


11-2004

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Recommended Citation

Boyero, Marceliano C.M. (2004) "Jose Maria Alcacer, C.M. (1899-1994)," *Vincentiana*: Vol. 48 : No. 6 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/vincentiana/vol48/iss6/12>

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José María Alcácer, C.M. (1899-1994)

Minsister of Sacred Music

by Marcelino Boyero, C.M.

Province of Madrid

“You will hear my voice at dawn” (Psalm 5)

On 24 August, 1994, Fr. Teodoro Barquin and I were in the Philippines. We had gone there with the project of recording a selection of the music of Fr. José María Alcácer. We visited Cardinal Jaime Sin, Cardinal of Manila, and spoke to him about our plan. “Oh, Fr. Alcácer! I have his Cancionero (song book) on my night table. I was educated by the Vincentians.”¹ We had a long and pleasant conversation about that and many other topics.

Not long ago, while going through the correspondence of our musician, I came across a letter that Fr. J. Martínez San Juan wrote to him from the Philippines; in it he tells him he has interpreted some of his Psalms and asks his advice about adapting some detail for his choir so as to be able to interpret another work.² Fr. Alcácer is well known even in the Philippines. The Vincentians have made him known there. We could also mention America and other places. Many good students of his have made him known.

“Awake lyre and harp” (Psalm 56)

José María Alcácer Martínez was born on 14 March, 1899, in Aldaya (Valencia). Manuel Alcácer, his father, played the clarinet in one of the town's two bands and the violin in the orchestra of the Musical Chapel of the parish. Andres Temprano has left us a charming scene from his childhood: “When he was five years old the child used to go with his father in the religious processions carrying the clarinet case and whistling in his own way what the band was playing.”³

¹ M. BOYERO, *Los Trabajos y los días. Anales*, t. 104, n. 3, May-June 1996, pp. 260-276.

² Provincial Archives of the Congregation - Madrid.

³ ANDRÉS TEMPRANO, O.Carm., *Panorama actual de la música religiosa española*. Tesoro Sacro Musical, n. 2, 1972, pp. 42-47.

He had music in his blood, but from a very early age that seed found fertile ground and a favorable climate. Between the ages of eight and 14 he attended the Colegio-Asilo Romero in Valencia. He was registered in the Conservatory of the city of Turia: three years of music theory, four of piano and one of harmony. He practiced the piano assiduously in order to accompany the songs of the school children. When he was 12, he registered to study piano in the Conservatory. Juan Cortes was his piano teacher and Amancio Amoros his professor of harmony. At that age he wrote an *Ave Maria* for voice and organ which has been lost. When he was 14 (1913) he studied three courses of humanities at the Conciliar Seminary. At the end of the first one he obtained the position of organist in a competition. He studied Gregorian harmony and counterpoint with Vicente Repulles. It was a good start for making beautiful sounds.

Encouraged by the Daughters of Charity at the Asilo and by his brother Manuel, at the age of 18 he entered the Internal Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission, the Vincentians, in Madrid. His novice master, Fr. Adolfo Tobar, encouraged the young José María to compose religious works for the liturgy, for literary gatherings and trips, which would take the place of existing works that were not popular with the director of the novitiate. He was even allowed to attend the concerts arranged by Fr. Luis Iruarrizaga in the Royal Theater. Thus were written several songs that later became part of the first edition of the *Cancionero Religioso* (Religious Song Book) (1928).

He studied philosophy in Madrid and Horaleza (Madrid) from 1919 to 1922 and theology in Cuenca (two years) in the Seminary of St. Paul, a former Dominican convent, handed over by the bishop to the Vincentians. He finished the other two years of theology in Madrid. In Cuenca, besides being a good theology student, he showed himself a precocious composer, director and organist; he did outstanding work in all that had to do with music in the religious celebrations as well as in the literary gatherings. The Vincentian choir, directed by the seminarian Alcácer, went beyond the limits of the seminary and performed successfully in the Cathedral, in the Salon Palafox in the city and other places. Art and constancy were two virtues that would be with him throughout his life.

