

Notes about Sacred Music from the CDW Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in Rome.

Taken from the book, *Musica Sacra*.

Sacred music should help to promote more active and intense participation in the liturgical celebration; it must be in keeping with the greatness of the liturgical act, which celebrates the mysteries of Christ; it must be characterized by a sense of prayer, beauty and dignity. In no way should it give way to frivolity, superficiality or theatricality.

From *Trae le Sollecitudini* by Pope St. Pius X. "When true art is placed at the service of worship and dedicates to God that which is most excellent and worthy of Him, sacred art is born. In this sense it --- unlike profane art --- enjoys a ministerial status, because it is not merely *ars gratia artis* [art for art's sake] but rather art that is shaped and enlivened by its character as an oblation and by its liturgical purpose."

To the pope's way of thinking, singing and sacred music were the paradigm for all the arts: not only were they at the service of the liturgy, but they constituted an integral [Latin: *necessaria*] part of it; that is, they were ontologically connected with it. Therefore, they shared its end ---and its *bonae* or characteristics: holiness and goodness of its forms [i.e., the congruence between those ends and its expressive qualities and modalities] and universality [i.e., legitimate diversity must be rooted within a *koine*, or common standard language].

The Chirograph penned by Pope John Paul II, of happy memory, on the occasion of the centenary of the *Motu Proprio* of Pius X; it is an authoritative summary and an updating both of the documents mentioned thus far and also of his own vast personal magisterial teaching on the subject of sacred music. The most characteristic note struck by the document seems to be its assurance of the ability of music to echo the word of God and the voice of the Church that celebrates---"to express adequately the mystery grasped in the fullness of the Church's faith" [no. 4; cf. also no. 7], to interpret the nature and contents of the liturgical rites [no. 5] and together to be "a bond of unity and a joyful expression of the community at prayer" [no. 11] and of its faith.