

# Sacred Music

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# Editorial Order

*The variety and contrasts of the liturgy lend meaning to our experience of time and clarity to understanding of the mysteries we celebrate.*

by William Mahrt

**O** rder is essential to liturgy. Clarity of order depends upon the projection of differences. The liturgy relies upon numerous kinds of difference for its depth and its beauty. The nature of each part of the liturgy is made clear by contrast with its other parts. These differences exist on a number of significant levels.

The order of the liturgical year reflects the natural order of the seasons, which is in turn made sacred by elements of text, music, and ceremony. Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and its season, Ascension, Pentecost and the following season, as well as the various kinds of saints' days, from those of the Blessed Virgin, Apostles, martyrs and more; each calls to mind such differentiation.

The differentiation of the parts of the liturgical day project a grand order. The Mass, with its sacramental focus, is the center of the day's liturgy. It is also surrounded by the Divine Office, whose function is non-sacramental but formal prayer. The offices are differentiated by structure

and purpose. There are more or less important offices: in the day, Lauds and Vespers—Morning and Evening Prayer articulate the beginning and end of the day, while Matins or the Office of Readings form a balance to these; the Little Hours—traditionally, Prime, Terce, Sext, and Nones mark the lesser hours of the day, and Compline—Night Prayer makes the transition into the night.

The order of traditional Lauds and Vespers has an internal hierarchy. Five psalms, each with its own antiphon, a short chapter, a hymn, a gospel canticle—the Benedictus or the Magnificat with its antiphon—and a concluding collect. The chapter, a verse from the scripture as a brief reading, is often drawn from the epistle of the Mass of the corresponding day. The order of elements is significant: the psalms are the bread and butter of the office, the canonical prayer texts of the scripture. The hymn is a poetical composition, whose poetry is an expressive complement to the psalms, an outgrowth of them. The gospel canticles, drawn from St. Luke, form a culmination of the office. In

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the ordinary form the order of psalm and hymn are inverted, and this has come in for some criticism: placing the hymn first does not give it the function of a poetic outgrowth from the psalms, but rather seems analogous to the entrance hymn of the Mass, and one wonders whether this ordering was not meant to provide the office with a processional piece; traditionally there was no processional chant.

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In the office of the extraordinary form, the offices are linked by the thread of the gospel of the Mass: Matins includes a patristic homily upon the gospel of the day; then the antiphons to the gospel canticles of Lauds and Vespers—the Benedictus and Magnificat—are on the subject of that same gospel; sometimes, the communion antiphon of the Mass is based upon it as well. The office of the ordinary form does not maintain this kind of link, but its parts have a hierarchy of importance as well.

The order of Mass is somewhat more complex, but clear and effective. The two parts of the Mass are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

Each has a cumulative structure, beginning with an introductory rite—a processional chant, a common text to be sung, and then the culminating action of that part. Thus the Liturgy of the Word begins with the introit chant, followed by the singing of the common texts, Kyrie and Gloria. This entrance rite is then concluded with a collect—a prayer summarizing all the intentions of the previous action. The substantive portion of the Liturgy of the Word follows, including three lessons, which are arranged in ascending order of importance, a reading from the Old Testament, an epistle, and a gospel. The first two are followed by melismatic chants: the gradual forms a meditation upon the first reading; the second, the alleluia, is more ecstatic and serves at once as a meditation on the epistle and an anticipation of the gospel.

The hierarchy of the Liturgy of the Word can be made emphatic by ceremonies. The introit procession, when made through the church, is purposeful motion to focal point of the liturgy, the altar. The introit chant, with its rhythmic style, supports this purposeful motion and sustains the dynamic of the procession through the incensation of the altar. Its full Gregorian form also projects a sense of solemnity that manifests the importance of what is to be celebrated.

