

De musica sacra et sacra liturgia

Instruction on Sacred Music and Sacred Liturgy

Sacred Congregation for Rites - September 3, 1958

Excerpts: [Chapter III-4. Musical instruments and bells.](#)

A. Some General principles.

60. The following principles for the use of musical instruments in the sacred liturgy are to be recalled:

a) Because of the nature, sanctity, and dignity of the sacred liturgy, the playing of any musical instrument should be as perfect as possible. It would be preferable to omit the use of instruments entirely (whether it be the organ only, or any other instrument), than to play them in a manner unbecoming their purpose. As a general rule it is better to do something well, however modest, than to attempt something more elaborate without the proper means.

b) The difference between sacred, and secular music must be taken into consideration. Some musical instruments, such as the classic organ, are naturally appropriate for sacred music; others, such as string instruments which are played with a bow, are easily adapted to liturgical use. But there are some instruments which, by common estimation, are so associated with secular music that they are not at all adaptable for sacred use.

c) Finally, only instruments which are personally played by a performer are to be used in the sacred liturgy, not those which are played mechanically or automatically. [They can however be used before or after the Mass for meditation music, etc.]

B. The classic organ and similar instruments.

67. The organ should be located in a suitable place near the main altar, unless ancient custom or a special reason approved by the local Ordinary [the diocesan bishop] demand otherwise; but the location should be such that the singers or musicians occupying a raised platform are not conspicuous to the congregation in the main body of the church.

D. Musical instruments, and mechanical devices.

70. Musical instruments which by common acception, and use are suitable only for secular music must be entirely excluded from all liturgical functions, and private devotions.

71. The use of automatic instruments and machines, such as the automatic organ, phonograph, radio, tape or wire recorders, and other similar machines, is absolutely forbidden in liturgical functions and private devotions, whether they are held inside or outside the church, even if these machines be used only to transmit sermons or sacred music, or to substitute for the singing of the choir or faithful, or even just to support it. [exceptable for Pre-Mass or Post-Mass]