

## The Liturgical and Musical Heritage and The Constitution

### *[Play Bethena]*

Scott Joplin's work is part of the musical heritage of the State of Missouri. He was best known for ragtime hits like "The Maple Leaf Rag" and "The Entertainer." But he wanted to be known as a serious composer. He composed two operas, though only one survives. He published "Bethena" in 1905 when in his late 30s, struggling to pay his bills and grieving over Freddie, his second wife, who died ten weeks after the wedding. "Bethena" was probably an attempt to show that there was more to Scott Joplin than ragtime. It's a sophisticated composition that holds itself together while modulating through five different keys. In it Joplin paid tribute to the waltz, part of Europe's musical heritage, while balancing it with syncopation, the African American's musical heritage. No one knows who Bethena was, or whose photograph adorned the original cover of the sheet music. Joplin dedicated the work to Mr. & Mrs. Dan E. Davenport of St. Louis, and that's about all we know about them. Still, even though the people associated with the composition and the circumstances surrounding its creation have faded from memory, the art remains. As a musician from Missouri, I feel responsible for keeping the art alive.

There's a lot we don't know about the origins of the musical and liturgical heritage of the Catholic Church. We don't know who first wrote the earliest examples, when or why, but somehow the art remains. We have some responsibility for keeping it all alive.

*Sacrosanctum concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, refers to the treasures of the Church eight different times. Once the word "treasures" means art. Once it means the Liturgy of the Hours. Twice it means the bible. And four times it means music. In this talk, I'll show you those citations from the Constitution, so that you can see what the Council thought are the Church's liturgical treasures. Then I'll add one more treasure that the Constitution did not so explicitly mention. I'll share what may be a prejudice on the part of the Constitution. I'll evaluate where we are in preserving those treasures. And I'll conclude with a reflection on one individual whose life may serve as a guide for us to follow.

First of all, let's look at the quotations from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Near the end, it speaks of representational art (123). [I'll be coming back to this quote.]

The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her very own; she has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in the course of the centuries, she has brought into being a treasury of art which must be very carefully preserved. The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns the sacred buildings and holy rites with due reverence and honor; thereby it is enabled to contribute its own voice

to that wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith sung by great men [and women] in times gone by.

We have Christian art dating back to the earliest centuries after Christ. We can still see images from early tombs and churches. We have poetry from that era as well. We know its words and rhythms. But we don't have any music. Nobody has any music. There was no way to write it down or record it. We have no clear understanding of what the first Christian music sounded like, any more than we can know the sound of John Chrysostom's melodious voice. Consequently, the treasury of representational art is characterized by its vastness, antiquity and diversity. This historical evidence prompts a liberal view of the kind of art we use in the liturgy. All that the Constitution asks is that art adorn the buildings and rites with reverence and honor. It's an amazingly broad criterion. As long as new art and architecture accomplishes that, it may take its place in the Church's treasure today.

Another treasure is what came to be known as the Liturgy of the Hours. The Constitution says (90):

In revising the Roman office, its ancient and venerable treasures are to be so adapted that all those to whom they are handed on may more extensively and easily draw profit from them.

Lots of changes were happening to the Liturgy of the Hours right after the Council. In the past, clergy most commonly prayed it each day all in one sitting; now all Christians are encouraged to join in this prayer, and to do so at the appropriate times of the day. In the past, clergy prayed all 150 psalms every week; after the council they took a more leisurely pace, spreading the psalms over four weeks. The revised liturgical calendar affected the arrangement of the seasons, and a broader range of readings accompanied the appearance of new saints' days. The intercessions that conclude morning and evening prayer were a post-Vatican II innovation. So, much changed with the Liturgy of the Hours. Still, its ancient hymns, antiphons, orations and structural elements - what you might call its venerable treasures - were to be adapted - not simply preserved - so that they would fit new circumstances and pieties.