He was ordained a priest in Madrid in 1926 and was sent to work in the musical-pastoral work of the Basilica. He renewed his studies of harmony, counterpoint, fugue and instrumentation under Emilio Vega. He acquired great mastery of these subjects and everyone recognized his skill which would progress throughout the years. Emilio Vega himself would write the prologue to the first edition of the *Cancionero Religioso*, in 1928, with 70 songs, and the second volume three years later with 77 songs. He would advise him to go to Rome to further his studies of religious music.

“What glorious praise for you, O City of God!” (Psalm 86)

He studied in the Superior Pontifical School of Sacred Music for many years, a pioneer in the teaching of liturgical and religious music. There were well-known teachers there: Licinio Refice y Cassimiri taught classical polyphony; Manari taught organ; Ferreti y Suñol, abbot of Montserrat, taught harmony, counterpoint, fugue and composition, and the interpretation of Palestrinian polyphony. Lorenzo Perosi was the master of the Pontifical or Sistine Chapel; he was not a professor, but he was a model. The *Motu Proprio* of Pius X of 1903, was the norm and guide. After barely two years in Rome, he brought to Madrid a in Gregorian chant and a wealth of knowledge and techniques in religious music. N. Otaño and L. Iruarrizaga, wellknown Maestros, directed and promoted Musical Congresses which Alcácer attended, hungry to learn and familiarize himself with the musical climate in Spain.

“Keep me, O Lord, for I trust in you” (Psalm 16; Vulgate 15)

1932-1940. Organist and composer in the Basilica of the Miraculous Medal. While he was studying, he was also collecting compositions which would later fill out the successive editions of the *Cancionero Religioso* and *El Salterio*. But in 1936 war broke out. His ups and downs, his hiding out, his imprisonment in the Women’s Prison in Ventas, his release in the same year of 1936, his passage through the French Embassy and the concentration camp, his brief stays in Paris and Solesmes, where he spoke with Dom Gajard, his return to Spain in 1938 by way of San Sebastián where he had his earlier studies in harmony and piano validated and where he registered for the third and fourth levels of harmony and the fifth of piano are like a historic-tragic novel with a happy ending and told with sorrow but also with grace by Fr. E. Escribano and other authors in *Anales*.⁴ Wherever he went he left ample proof of his character as a priest and his quality as a musician — in prison, in the houses of the Daughters of Charity, who helped him greatly. His works *Gloria a Ti, Cristo Rey* (Glory to You, Christ the King), *Al Volver de las Yuntas* (Upon Returning from Plowing) and *Viva Madrid* all belong to this period. He traveled to Barcelona for the new edition of the *Cancionero Religioso*, which now contained 292 pieces.

⁴ *Anales*, t. 46, n. 7, July 1938, pp. 369 and following. Cf T. MARQUINA, *José María Alcácer, C.M., Vida, Obra y Testimonios*. Editorial La Milagrosa, 1996, pp. 62-73 (There are some errors in the citations).

“A Music Never Before Heard”

In 1940 we find him once again as the organist in the Basilica of the Miraculous Medal in Madrid. He continued to study organ and composition. He made contact with N. Otaño and especially with the great Maestro Conrado del Campo. With him he studied counterpoint, fugue and composition. In 1943 he received the first prize in Composition, by a majority of votes, for his work *Primer Tiempo de Cuarteto* (which has been lost).⁵ He completed his musical formation years later (1948) with specialized studies on modern procedures for composition and orchestration with Maestro M. Palau in the Superior Conservatory of Music in Valencia.⁶

