

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York

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Sing to the Lord a New Song!

About 35 years ago, when I was in Montreal, I started a Youth Mass which quickly was attended by over 400 people with its own 30-member choir. That was the time when folksy songs were being introduced in the mass and Kumbyah, my Lord became the Catholic national anthem. My advisor was Yvon Gadbout who had the unique distinction of playing in a night club during the week and the church organ in our parish on weekends. He was an exceptional organist and even won a national competition of church organists. Our youth choir performed, I thought, good music. One day, however, the lead guitarist chimed, "Father, don't think that you will keep young people in the Church with these gimmicks." I was surprised by that young man's remark, but I learned my lesson.

In the past decades, many tricks have been used to keep the fold inside the Church and entice other sheep to enter the corral. Some of the worst liturgical abuses have taken place in the name of appealing to the youth and in the "spirit of Va-tican II". Liturgists and youth ministers embarked in all kinds of experiments, pitting innovation against tradition. Young peo-ple, it was thought, were uninspired by solemnity and preferred laxity, pop music, casual celebrant demeanor, liturgical dances and puppets.

These casual folksy masses became the pattern of other parish celebrations. The church organ fell silent, Gregorian chant faded away, adults began to shy away from their parish choir as the youth were entertained for a while by garage bands and budding pop stars. Little by little, the youth also began to leave the Church. In a few years, we passed from the "Sung Mass" to "songs during mass". Not only the type of music was incompatible with the true spirit of the Mass, but utterly contrary to it. And people, young and old, felt it and left the church.

A couple of years ago, world famous composer Ennio Morricone had this to say about modern church music:

"A few days ago, I went to Santa Maria degli Angeli in Rome, a church designed by Michelangelo. Some young people were livening up the Mass, playing the guitar and singing rather well but their songs were pretty hopeless. It was incredible, as though we had returned to the times before the Council of Trent when people used to put the words of hymns to popular tunes, and put rude and unpleasant words to hymnal music. It seems we've gone back to this stage, and nothing is being done to improve the situation. With Vatican II, the Catholic Church abolished Gregorian chants, which was of an extraor-dinary historical value in musical terms. I can't understand why, and it anguishes and irritates me. I can understand why Mass is said in various languages, but I will never understand the abolition of Latin hymns and Gregorian music."

"He who sings prays twice." (St. Augustine).

Actually, the great doctor of the Church said: "He who sings well prays twice."

The good old music

"Toward the end of the 18th century, religious music was in a state of confusion. Those parts of it which were intended as accompaniments to the liturgy were utterly deplorable: Gregorian chant had reached its nadir; churches re-echoed the strains of hunting songs, sarraban-des, minuets, and rigadoons... To what extent was the music really of the Church, or even truly Christian? A few of its composers - Bee-thoven, Liszt, Berlioz, and Gounod - were be-lievers, but even the most sincere among them fell victims to the confusion we saw establi-shed during the 18th century between sacred and profane music; bringing into church the-mes more suited to the stage or to the concert hall... There was much music in church, but the music of the Church was in full decline."

(Church historian Daniel-Rops, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, 1965)