Certainly the greatest treasure of the Church is sacred scripture. The Constitution imagined a wider usage of scripture throughout the liturgy. Regarding the mass, for example (51),

The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years.

You will recognize from this advice the great contribution of the post-Vatican II Lectionary for Mass. Prior to the Council people rarely heard an Old Testament reading. The Liturgy of the Word (or the Mass of the Catechumens, as it had been called), featured two readings - an Epistle and a Gospel, both from the New Testament. The pre-Vatican II lectionary contained 1% of the Old Testament and 17% of the New. The post-Vatican II lectionary has 14% of the Old Testament

and 71% of the New. Fourteen percent may not seem like much of the Old Testament, but it is 14 times what we used to hear. Besides, there are 45 books in the Old Testament compared with 27 in the New. One Old Testament book, Psalms, is perhaps the single most frequently quoted book in the Catholic liturgy.

The revision of biblical readings also affected the Liturgy of the Hours (92a):

Readings from sacred scripture shall be arranged so that the riches of God's word may be easily accessible in more abundant measure.

The word “riches” in this paragraph is the same Latin word translated as “treasure”, “treasures” or “treasury” in the other passages I’m citing from the Constitution. The Latin word in question is one you probably know: *thesaurus*. We use it for a handbook or an electronic tool that locates synonyms and antonyms from the treasury of the English language. In case you’re wondering why I’m not focusing specifically on the word “heritage”, which NPM gave me in the title for this talk on *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the reason is simple. The word “heritage” doesn’t appear anywhere in the entire Constitution, which would have made this talk exceptionally brief. Nonetheless, by “treasure” the Constitution is referring to our heritage. When it came to the bible, the goal of sharing its riches was implemented vigorously and has been received warmly by Catholics ever since the Council.

The liturgy Constitution’s other references to the Church’s treasures all refer to music. One of these pertains specifically to the Liturgy of the Hours (93):

To whatever extent may seem desirable, the hymns are to be restored to their original form, and whatever smacks of mythology or ill accords with Christian piety is to be removed or changed. Also, as occasion may arise, let other selections from the treasury of hymns be incorporated.

As you can see, the Constitution is ambivalent about those hymns, and the results are plain to see in the English translation of the Liturgy of the Hours. Many of the original Latin hymns were preserved after the council; many others in the volumes were newly composed in Latin. For example, the pre-Vatican II hymn for vespers on the feast of Mary Magdalene included this verse, translated into English by Edward Caswall: “Her precious ointment forth she brings, / Upon those sacred Feet to pour; / She washes them with burning tears; / And with her hair she wipes them o’er.” This preserved the unsteady tradition that the Magdalene was also the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet in Luke 7:37-38. It’s the kind of thing the Constitution probably thought “smacks of mythology.” The entire hymn was replaced after the Council with a new composition.

However, in general, the vernacular languages opted for the permission in the last sentence of this paragraph, and turned to a wide variety of hymns with which people were familiar, thus reaching into a different part of the Church’s treasury. Some have criticized that decision because many of the hymns that were popular forty years ago are not much known today. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has committed to a partial redo of the Liturgy of

the Hours. Work is underway. Most likely we are going to see the once popular hymns replaced with a translation of the Latin hymns, which can be sung to familiar melodies, and which would immediately put into repertoire a body of music both ancient and new.

In a special chapter on sacred music, the Constitution reserved high praise for this corner of our heritage (112):

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.

Just as the words of the liturgy are sacred, so is the music that adorns them. This paragraph is surely speaking primarily about the sung parts of the so-called Ordinary and Propers of the mass, such as the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria*, the *Sanctus*, and the *Agnus Dei*; as well as the entrance and communion chants for each mass provided by the missal - even though these may be replaced by other hymns, a permission broadly put into practice. Nonetheless, because the words of the liturgy are integral to it, the music for these words becomes integral as well.