There are particular stories which could be generalized. It was Eugenio D'Ors who first taught us to do that. Here we find another Cardinal, Cardinal Segura. A certain friendship between Segura and Alcácer came from the years in Rome. The Cardinal used to go to Cuenca once in a while to relax. There he heard the Vincentian choir sing some of Alcácer's *Salmos* (Psalms). The Cardinal remarked: “The choir of the Vincentian theologians in Cuenca presented a literary-musical evening for me there on one occasion. I heard religious music that not only pleased me, but also moved me.” In March of 1945 the Cardinal convoked in Seville a Provincial Congress of Sacred Music. He had the inspiration to invite the Vincentian theologians from St. Paul Seminary in Cuenca to present the assembly with “a new kind of sacred music.” The Assembly took place from 15-17 March. A group from the cathedral and some children from different schools augmented the choir. The author of the *Salmos* himself directed the choir. At the end the Cardinal congratulated him: “Fr. Alcácer, it was a success.” On 28 March he wrote the Superior of the theologate to thank him for allowing the choir to travel from Cuenca to Seville. He added: “Fr. Alcácer's work was wonderful, and the work was a good advertisement for itself.” Each psalm was presented by none other than D. José Artero, prefect of music of the Pontifical University of Salamanca. He said, among other things: “Fr. Alcácer's music evokes the oratorios of the great German masters of the 17th and 18th centuries, Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn and, above all, Haydn.” No small compliment. And someone has repeated it.⁷

⁵ Cf. T. MARQUINA, *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁶ Provincial Archives C.M. - Madrid. Cf. T. MARQUINA, *ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

⁷ *Anales*, t. 53, n. 5, May 1945, pp. 150-154.

**“Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest...”
(Psalm 84, Vulgate 85)**

The Central House of the Vincentians at 45 García de Paredes, Madrid and Basilica of the Miraculous Medal were the center where Fr. Alcácer lived out the greater part of his life. I will quickly summarize other places where he lived and then return to the center where he exercised his pastoral and musical ministry.

He passed very briefly (1952-1953) through Hortaleza in Madrid as a professor of Logic and Music, and also through St. Paul's theologate in Cuenca from 1953-1957, as Professor of Moral Theology and Music, and also a few years in the theologate in Salamanca (1957-1963), with a brief interlude in New York (1962-1963). The rest of his years he lived at the Central House as priest and organist, as composer and music director; a life dedicated to religious music and minister of the same. Holy Mass and religious ministry in a chaplaincy of the Daughters of Charity, a service to which he was always faithful, as punctual as a clock and never missing a day; a community life of obedience, simplicity and piety for many long years, as constant and exemplary as a monk; work in his room at his desk, writing music with that small, clear hand which was peculiar to him; trials at the piano, rehearsals at the organ, continuous service to the liturgy year after year: all these form the long and lovely tapestry of the hours and days zealously dedicated to giving glory to God through music. He was not a highly sociable man, but he always received cordially anyone who knocked on his door, or wrote him a letter to ask for spiritual or musical advice or help.⁸

“How I love You, O Lord” (Psalm 18; Vulgate 17)

Alcácer was a precocious, long-lived and productive musician. Precocious and long-lived — the dates of his life show that. He began to compose music and be involved in it from a very early age and he lived for 95 years (1899-1994). The productive aspect can be seen from the number of his works. Later I will write a shortened Catalogue. To do a complete one would be impossible for such a brief biography as this one. But now, let me pause to describe some of his major works; and to judge their worth I will present the opinions of well-known musicians.

El Cancionero Religioso (The Religious Sangbook). “A ‘best seller’ in its time, up until Vatican II, indispensable for liturgical and paraliturgical moments, with small master works, some of which will

⁸ Cf. T. MARQUINA, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-245.

last in the coming decades. It was the best religious song book of its time, far superior to the others.”⁹

Emilio Vega, in the prologue to the *Cancionero*, wrote: “Fr. José María Alcácer... has placed himself at the musical level of those composers who... in our country... constitute the group which has begun and developed the genre of religious and popular music.... The compositions of the *Cancionero* spring forthright, fresh and substantial from the spiritual wellspring that fills Fr. Alcácer’s soul with mystical fervor.”¹⁰ And let us not forget his artistry in the accompaniment of Gregorian music.

