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The Pope receives the participants in the International Congress on Sacred Music

“Music and Church: Cult and Culture 50 years after *Musican sacram*”, is the theme of the International Congress on Sacred Music, organised by the Pontifical Council for Culture, and whose participants were received in audience by the Pope this morning in the Clementine Hall.

The organisers of the event, which took place in Rome from 2 to 4 March, also include the Congregation for Catholic Education, in collaboration with the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music and the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of the St. Anselm University. The Pope thanked all those present, along with Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and expressed his hope that “the experience of encounter and dialogue during these days, in joint reflection on sacred music and particularly on its cultural and artistic aspects, be fruitful for ecclesial communities”.

Half a century after the Instruction *Musicae sacrae*, the convention sought to explore, from an interdisciplinary and ecumenical perspective, the current relationship between sacred music and contemporary culture, between the musical repertoire adopted and used by the Christian community and prevailing musical tendencies. Of great significance, too, was the reflection on the aesthetic and musical formation of both clergy and religious, and laypeople involved in pastoral life, and more directly in the *scholae cantorum*.

In his address, Francis mentioned that the first document to emerge from Vatican Council II was indeed the Constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. “The Council Fathers were well aware of the difficulty of the faithful in participating in a liturgy whose language, words and signs they did not fully understand”, he remarked. “To implement the fundamental guidelines of the Constitution, the Instructions were issued, including that on sacred music. Since then, although new documents of the Magisterium have been produced on the issue, there have been various and significant pontifical interventions that have guided reflection and pastoral engagement”.

The Pope emphasised the contemporary relevance of the Instruction, which states that “Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, with the ministers of each degree fulfilling their ministry and the people participating in it. Indeed, through this form, prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, [and] the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices”.

Several times the document, following Council indications, highlights the importance of participation of all the assembly of the faithful, defined as “full, conscious and active”, and clearly underlines that “the true solemnity of liturgical worship depends less on a more ornate form of singing and a more magnificent ceremonial than on its worthy and religious celebration”. “This means first and foremost, therefore, participating intensely in the Mystery of God, in the ‘theophany’ that is achieved in every Eucharistic celebration, in which the Lord makes Himself present in the midst of His people, called to participate truly in the salvation put into effect by Christ, Who died and rose again. Active and conscious participation consists, then, in knowing how to enter deeply into this mystery, in knowing how to contemplate, adore and welcome, in perceiving the meaning, thanks in particular to religious silence and the musicality of the language with which the Lord speaks to us”.

The Church is therefore called to pursue a dual mission in this field. “On the one hand”, explained the Pope, “to safeguard and promote the rich and variegated patrimony inherited from the past, using it in equilibrium with the present and avoiding the risk of a nostalgic or ‘archaeological’ vision. On the other hand, it is necessary to do so in such a way that sacred music and liturgical song are fully inculturated in current artistic and musical languages; that they are able, that is, to incarnate and translate the Word of God into song, sound and harmonies that resound in the heart of our peers, also creating an emotional climate conducive to faith and which inspires acceptance of and full participation in the mystery that is being celebrated”.

“Certainly, the encounter with modernity and the introduction of spoken languages in the liturgy gave rise to many problems: of musical language, form and genre. At times a certain mediocrity has prevailed, superficial and banal, at the expense of the beauty and intensity of liturgical celebrations. Therefore the various protagonists in this field – musicians and composers, directors and choristers of *scholae cantorum*, animators of the liturgy – can offer a valuable contribution to the renewal, especially in a qualitative sense, of sacred music and liturgical song. To favour this approach, it is necessary to promote adequate musical formation, also in those preparing to become priests, in dialogue with the musical currents of our time, with the demands of different cultural areas, and with an ecumenical attitude”.

Francis concluded by commending the participants in the Congress to the Virgin Mary who “in the Magnificat sang the mysterious holiness of God”. “I urge you not to lose sight of this important objective: helping the liturgical assembly and the people of God to perceive and to participate, with all their senses, physical and spiritual, in the mystery of God. Sacred music and liturgical song have the task of giving us a sense of God’s glory, of His beauty, of His holiness that envelops us like a ‘luminous cloud’”.