That is why the Constitution has strong words for composers of new music (121):

Composers, filled with the Christian spirit, should feel that their vocation is to cultivate sacred music and increase its store of treasures.

The Constitution thus opened the door to new compositions and invited composers to contribute to a heritage that future generations would prize. To do this, they should be “filled with the Christian spirit.” This expression identifies the specific muse upon which our composers call: a spirit that flourishes within the Christian faith. They compose out of their own faith, and in keeping with the traditions they have received. The same Constitution that values the heritage of the past hoped that the musical treasury would expand in the future.

Of course, not everything is supposed to be new. We are to preserve the good things of the past (114):

The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted, especially in cathedral churches; but bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that, whenever the sacred action is to be celebrated with song, the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs, as laid down in Art. 28 and 30.

Think about our treasure of music. Some of the earliest written music in all of world history is Gregorian chant. Great composers of the Renaissance wrote motets for choir. Polyphony contributed to the beauty of sacred services. Organ solos - some based on Gregorian chant, others free compositions - mark the history of that instrument and the development of the liturgy. And although we Catholics cannot claim Johann Sebastian Bach as our own, you wouldn't know it

from the way we let his music influence so much of our own. Well, everyone lets his music influence their own. Even people who don't believe in God believe in Bach. If Thomas Aquinas had been born a few centuries later, we'd have six proofs for the existence of God.

Today's composers are experimenting with a variety of styles. We've had uncommon success singing an easy-listening folk style of antiphonal liturgical music ever since the 1960s, but some composers are challenging us with the harmonies and rhythms of our day. We have yet to catch up liturgically where both folk and classical music have advanced through the twentieth century. But when there is so much liturgical music being written - and the number of compositions is staggering - it takes time to sort through them to find not just what is best, but what is pointing the way to the future. Our Church can probably learn a lot from secular studies in this regard - the ethnology of folk music as well as the advances in classical music. It used to be that sacred music was on the cutting edge of music history. It isn't that way right now. We are behind. Perhaps after the upheaval of the liturgical musical scene following the Second Vatican Council, we have settled into any musical style that just feels comfortable.

So, to sum up what the Constitution says about the liturgical and musical treasures in our heritage, they need to be preserved, adapted, and built up for the future.

Here's one part of our heritage that the Constitution overlooked: euchology, or the body of prayers in the Roman Rite. Maybe the framers of the Constitution just didn't see it coming, but when the revisers went about changing the pre-Vatican II Missal into the post-Vatican II Missal, they reached very deeply into the Church's history. The Order of Mass itself gathers nuggets from every age: The Lord's Prayer comes from the first century New Testament. The preface dialogue was in place by the third or fourth century. Many of the collects come from the fifth to the seventh centuries. The private prayers of the priest date to the ninth. The eleventh century gave us many of our incensation practices. Candles appeared on the altar in the twelfth century. The prayer for the washing of the hands came in the thirteenth. The sign of the cross at the start of the mass can first be found in the fourteenth. The prayers "Blessed be God forever" were added in the twentieth century. And the name of St. Joseph was added to three eucharistic prayers in the twenty-first century.

Of pertinent interest is not just the centuries in which things were added to the mass, but the sources of our prayers. Take Eucharistic Prayer II, for example. It's everybody's favorite Eucharistic Prayer. Because it's the shortest Eucharistic Prayer. It's based on one from a third- to fourth-century church order called the *Apostolic Tradition*. It was added to the Roman Rite by a unanimous vote of the committee responsible for the post-Vatican II Order of Mass. But it needed some fixing. The original opening seemed to imply that Jesus became the Son of God after he was born. There was no Sanctus. The epiclesis (the prayer for the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ) came after the institution narrative, not before as we hear it today. There were no intercessions for the pope, the bishop, the living or the dead.