Vicente de Dios, a great collaborator in the edition of some of our musician’s works, says: “Besides Fr. Nemesio Otaño, S.J., I cannot think of another author so much of the Spanish people as Fr. José María Alcácer.”¹¹

“All the songs breath such fervor and feeling as to be most suitable for moving the spirit peacefully and elevating it to God in prayer.”¹²

About the accompaniment book, Muneta says: “This is a monumental work in which shines forth in singular relief the harmonizer, never trivial, always of noble quality.... It shines forth with simplicity in the harmonizations of the Gregorian melodies...”¹³

El Salterio (The Psalter). Among the many judgements, appraisals, analyses and critiques that have rained upon *El Salterio*, I know of no study as ample and thoughtful as that of Muneta in his work about Alcácer. He begins with this specific, categorical affirmation: “The four notebooks which make up *El Salterio* constitute an enormous musical monument, unique in Spanish musical history. We find no work of such scope, not in the chapel masters of the past from the 16th to the 18th centuries, not in modern musical literature.”¹⁴ Surely it will remain “in a very high place in Spanish musical history.”¹⁵ If this is true, and Muneta tries to show that it is, then I must also agree with the judgement that Andres Temprano made to me personally, when I was gathering data and

⁹ J.M. MUNETA, *Anales*, t. 102, n. 6, November-December 1954, p. 593.

¹⁰ From the *Prologo de la Primera Edición (Libro del Acompañamiento)*. Cf. T. MARQUINA, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹¹ Cf. T. MARQUINA, *op. cit.*, p. 152. (I have not been able to verify the citation in *Anales*).

¹² A brief and charming analytical note by B. GARCÉS, *Anales*, t. 40, n. 5, May 1932, pp. 260-263.

¹³ J.M. MUNETA, *José María Alcácer, un clásico de la música religiosa contemporánea*. Teruel, 1988, p. 36.

¹⁴ J.M. MUNETA, *ibid.*, pp. 75-113.

¹⁵ J.M. MUNETA, *Anales*, t. 102, n. 6, p. 594.

appraisals for this biography. So as not to ask him where he would situate Alcácer within Spanish religious music, I asked him “in which line.” His answer was decisive, emphatic: *in the very first line*.

Norberto Almandoz, a great musician, writes: “Analyzing the *Salmos* musically, one finds throughout them the inspiration of a vigorous musician, firm and well trained, who translates and handles his ideas with ease and a total knowledge of the sonorous element. Above all, Fr. Alcácer is an artist of the polyphonic polymelodic tendencies, in the sense of expressive multiplicity, in simultaneous use of vocal resources.”¹⁶

José Artero offers this analysis: “This is music with an oriental origin and requires large groups for its performance. We come across passages of great aspirations which remind us of the oratorios of the great German masters.”¹⁷ The same author, on the occasion of a grand concert in Seville in March 1945 affirms: “If to the fine work of Fr. Eugenio Escribano — referring to his translation of the psalms — were joined the musical technique of Fr. José María Alcácer, what a work of art would we not have. Fr. Alcácer’s music evokes the great oratorios of the German masters of the 17th and 18th centuries, like Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn and, especially, Haydn.”¹⁸

Barron explains: “Fr. Alcácer is putting together his monumental *Salterio* with the firm hand of a master and Benedictine dedication. Let us be mindful that *El Salterio* is not just any construction; it is a cathedral, it is the pyramid of Cheops; upon the first foundations so magnificently laid, let us hope that it rises to monumental heights for the glory of Spanish sacred art.”¹⁹

José Ignacio Prieto affirms: “Fr. Alcácer’s pen is agile and inspired.... Through the interventions of soloists and different choral groups, Fr. Alcácer manages to give interest and variety to long texts which may not lend themselves to musical arrangement. There are some that are simple and adaptable to the people, at least in part; and there are some suitable only for great chapel choirs. In all of them appears, together with the clarity of the lines and the purity of the phrases, a knowledge of modern technique skillfully applied.”²⁰

Federico Sopeno, the music critic, writes: “Simplicity, as the summary of many and difficult technical problems, this is the distinguishing mark of this music placed on its knees before the divine words. These fortuitous arrangements move between two

¹⁶ *El Salterio*, t. II: “Juicios Críticos....” Cf. A. TEMPRANO, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁷ *El Salterio*, t. II: “Juicios Críticos....” Cf. A. TEMPRANO, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹⁸ *Anales*, t. 53, May 1945, pp. 150-154.