The peak of the action of the Liturgy of the Word is the gospel. Its pre-eminence is made evident by its being sung at a privileged place, accompanied by candles and incense, and prepared by a procession to the place, while the congregation stands for it. Its place is usually the ambo on the “gospel side,” that is, to the right of the priest facing the people. The first two lessons could be sung at the “epistle side,” to the left of the priest facing the people. This

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spatial differentiation emphasizes the hierarchy of the lessons, and shows the gospel to be the climax of the Liturgy of the Word.

Singing the lessons from the opposite sides of the sanctuary is an intrinsic part of the extraordinary form, but it can also be used in the ordinary form. It is true that the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* speaks of a single ambo, from which all the lessons may be read, but rubrics in the initial edition of the new lectionary spoke of ambos, and I am unaware of any prescription against the use of the two sides of the sanctuary for the lessons.<sup>1</sup> If there is a cantor or song leader in the front of the congregation, the place on the “epistle side” might be taken for that function, leading to the ambo on the “gospel side” being reserved for all

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<sup>1</sup>¶ 260. “The readings should whenever possible be proclaimed from the ambo or a lectern.”

the scripture. This theory is presented in the literature, but not elaborated in the liturgical documents. In the absence of a cantor, I believe an ambo for the gospel and a lectern for the first two lessons to be entirely possible. Even with a cantor, there could be a lectern for the lessons, and the cantor could lead the congregation from a different place, either on the epistle side or elsewhere. At one point in our celebration of the Mass, we decided to use both sides for the lessons, and I asked one of the priests who celebrated the Mass for his approval. He responded that it made little sense for a gospel procession to process to where you have just been.

The homily and the Credo then complete the celebration of the gospel, amplifying its importance. I have often advocated singing the lessons, especially the gospel. Even with the three-year cycle of lessons, these are not just for information. Over the years, they have become familiar stories; they are a celebration of the events of salvation through the year, and this is more effectively emphasized by their singing. I am aware that not all congregations would receive the sung lessons equally well. The practice might be introduced by singing just the gospel and only on the most important feasts, until the singing becomes assimilated as a part of the normal liturgical practice.

I tell a story that illustrates the singing of the lessons: a new pastor was installed, and he told me he did not want us to sing the lessons; I objected, and so he said, read the lessons without singing for two months, and if you still disagree, come back to me. The first Sunday without the sung lessons, members of the congregation were upset, but we learned something important by the exercise. The congregation said that they could understand the text better when it was sung;

moreover, its perception was enhanced by being presented without exaggeration. I felt that when the lessons were read, the gradual and alleluia did not have so close a connection with the lessons and that they seemed a bit too long, something not the case when the lessons were sung. After two months, I came to the pastor, requesting restoration of the singing. He was quite surprised, perhaps suspecting that this was just my idea, so he said it would be put up to a vote of the congregation. They voted two to one for the sung lessons, even after two months without them, and so we sang again.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist has a different shape. It begins with the offertory chant, which is partly processional and partly meditational, being in a style halfway between the introit and the gradual. It comes after the Credo and the intercessions, both of which are active for the congregation; they then sit for the offertory, which gives a moment of repose in the activity. The offertory is then concluded by the prayer over the offerings, another collect. The important action then begins. The preface, when sung conveys the greater importance of this action by being sung to a more elaborate melody than the previous prayers; it concludes with the Sanctus, a common text suitably sung by all. The Eucharistic Prayer follows, and this includes the high point of the Mass, the consecration. The Eucharistic Prayer is not often sung, but it can profitably be done so. This singing contributes an elevated tone of voice that conveys the sacredness of the occasion. When sung, the words of institution have a more distinctive melody, underlining the fact that these are the most sacred words of the whole Mass. Upon the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Lord's Prayer and the Agnus

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Dei are common texts in preparation for Communion. This is then accompanied by the communion—a processional chant projecting a sense of motion appropriate to the procession of the whole congregation. The communion is concluded with the post-communion—the third collect of the Mass, and a brief dismissal is sung. It is interesting that the Roman Rite never prescribed a recessional; I think that after the communion, nothing more is necessary; rather each worshipper may make a thanksgiving, or depart with the Lord's presence.