So, the post-Vatican II group gave this prayer a facelift. Once they put the *Sanctus* in, and once they moved the epiclesis to its position before the institution narrative, they needed a bridge between these two parts, and they had to compose the specific kind of epiclesis they wanted. So they came up with two images, both pertaining to water, and coming from two very different sources. One was from a Mozarabic prayer and the other from the Gothic Missal. The Mozarabic Rite is a small western Catholic Rite centered in Toledo, Spain, with an important body of prayers that developed separate from the Roman tradition. But we share communion privileges with this Rite, so here and in other places in the missal, the post-Vatican II group dipped into the Mozarabic tradition for an image. The one they brought into Eucharistic Prayer II was one that did not appear in the *Apostolic Tradition*. It called God the “fount of all holiness.”

In the Gothic Missal they found another image they thought would help illustrate what an epiclesis does. It calls the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts to instill them with new life, even to make them beautiful. The word “dewfall”, which has not been a popular choice for translating the Latin word that’s in there, has at least this merit: It represents a word found in the Gothic Missal, a seventh-century Gallican book, another non-Roman source, to grasp another gem from the vast treasure of the Church’s heritage. These are but two examples. Other prayers you hear each Sunday come from the vast store of the Church’s many branches and generations. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy did not explicitly name this euchology of the Church among our treasures, but the prayers we hear and say at every mass have been handed down to us as preciously as any other work of art or liturgical song.

The absence of any reference to the treasury of our prayer tradition is a melancholy omission. It would have been interesting to know if the Council fathers intended us merely to receive that tradition, or to develop it as well. Immediately after the Council, new prayers were written for the missal - most notably Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV. But did the Council fathers have any thoughts for what comes next? They placed their trust in artists and composers of music to expand the tradition in their respective fields, but they said nothing about continuing the composition of new prayers. Some were added after the missal first came out; for example, the Order of Christian Funerals received a number of rather beautiful prayers in English that have no equivalent in Latin. They were composed in English for English speakers. At the time it made sense - surely our own generation has the ability and spirituality to compose prayers that fit our style and needs. But the translation rules do not permit that now. Today, conferences of bishops are not to add their own prayers to the Roman Rite. Imagine if *Sacrosanctum Concilium* had said about the prayers of the Church what it said about the art of the Church. It would have sounded something like this:

The Church has not adopted any particular style of art *prayer* as her very own; she has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites. Thus, in the course of the centuries, she has brought into being a



treasury of art *prayer* which must be very carefully preserved. The art *prayer* of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns *equips* the sacred buildings *ministers* and holy rites with due reverence and honor; thereby it is enabled to contribute its own voice to that wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith sung by great men [and women] in times gone by.

However, on that point, the Constitution was silent. Furthermore, there may be a prejudice on the part of the Constitution with regard to the treasury of music - perhaps more so than the treasury of art. The musical heritage of the Church is unabashedly Euro-centric. By the time the faith spread through missionaries into Latin America and Africa, the music of Europe had taken firm hold of the tradition. The architecture did too. Tour around Latin America today, and you'll find many beautiful homes inspired by local architectural styles, but most of the Catholic Churches look like a large crane lifted them from someplace in Europe and deposited them on site. This is the way history and geography combined with evangelization. But if you are looking for the musical heritage of the Church prior to the twentieth century, you are probably looking at its European heritage. It's rich. It's deep. It's part of the patrimony of humanity. It needs to be preserved. But it will not completely express the yearnings of the human spirit in every land today.

Twentieth-first century indigenous music is still under development. In my parish the Spanish-language masses are full of music, color and life. The music is a robust charismatic style of song that energizes us all. It works, but it isn't clear if this is the new treasury. Will people still be singing *A Quién iremos?* fifty years from now? One hundred or two hundred years from now? Or is the real treasure of a hymn the way it captures the spirit and faith of a people? Is that the dynamically equivalent treasury that must be preserved? To some in the new world, the European treasury signals a rejection of local gifts. If the music in ethnic populations today needs depth and diversity, this is a process that will long be measured, sifted and purified. At its best, it will always capture the heart of a people and guide it towards God in prayer.