¹⁹ *Ritmo*, September-October 1947. Cf. J.M. MUNETA, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

²⁰ *El Salterio*, t. II: “Juicios Críticos....” Cf. J.M. MUNETA, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

tones: the noble design for the people, without commonness; and the polyphonic splendor, heir to the greatest tradition.”²¹

It is not necessary to read the *Comentario Musical de 'El Salterio'* (Musical Commentary on the Psalter) (a notebook with commentary on the first ten psalms) to realize one thing which I believe all the commentators have passed over, and which I judge fundamental: the cohesion, the unity, the structure of each psalm, its aptness for the text. Some might say this is so elemental that it does not need to be underlined. But I think it must be said explicitly. I imagine the music soaking up the text. In fact, the best psalms are those in which the music has taken possession of the words through study, meditation and contemplation, and then given them the form and structure that are most fitting. And I do not speak only of the great psalms (5, 8, 18, 29, 34, 40, 117...), but also of the *big-little* pieces like (and this is just one example) psalm 13, a masterpiece. It may begin with a humble and simple prayer, but then the internal thread of the text leads it to a tremendous finale, affirming the blessing of God which surrounds the just one like a shield (psalm 5). One could cite many others (4, 11, 84...).

One final citation from the critiques of *El Salterio*: once again from José Artero, now commenting concretely about volume IV: “Fr. Alcácer advances... with the thrust and wisdom of an author from the classical periods. And... he advances... in technique, thoughtful modernity, melodic richness and the ardor of inspiration.”²²

Ofrenda lírico-litúrgica (Lyrical liturgical offering). This poetic name captures another of Fr. Alcácer's monumental works. It is nothing more or less than the complete Liturgy of the Hours: the Office of Readings, Lauds, Middle Hours, Vespers and Compline with their invocations, brief responses, formulas for the recitation of the psalms, hymns, antiphons for the psalms and gospel canticles, etc. The most important pieces are, naturally, the hymns and antiphons. This work constitutes, to my way of thinking, the most important contribution of our brilliant musician to the religious music renewed by the directives of Vatican II. It is an unpublished work, finished in 1984 and presented that same year to the Provincial of the Vincentian Fathers. Thinking about its publication, the author distributed it in eight volumes of words and melody, and eight volumes of accompaniment — 16 volumes in all. The author had great hopes of having it published, at least in part; but it is still there in the archives. I have had the great privilege of handling it from beginning to end. It is like a forest, with large and small plants, but all of them beautiful; or if you wish, like a large jewelry case with

²¹ *El Salterio*, t. II: “Juicios Críticos...” Cf. J.M. MUNETA, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²² TSM. January-February 1961. Cf. J.M. MUNETA, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

precious pearls (the hymns and antiphons). I believe it is the third great work, along with the *Cancionero* and *El Salterio* — three great works to immortalize a great musician, without taking away from any of the other works.

“For he is like a tree” (Psalm 1)

“Let us praise worthy men” (Ecclesiasticus, 44). Among these worthy men are the *composers of music* (v. 5). This praise has been extended to Fr. Alcácer in some way during his lifetime in a multitude of tributes celebrated to honor the importance of his work and his person. I would like to point out just a few of these, among the many that one could choose from such a fruitful life.