Differences between the styles of the chants enhance the order just described. The introit, with its neumatic style—two or three notes per most syllables—projects a sense of purposeful motion, while the communion is a bit more active, accompanying the procession of the whole congregation. The gradual, alleluia, and tract are much more melismatic—some syllables bearing a significant number of notes. This is in striking contrast with the processional chants, and its purpose of also contrasting: these responsorial chants elicit recollection, meditation, which then

also prepares the listener to hear the next lesson. The offertory is in a style between these, being differentiated in function from the others by its style.<sup>2</sup>

Gregorian chant has principal place in the liturgy, but there are many aspects of the Propers of the Mass to be considered. It is better to sing the texts which the liturgy prescribes than songs or hymns. If the texts cannot be sung in full Gregorian form, they can be sung in some abbreviated form

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or even to a simple psalm tone, though I recommend using Mass psalmody, rather than office psalmody.<sup>3</sup> If the congregation is

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<sup>2</sup>I have described the purposeful differentiation of melismas in the chants of Mass and office in “*Jubilare sine verbis: The Liturgical Role of Melisma in Gregorian Chant*,” in *Chant and Culture: Proceedings of the Conference of the Gregorian Institute of Canada, University of British Columbia, August 6–9, 2013*, ed. Armin Karim & Barbara Swanson (Ottawa; The Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2014), pp. 1–22 <academia.edu>.

<sup>3</sup>As can be seen in the psalms for each introit, in the table of Gloria Patri, or in *Versus Psalmorum et*

attached to hymns, the hymn might be sung and then the proper in a psalm tone. The proper texts can be sung, as Jared Ostermann describes below in this issue, in polyphonic settings. Important for the propers is their beauty and their liturgical differentiation. Polyphonic propers contribute beauty; I have often sung such pieces by Dufay, Isaac, and Byrd. Nevertheless, they do not contribute the differentiation that chant does. Byrd’s propers from the *Gradualia* are so composed that the same piece might serve more than one proper function—e.g., as introit or gradual. Thus while contributing beautiful polyphony to the liturgy, they do not provide the differentiation that chant provides.

Circumstances in each parish will be different; the congregation’s reception of the various kinds of sacred music should be taken very seriously. So the choice of music for the liturgy can vary considerably from place to place. Still the ideal should also be kept in mind. As Pope St. Pius X said, “the more closely a composition for church approaches in its movement, inspiration and savor the Gregorian form, the more sacred and liturgical it becomes.”<sup>4</sup> From this ideal, the choice of music can take into account the differences of purpose between the various parts of the Mass, making them beautiful and effective, a natural and proper role of music. ❖

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*Canticorum* (Tournai: Desclée, 1961), pp. 12–23; this book can be viewed at [musicasacra.com](http://musicasacra.com), under music books, Latin chants.

<sup>4</sup>Motu proprio, *Tra le Sollecitudini* (1903), ¶3.

## Articles

# A Necessary or Integral Choir: Moving Parish Ensembles from Peripheral to Essential Liturgical Roles

*Excellence in the quality and performance of choral repertoire must be intimately linked to an understanding of what the choir's integral role in the liturgy is.*

by Jared Ostermann



his summer I reached a minor milestone in my career, as I completed my fifteenth year of work as a church musician. Ten of those years were spent working in various parish positions while earning degrees; followed by five years in my current employment as a cathedral music director. In reflecting on those years, I am amazed at how much has changed for the better in the world of Catholic sacred music in such a short space of time. Looking around the country today, I could point out many signs of this positive transformation—from music programs founded, refurbished, or expanded, to seminary and university faculty appointments and course offerings, to the presenters and content at major conferences, to published musical resources (both

from major publishers and from free online sources), to the tenor of collegial interaction and conversation. The list could go on. One thing is clear, though: at the national level the pendulum is beginning to swing away from an “anything goes” mentality, and toward higher quality and standards in liturgical music. Most critically, core principles that once guided only a marginalized minority—such as faithfulness to church legislation, respect for tradition, and preservation the treasury of sacred music—are becoming more mainstream. As a result, thankfully, the usual “camps” within the field of sacred music are becoming less sharply divided. Just as one example, the National Association of Pastoral Musicians offered a multi-day five-part “chant institute” at their 2017 national convention.

