The Animator

BY JOSEPH GELINEAU

... no business attracting attention to myself; my job is to turn the people toward their God, whom they are celebrating, and whose praises they are singing.

Ever since the time of the earliest Christian communities, their gatherings have been essential. It is on these occasions that Christians have always shared the Word of God, their goods, and the eucharistic bread. Like the Servant they celebrate, the Christ and Lord living in them through the Holy Spirit, Christians are all in service to one another. In order to maintain and perpetuate this mutual service, certain members of the community are invested with a ministry or spontaneously fill certain functions, such as the service of the Word, service to the poor, or the service of the table. These are not mere social duties that call for ordinary competence and dedication; they are ministries, or "charisms"—gifts of the Spirit for the building of the Church (I Cor. 14:26).

Church ministries have become both diverse and interdependent, as St. Paul envisioned them. Their makeup has evolved quite a bit over the course of history. Even if the organized, hierarchical triple ministry of the second century (episcopacy, presbytery, diaconate) had crystallized, the functions of these different orders would still have changed considerably by now. In any case, they are defined much less by the actual tasks involved as by their significance. In actuality, ministries develop and fade away, change, or reappear according to the needs of the people.

In the New Testament, ministries of the Word are predominant (e.g., the work of the Apostles and itinerant evangelists, prophets and local preachers). Service ministries are also well represented. However, there is scarcely any reference to liturgical ministries. The present-day art of presiding over a celebration can hardly be linked to the gift of leadership that is mentioned in one of the many lists of charisms in I Corinthians! Indeed, it was not until the organization of congregations in the fourth century that liturgical ministries took on importance and definition. During the Middle Ages, liturgical functions were performed primarily by members of the clergy. Little by little, in the West at least, the priest assumed practically all of these roles. Only since Vatican II has a new division of responsibilities been emerging, with new or renewed ministries appearing in liturgy.

From commentator to animator. The role that we call animateur arose from a need to help the faithful participate in the liturgy. In the 20 years before the Second Vatican Council, when the liturgy was still entirely in Latin and controlled to the most minute detail, the push for "pastoral" renewal in the liturgy sought ways to enable the people to understand and participate. This was the origin, in many countries, of the commentator. His role consisted of finding certain "holes" in the liturgy that were left open by the rubricists so that the words of a prayer, a song, or a rite could be inserted in the native language of the faithful. The commentator did the introductions, the invitations, and the admonitions, and made commentaries and paraphrases for the weekly celebration. Most commonly, this pastor/liturgist—almost always a priest—was also the one who encouraged the congregation to participate in the singing. Nevertheless, the commentator and his duties were by no means considered "liturgical"; he was seen as a kind of parasite who was only tolerated because of his apparent usefulness.

The reform of Vatican II, with the attendant use of living languages, opened the way for a redivision of roles in the celebration according to the real needs of the people and their various abilities. This allowed for the appearance—or reappearance—of the reader, the psalmist, the cantor; and eventually, the welcome service, the collect, the intentions of common prayer, and so forth. The role of the commentator dissolved. It was superfluous to make "explanations" and "commentaries" during the celebration now that the words and signs had regained their direct meaning to the people. Any sort of dubbing, glossing, or reporting became irritating. Poetry, music, symbols—these things are not to be explained; they are to be experienced. And if introductions to the day's liturgy, or to a reading, or to an unfamiliar rite would still be useful, then it was up to the one presiding to make them, not an additional minister.

Still, at least in some parishes, it seems that the disappearance of the erstwhile commentator left a gaping hole.

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This article was translated from the French by Gina Doggett
of the office. We still maintain proper antiphons with their psalms (cf. Graduale Romanum, Graduale simplex), and the chanting of these antiphons and psalms in English provides a textually pointed alternative during the entrance, offertory, and communion processions. Simple settings of these antiphons are within the capability of the assembly, assisted by the choir.

In the introductory rite, Kyrie and Gloria may be sung by the choir alone, and on days of greatest solemnity in which the assembly is already singing both more, and more familiar, musical materials, festival choral settings of the ordinary can enhance the solemnity far more than can a simpler setting for unison congregation or cantor-choir congregation. Bear in mind the study’s observation of the people's fatigue when most every musical option was in the domain of the congregation. In the Easter season, the Sundays following the great feast might be accompanied by settings that include both congregation and chorus.

Music during the beginning of the liturgy of the eucharist has long posed a problem for musicians. Is this a liturgical no-person’s land? Hardly, we think. The order of events can include (1) preparation of the table, (2) procession with the gifts, (3) priest’s offering of gifts and private prayers, (4) incensation of the gifts, table, ministers, and assembly, and (5) the washing of hands. The solemnity of the day and the time and ceremonial involved in these actions are the first indicators for the kind and length of musicmaking. It is proper for the choir to sing alone at this point; proper antiphons for this time exist in plainsong and in countless choral settings.

It is appropriate for the choir alone to sing the texts accompanying the rite of fraction and, finally, the communion music, but not the optional song of praise. In this context, we are reminded that the vogue for “meditation music” or “song of thanksgiving” is without liturgical documentation.