Tribute of “Apromur” (Association for the Promotion of Religious Music) December of 1988. At the beginning of the celebration an outline of his life was read. One of his works was played on the organ and Gabarain read the special papal blessing granted to our musician “as a composer of sacred music.” He was presented with a trophy in the form of a lyre with the inscription: “Apromur to Fr. José María Alcácer, young like his music.”²³

Tribute of the Vincentian Family. March 1990. In the Basilica of the Miraculous Medal on the occasion of the presentation of his book *Cantoral Litúrgico de la Familia Vicenciana* (Liturgical Songbook of the Vincentian Family). In the morning there was a special Mass because the tribute was held on the Day of the Province. In the afternoon there was a poetic-musical presentation. The choir *Coro Vocal Círculo 92* interpreted nine of his psalms and the Papal Nuncio, Bishop Mario Tagliaferri, conferred on him the Augusta Cross “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice,” *above all for his outstanding work and his extraordinary creative merit.* This same Nuncio would write in May to the Provincial, Fr. Miguel Ángel Brenes: “It was very pleasant for me to be able to give this decoration to our dear Fr. Alcácer in recognition of the valuable work carried on throughout his life.”²⁴

A tribute that I consider wonderful was the one prepared for our musician by the city of Zamora when the Brotherhood of the Dying Christ invited him on Good Friday of 1992 to be present for the entrance of the Dying Christ into the Viceroy’s Plaza. There in the midst of an imposing silence, a choir of a hundred men sang our outstanding composer’s Psalm 50, *Miserere*. This piece has been sung there for many years. When Fr. Alcácer died in 1994, the Supreme Council of the Brotherhood resolved: *To name José María Alcácer*

²³ *Anales*, t. 97, n. 3, March 1989, p. 128.

²⁴ *Anales*, t. 98, n. 5, May-June 1990, pp. 331-339.

posthumously an Honorary Brother. The chronicler would say Alcácer conquered Zamora in an hour.²⁵

A grand implicit tribute was the recording of a selection of Fr. Alcácer's works in the Philippines in 1994. This was done at the initiative of Fr. Teodoro Barquín. The bar is set very high; and I would like to see who manages to reach it; but it is one of the best we have in a recording. *Paz y Armonía* (Peace and Harmony) is the title of those efforts in which I personally had a hand. For three long months, from August to the middle of November, I had the privilege of detailing that work in an article in *Anales* titled "The works and the days" (Recording Fr. Alcácer's music in the Philippines). While we were in the midst of that difficult labor, the sad news reached us from Spain about the death of our grand musician on 10 September at the age of 94.²⁶

Several confreres also offered magnificent tributes to Fr. Alcácer; some because they lived with him for many years, others because they closely followed his musical production and they also were good musicians. Their names are in the great biographies of the great maestro.

Fernando Espiago evokes, laconically, a number of recollections of Fr. Alcácer: *Thirty years living with a saint*. Martín Abaitua, a cultured man and an excellent interpreter of Alcácer's music as director, speaks of *our dear and admired little great man... quiet, unless there was some exciting music around: then emerged the bundle of nerves hidden under his skin*. As a student of philosophy and theology in the 40s, he was a witness to the early experiences of the first *Salmos*. José María Martín, Alcácer's successor as organist in the Basilica of the Miraculous Medal and a great admirer, says: "Maestro Alcácer's music is profound. The first time one hears it, it seems hard to assimilate. But if one continues to listen attentively, soon he will feel it penetrate his soul and his heart.... It comes forth from a source that, like good high quality wine, comes from a good high quality mother: his most profound artistic and musical inspiration."²⁷ Luis Bacaicoa, a great organist and friend, is enthusiastic in his praise: "His technique in harmony cannot be improved upon... neither Zamacois nor Durand, nor the great masters in difficult musical architecture, found in his compositions neither chords to correct nor musical phrases to amend. He flew with the eagles in the great number of his written works."²⁸ Of my own admiration for this great musician I can say that I have left ample testimony. Aside from

²⁵ LÓPEZ OLMEDO, *Boletín Informativo*, n. 25, May 1992, pp. 58-59.

²⁶ M. BOYERO, *Anales*, t. 104, n. 43, May-June 1996, pp. 260-276.

²⁷ T. MARQUINA, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-270.

