising Christmas carol (1984); USA for Africa and “We Are the World,” written by Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson and recorded by a cast of superstars (1985); fund-raising concerts such

as Live Aid, Farm Aid, Amnesty International's "Conspiracy of Hope" (1986); Human Rights Now! (1988).

18. From "Freedom Is Coming: Songs of Protest and Praise from South Africa," traditional songs collected and edited by Anders Nyberg (Uppsala, 1984; distributed in the United States by Walton Music Corporation).

19. "Leadership Viewed From the Vantage Point of American Culture," *Origins* 20 (13 September 1990): p. 223.

20. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, 1985), p. 19.

21. Ellen Koskoff, ed., *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York, 1987), p. 15.

22. Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (Urbana, 1983), pp. 334-35.

23. Carol Robertson, "Power and Gender in the Musical Experiences of Women," in Ellen Koskoff, ed., *Women and Music* (New York, 1987), p. 241.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

25. *Ibid.*