**The seed is the word of God.**

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In the usage of these elements that may be exclusively choral, sound judgment and the planning that accompanies every good liturgical celebration must be the guides. Variety that responds to seasons and feasts prevents reliance on formulas.

Appropriateness of choral repertoire is directly proportional to the size of the repertoire, and thus to the knowledge of the musician. Size of repertoire need not be restricted by equating enormity with complexity. Knowledge is key.

Is this great treasury of the choral repertoire employed in the American church? If so, where?

Does the cathedral church accept its responsibility to be a model and mother to the local church? Without embarrassing those who are models by calling attention to their gift, or summoning to task those who do not exercise gentle leadership, I believe the answer is a general and optimistic yes. Acquaintance with music personnel and knowledge of the repertory in the programs of a significant number of American cathedrals have given me a renewed confidence in the musical health of choirs in 1986 America.

But for each cathedral there exist hundreds of parishes, and it is therein that much of the best musicmaking occurs. Few parishes can claim an unbroken tradition of choral excellence, but some do. Others cite the development of choir programs as a source of liturgical growth and parish pride. The archdiocesan choral festival has returned with a new vigor, whose purpose is most frequently
the enrichment of the parish, not merely the performance of larger works inaccessible to smaller choirs.

Organizations such as AGO, NPM, and university announcements of positions have facilitated many marriages between parish and musician. Colleges and universities offering curricula and degree programs in liturgical music have provided a new kind of musician for the church. Although a critical appreciation and evaluation of these places of study would be appropriate at this time, it appears that, in general, better prepared musicians are now available.

The person who makes choral music must have a well-rounded musical education, fortified by several specialized skills: a working knowledge of the human voice, its development, its use in ensemble, techniques for ensemble unification and a thorough knowledge of the choral repertoire. The interpersonal skills required for both conducting and ministry lie beyond the parameters of this small appreciation, but *Verbum sapientis sat* we are wise to approach both conducting and ministry with respect and humility. Fortunately for us all, we live in a time in which opportunities for continuing education in our art and ministry are plentiful; I refer not to how-to manuals, but to study, *studium* in its first sense: zeal. We can learn from great teachers, from the best and from the worst in our respective fields. Openness to growth is fundamental to our art and faith. We are called to the constant pursuit of individual excellence.

Progressing in our observation of the chorus functions at eucharist, we see that the chorus is not limited in its use to those elements that belong exclusively to it. The chorus joins the assembly in its hymnody and may strengthen it, embellish it with descants, alternate harmonizations, even entire verses in free-composed and concerted settings. It may support the cantor and congregation in psalmody and acclamation.

It is particularly in the form of acclamation that organ, chorus, and instruments may amplify the voice of the people. I have long wondered if the bulk of our post-Vatican II acclamations are even remotely related to the *clamor* from which they take their name. Is it not much more convincing to accept these words and phrases *Amen, Alleluia, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again, Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory* as "shouts" from a textual rather than from a musical viewpoint? Although the question is posed more from a compositional than performance perspective, the further development of the form cannot but serve sacred liturgy, which should itself be served by this spectrum of forms available to the contemporary composer.

A worshiper should intuitively react to and differentiate among hymn, psalm, antiphon, song/lauda, acclamation/clamor, litanic, and mantric forms at liturgy. A different kind of participation flows from the hearing of choral mass movements, motet and anthem. These are the riches that time and the creative spirit have given to the church. In order to further develop existing forms, might not the difficulty faced in dealing with music to accompany the procession to receive holy eucharist be alleviated by congregation-cantor-choir interaction in worthy texts employing these litanic and mantric forms?

From the knowledge and appreciation of the existing choral repertoire, it is logical to speak for the continuation and development of both that body and its forms. I noted in a previous article ("Choral Music in the American Roman Catholic Church." *The Hymn*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January, 1986) the absence of pivotal (read major) composers in music for the church: we know of Stravinski, Durufle, Poulenc, Persichetti, but where is the sacred output of Samuel Barber, of Elliott Carter? (Musicians everywhere would like to wrestle with that!) Would not the music of Glass, Smith, and cohorts make a handsome whirring presence in worship? We are anxious to augment the treasury, to realize in sound the thoughts of today's composer, works defined not necessarily by their complexity or difficulty, but by their ability to endure as testaments to faith graced by art.

A concluding comment relates to the materials employed in worship. The range of worship aids was classified by the Notre Dame study into four categories: hymn books, missalettes, song books, and parish collections. In addition to any of these, perhaps in conjunction with several, many parishes are printing a weekly worship leaflet. Such a companion can open doors in the communication of thematic elements: it can specify the connection between organ literature and the day; it clarifies already well-declamed choral and cantorial texts. When the leaflet contains the entire order of worship, it facilitates the flow of elements. In those steadily increasing places "where the church's ideal of a sung liturgy with full and active ... participation appears most often to be realized," the use of this companion is growing. It is worthy of consideration.