²⁸ *Anales*, t. 102, n. 6, November-December 1994, p. 597.

anything else, I just want to bring to mind something that Bacaicoa has remembered as well: On the great feasts of the Miraculous Medal, of St. Vincent de Paul, Holy Week... how the nave of the Basilica resounded when we would sing *Misas, Salmos y otras obras de Alcácer* (Masses, Psalms and other works of Alcácer). The organist was the author himself or Bacaicoa; and the director either the author or Abaitua or someone else, even daringly, myself. The choir, almost always, was the Vincentian students from Hortaleza and the novices of the Daughters of Charity. Bacaicoa wrote with admiration: "Who can forget those almost heavenly moments here on earth?"²⁹ Also admirable are the biographical voices of the great musician Muneta and the poet Marquina. I could go on and on.

I would also like to remember Andres Temprano. He was the first to write a brief firsthand biography to which all who have written of Alcácer have had to turn. He coined the felicitous phrase, describing our artist as "a real classic of the religious music of our surprising century." "Paradigm of simplicity and amiability... the music transforms and makes a giant of him. It is his element. To watch him direct his own work is quite a show."³⁰

In his tribute to Fr. Adolfo Tobar, Visitor of the Madrid Province, on his Golden Anniversary of vocation, Fr. Escribano wondered humorously how so much and such good music could fit into such a small figure as that of our artist. The answer was that it was not a question of physical size, but rather of artistic and spiritual stature.

The liturgical renewal of Vatican II did not exclude nor intimidate a musician forged in the old styles; it gave him wings to continue to work in the service of religious music. Notice the dates of composition on many of his works, above all on the *Ofrenda-Lírico-Litúrgica*. I visited him in his room frequently and many parts of *Salmo Responsorial* (and others) flowed from his pen to be interpreted in the Basilica or in the chapel of the philosophy students in Hortaleza.

"My Music is for You, O Lord" (Psalm 100)

I want to add a word to the subtitle of this brief biography. Years ago I wrote an article about "Music and Formation."³¹ In it I cited various Church documents on religious music. From them and from other later ones, one can deduce that religious music (and concretely, liturgical music) is a ministry, a service; and the musician is a minister, one who is at our service. That Fr. Alcácer was such a

²⁹ *Anales*, t. 102, n. 6, November-December 1994, p. 598.

³⁰ A. TEMPRANO, *op. cit.*, 44 and 43.

³¹ *Anales*, t. 101, n. 6, November-December 1993, pp. 602-621.

minister, a servant of religious music, is more than clear to anyone who has followed his life and his work.

A little while ago I spoke with the great musician Antonio Alcalde and he told me that for Fr. Alcácer music was a true pastoral ministry; that he served God and his people with music. He emphasized two aspects: as a great organist and as a heartfelt devotee of the Virgin Mary. (What a marvelous collection of Marian songs!).

Our musician once wrote to one of his nieces when he had just received from the Nuncio the “Crux pro Ecclesia et Pontifice” He told her of the sense of the insignia *as a reward to those who have rendered notable service to the Church. And I — he continues — have dedicated almost my whole life to composing religious music for divine worship.* It was a confession he had made in another moment, but now he did it with music in the antiphon of psalm 100: *My music is for you O Lord.*³² I would gladly copy it here.

Fr. Sopeña, whom we quoted above, spoke of the music of *El Salterio* as “music placed on its knees before the divine words.” To that I have nothing further to add. That is the way it is.

* * * * *

Principal Works of Fr. José María Alcácer, C.M.

Cancionero Religioso en estilo popular (Religious Songbook in the Popular Style), 1928-1966. Nine editions.

Missa in honorem Beati Antonii Mariae Claret, 1940.

Missa de “Requiem,” 1944?

Missa in honorem Sancti Vincentii a Paulo, 1955

Misa, “Vaticano II,” in popular style, 1965.

Misa Basilical, 1965.

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³² *Lauds*, Tuesday, Week IV of O.T., Antiphon I.

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