

10 YEARS OF "ANKOLE SACRED MUSIC" IN THE DIOCESE OF MBABARA

In Uganda, the very first attempts to introduce Sacred Music in African style into divine worship were made in the Diocese of Mbabara (West Uganda) in the year 1955.

During the initial stage the experiments did not meet with the approval of everybody. The same has been experienced in various other African countries. Therefore a Musical Study Week was held at Mbabara during the Easter holidays in 1959 and was attended by over 50 musical Banyankore, lay-people as well as religious. Many different musical problems were dealt with, but of course special attention was given to producing Ankole Sacred Music and the possibility of introducing it into the Liturgy.

During the course of the Study Sessions several talks were given on Sacred Music, particularly on what the Popes of the present century have taught in many an allocution or have written in their respective papal documents on this subject, about the requirements it should meet with, in general and also in the mission countries, and the intentions, desires and directives of the Church authority in this field.

The practical applications of these directives were given in the most convincing way by Mr. Benedikto K. Mubangizi, a very talented musical Munyankore. After interesting discussions and manifold debates all eight compositions of Mubangizi, ready at that time, were approved unanimously. At the end of the Study Week some of these first Kinyankore hymns were successfully performed by all participants during a Solemn High Mass in Nyamitanga Cathedral.

Great enthusiasm was created by this Study Week at Mbarara. Several other Banyankore musicians followed the good example of Mr. Mubangizi, and composed Ankole hymns both new texts and new melodies. Most of these new compositions were approved by the Diocesan Committee for Sacred Music which had meanwhile been erected by the Right Rev. J. M. Ogez, bishop of Mbarara.

Interest in the new hymns was growing gradually also among the Banyankore Catholics of the Diocese. At the end of 1961 a hymnal "Mweshongorere Omukama" was printed. It is a matter of rejoicing that since the publication of this hymn book more and more Africans are trying to produce Ankole Church Music, fortunately not without success.

Evidently, none of the composers had the pretention to think that his compositions had already reached the peak of perfection. Firstly, it must be noted that the entirely new texts are cast into a rather European poetic form. The regular alteration of accented and unaccented syllables of the text finds its response in the music. Despite the European "stanza-refrain" form, most of these hymns "new style" became real favourites right from the beginning. However, it is noteworthy that for some time past there has been developing a remarkable tendency to switch over from the European to the more African structure: a soloist's part which calls for a response of the congregation.

The melodic line of quite a number of these hymns seems to give the impression of Western influence. Yet, the tone-pattern of the language has been scrupulously observed.

In their vocal music the Banyankore have but very little harmony. No wonder that the newly-composed church hymns are monophonic music. During the Study Sessions it had been stressed more than once that above all "congregational" music was needed, and consequently that there was no interest whatsoever for that sort of "cathedral music" which had been composed abundantly in the past.

At the Study Week the delicate question of the instrumental accompaniment was also raised. All participants unanimously agreed that for the time being preference was to be given to "a capella" singing. Once this new type of Church music had found its way into the Liturgy, the problem could be considered later in due course, for nobody was against it in principle.

As far as I am aware, it is in all the parishes of Ankole and Kigezi and only in a few other ones outside the Diocese of Mbabara that African Sacred Music has been introduced into the Liturgy. It is sincerely hoped that more Dioceses in Uganda will follow the good example given by the Diocese of Mbabara, and especially by Mr. Benedikto K. Mubangizi who has been responsible for its introduction to such a great extent.

May more and more African christian musicians increase the treasure of African Sacred Music throughout the African continent, by composing new Church hymns which can be qualified as genuine Sacred Music, and which consequently will help our faithful to participate more fruitfully in divine worship, to sing better, to "pray" better.

Paul van Thiel, w.f.

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The Rev. Father Filiberto Giorgetti of the Missioni Africane at Cavallino, Lecce, Italy, is shortly to return to his work in Africa among the Zande, but on the Central African Republic side of the border where there are more than thirty thousand Zande refugees from the Sudan. A few months ago Father Giorgetti was among the missionaries who were expelled at a moment's notice by the Sudan Government, and the mission closed. Since arriving in Italy, Father Giorgetti has had his "Missa Zande" printed with the Italian text.

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