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Even the largest organizations and publishers have begun to acknowledge the increasing level of interest in the church's musical tradition. While much work remains to be done, and excellent sacred music is by no means the norm, the overall ecclesial situation is certainly much more encouraging today than it was fifteen years ago.

On the practical level, pastors and musicians today are often experiencing less resistance and greater ability to improve the musical situation in their parishes. In addition, growing numbers of priests, bishops, and musicians with excellent liturgical and musical formation are coming into positions of responsibility. Thus, that ideal pairing of supportive, well-formed clergy and skilled musician is becoming—while by no means commonplace—increasingly common. In short, our mission as tradition-minded church musicians is no longer primarily to salvage and survive; rather, we are faced with the task of leading, teaching, and building. This is a wonderful thing, and is certainly a testament to the many labors and trials of those who kept the dream of beautiful liturgy alive through decades of persecution and destruction. At the same time, the move from the margins to a position of influence brings with it a substantial increase in responsibility. And in spite of a general lessening of the overt war on beauty, our task remains a daunting one. Not very long ago, church musicians faced the prospect of the wholesale destruction of the treasury of sacred music. Today, however, we are confronted with a more subtle problem: the lack of a clear vision for the preservation and fostering of that treasury in the post-conciliar era. In other words, even though we *can* now accomplish a great deal in our work, we are often unclear about

what, exactly, it is that we want to accomplish. And not only *what*, but *how*. That is the disconcerting side of new-found leadership responsibility! The task of answering such questions, though, is a crucial one. If we as pastors and musicians do not have a clear answer to these questions at a moment when there seems to be a widespread shift of momentum toward musi-

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cal and liturgical excellence, we may lose a golden opportunity to effect real and lasting improvement—or worse, we might actually do more harm than good.

There are many aspects of liturgy and music to consider when discerning the best path forward: the *ars celebrandi* of the priests, the formation of the lay faithful, physical aspects such as art, architecture, instruments, and acoustics; fundraising and budgets, and so forth. In terms of liturgical music, the central post-conciliar questions seem to revolve around the choir and congregation. Are the choir and congregation in conflict, or complementary? Which group should sing when? What repertoire

should the choir focus on? Should the choir sing alone at all, or only to support the congregation? At times, the documents themselves can seem maddeningly inconsistent. As I and many colleagues have found, getting to a position with great potential is only the first step. These central questions remain. Once you have resources and a supportive pastor, once you *can* accomplish a great deal with your choir, *what*, exactly should you accomplish? I will offer my thoughts on the matter here from both a theoretical and a practical standpoint, beginning with the official documents and ending with a discussion of the three principal choirs active at my cathedral. I hope that this treatment will be helpful to others seeking to clarify both short- and long-term vision and goals for their choirs.

### **Choral Integration in the Liturgy**

In any attempt to articulate a vision for liturgical choirs, it is all too easy to be content with two lesser goods—goods that are ultimately means rather than ends. First, there is the good of performative excellence, by which I mean high-quality blend, balance, tuning, diction, and so forth. Second is the good of excellence in repertoire, by which I mean using only the best repertoire from the church's treasury, informed by the church's emphasis on chant and polyphony. While these are both important things, and I take as given the fact that we should always strive for them, to my mind there is a more fundamental question that we often ignore: how does the choir integrate with the liturgy? As we know from the many fine secular choirs active today, excellence in quality and repertoire (and even a total dedication to chant and polyphony) is achievable without any reference whatever to sacred ritual,

## *The importance of musical-liturgical integration can already be seen at the beginning of the treatment of music in Sacrosanctum Concilium.*

or even sacred space. What sets the actual liturgical choir apart, then, is its integration with the liturgy. Excellence in quality and repertoire is pursued in order to better fulfill this liturgical role, and not as an end in itself.