It is hard for anyone in the Roman Rite to be completely free of its heritage, any more than you can shirk your ethnicity or nationality. Whether you adapt or inculturate the Roman Rite, you're still dealing with a source that is Roman. Catholics find this appealing because we take great pride in being unified with other Catholics around the world today, and with Catholics of every former generation. We share the same biblical roots, the same way of thinking about Jesus and his teaching. We share a style of prayer that includes sacrifice and communion. We lace our prayers with biblical allusions. We use vestments from a former era, vessels and cloths that are time-honored. Today many of these show the influence of a variety of cultures and climes, yet they are still founded upon a common heritage of the faith that provides a source of unity for our diversity.

Look at how Scott Joplin handled a waltz. He took the European style, he rigorously applied principles of good composition, but he flavored it with just

enough syncopation to make it his. At every mass we take our heritage and make it ours. People don't realize when they come to church on the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time that the collect was probably written to ward off the effects of a plague in sixth-century Rome, or that the misspelling of one Latin word in the same prayer was corrected in the year 2002. They may not know that the organist chose an opening hymn based on a text from Syria in the fifth century, or that the cantor is singing a 1985 communion song written in Ohio. The treasury is all around us. A lot of times we don't even know that it's there. Our brains cannot process all the experiences they have. The overall effect is that something ancient and new is happening, something Roman yet close to home, and this may be enough.

I'd like to propose one figure who may serve as a patron saint for the liturgical and musical heritage of the church: John the Baptist. After all, his feast played a pivotal role in the history of music. A special hymn to John was composed in the 8th century. Very few people hear this hymn any more, so I will sing the first verse for you. *Ut queant laxis resonare fibris Mira gestorum famuli tuorum, Solve polluti labii reatum, Sancte Iohannes*. OK, all together now! I realize it's not a catchy tune. This verse asks Saint John the Baptist to loosen our voices to praise God, just as the voice of his father Zechariah was loosened; Zechariah was mute throughout Elizabeth's pregnancy, and got his voice back after John was born.

Anyway, in the 11th century a musician named Guido of Arezzo noticed that the first note of each phrase of this hymn made a scale. (*Ut queant laxis resonare fibris Mira gestorum famuli tuorum, Solve polluti labii reatum, Sancte Iohannes*.) So he took the 6 syllables that began the 6 phrases of this hymn, and gave their names to those 6 notes of the scale: ut, re, mi, fa, so, la. Later someone changed ut to do and added ti to round out the scale. Julie Andrews could never have sung "Do a deer, a female deer" if it hadn't been for the birth of John the Baptist.

So John is already a kind of patron for musicians, but the reason I think he makes a good patron for our heritage is because of something Jesus said about him when John was in prison. Matthew 11:13: "All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John." John is the figure who straddles the two Testaments. St. Augustine makes this point in one of his sermons: "John, it seems, has been inserted as a kind of boundary between the two Testaments, the Old and the New. That he is somehow or other a boundary is something that the Lord himself indicates when he says, *The Law and the prophets were until John*. So he represents the old and heralds the new. Because he represents the old, he is born of an elderly couple; because he represents the new, he is revealed as a prophet in his mother's womb." He prophesies there, in Elizabeth's womb, when he jumps for joy at the nearness of Jesus in Mary's womb at the visitation. John honors the traditions of the past, and he points the way to the future.

To me, this is our mission as musicians. The history of liturgical music is the history of great music. We should know it, learn it, and sing it. The future of liturgical music depends on us knowing what great music is. Composers, filled with the Christian spirit, need to write it, and musicians, discerning carefully what



**is great and what is not, need to sing it. The great liturgical music of the past blended the finest principles of composition with the real needs of people and a genuine faith in God. That is how we can preserve our heritage and sing our way along the road into the future Church.**

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