

**TWENTIETH CENTURY CHANGES
IN THE MUSIC LITURGY OF THE MASS
IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**AN ABSTRACT OF
A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF
WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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March 1968**

The Mass is the central act of worship in the Roman Catholic Church and music forms an integral part of that service. Twentieth century changes in the music liturgy of the Mass have been revolutionary. For the first time in the history of the Church, she has opened avenues of experimentation in the field of sacred music.

These liturgical changes have been allowed in an effort to up-date the Church, to bring it into the realm of modern living and in an attempt to keep pace with rapidly changing modes of the twentieth century. Another equally important reason for these experimentations lies in the Church's desire to help the faithful develop a deeper understanding of the sacred liturgy.

Through the adoption of the vernacular, the Catholic Church has attempted to reach the levels of all peoples, in all circumstances, in an effort to raise the laity to new heights of devotion. Hymns from other denominations are allowed in the rites. Folk and jazz elements have entered the services. Some music, previously forbidden because of secular characteristics, is being adapted for use in the temple. Instruments, formerly prohibited in church worship, are now permitted during the Holy Sacrifice. Masses, both low and high, are being sung by entire congregations instead of being

restricted to soloists and choirs.

Younger members of Catholic congregations have found the changes rather easy to accept. They are not restrained by years of indoctrination in "silent worship" as were their parents and grandparents. The more mature have found it harder to adjust. Then there are always the few who refuse to attempt anything new. But observation shows the majority of the people are really trying to go along with the new revised liturgy of the Mass.

When congregational singing was introduced as a permanent part of the Catholic liturgy, new materials were scarce. Then, within a relatively short period of time composers began turning out hymns, hymnals and Masses in abundance. This presented the problem of weeding out the bad and mediocre from the good.

Selection of "good" music was not the only difficulty. Composers of settings for the Ordinary of the Mass had been accustomed to write music for choirs, not congregations. Many of these former Masses were intricate compositions which required several rehearsals for even experienced choirs to master. Consequently, when these composers began producing Masses in the vernacular for the laity, many continued to produce music with rhythmic patterns that were too difficult for congregations and/or with a range of notes too extreme for the average layman.

With the passage of time, organists, choir directors

and composers of church music will gain an insight as to the types of music that will evoke the greatest response and devotion from the laity. These leaders will learn the musical capabilities as well as the limitations of congregations and produce music accordingly.

Changes of this magnitude are never resolved in a day, or in a month, or even in a year. Time and patience are the factors needed, a considerable amount of both. The most important thing to be remembered in the study of this new music liturgy is that attempts are being made to solve existing problems. Answers are being sought by church authorities and musicians. In God's good time all things will work to His greater honor and glory.