The importance of musical-liturgical integration can already be seen at the beginning of the treatment of music in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

¶112. The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The translation used in this article is found at <[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html)>.

The first sentence of this paragraph is so often quoted that it has become something of a mantra for church musicians—and rightly so. Too often, though, we forget to consider the second and qualifying sentence. Sacred music is not simply the greatest art, period. Rather, it is the greatest art *because* it forms a necessary or integral part of the liturgy. Similarly, ¶114 of the constitution begins with a favorite quotable of choir directors:

The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently promoted, especially in cathedral churches.

Here again, it is important to remember not just *that* sacred music must be preserved and fostered, but *why* it is so important; namely, its function as part of the liturgy.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* ¶112 offers further insight into the matter in its third sentence:

Holy Scripture, indeed, has bestowed praise upon sacred song, and the same may be said of the fathers of the Church and of the Roman pontiffs who in recent times, led by St. Pius X, have explained more precisely the ministerial function supplied by sacred music in the service of the Lord.

Two examples of the explanations of pre-conciliar pontiffs seem particularly pertinent here. The first is the first paragraph of Pope St. Pius X's 1903 document *Tra le sollecitudini*:

Sacred music, being a complementary part of the solemn liturgy, partici-

pates in the general scope of the liturgy, which is the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. . . . [Sacred music's] principal office is to clothe with suitable melody the liturgical text proposed for the understanding of the faithful, its proper aim is to add greater efficacy to the text, in order that through it the faithful may be the more easily moved to devotion and better disposed for the reception of the fruits of grace belonging to the celebration of the most holy mysteries.<sup>2</sup>

Here we see that music's principal purpose is to give the texts of the liturgy a "suitable melody," thus increasing the impact of those texts on the faithful. A further pre-conciliar clarification of the term "integral" can be found in the 1958 document *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia*, which in ¶21 notes that "Everything which the liturgical books prescribe to be sung, either by the priest and his ministers, or by the choir or congregation, forms an integral part of the sacred liturgy."<sup>3</sup> To return to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, after referencing such pre-conciliar twentieth-century documents in its third sentence ¶112 continues with a fourth sentence:

Therefore sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites.

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<sup>2</sup>The translation used here is found at <<https://adoremus.org/1903/11/22/tra-le-sollecitudini/>>.

<sup>3</sup>The translation used here is found at <<https://adoremus.org/2007/12/31/Instruction-on-Sacred-Music/>>.

Thus, if we unpack this opening paragraph of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* regarding sacred music, and consider the pre-conciliar texts it references, we find a series of valuable principles:

1. Sacred music is the pre-eminent artistic treasure of the church.
2. Sacred music is pre-eminent chiefly because as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the liturgy.
3. The most truly integral words sacred music clothes are those given by the church in the liturgical books.
4. The more closely sacred music is connected with the liturgical action, the holier it is to be considered.

We can see from all of this that the question of liturgical-musical integration is not merely one consideration among many. Rather, the value and even holiness of sacred music is directly proportional to the intimacy of its integration with the liturgy.

This principle of integration can be applied to sacred music in general, but also and more specifically to the music of the choir. Thus, we could say that the value and even holiness of choral music (and by extension, the choir itself) is directly proportional to the intimacy of its integration with the liturgy. In this way *Sacrosanctum Concilium* gives us a golden standard by which we can measure our choirs: choral-liturgical integration. We now have an answer for an earlier question as well. Now that we are in charge and *can* accomplish what we want to, *what*, exactly, do we want to accomplish with our choirs? We certainly do want to establish a high-quality repertoire, and excellent performance standards. But more fundamen-

tally, we want our choirs to form a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.

### **What do the Terms “Necessary” and “Integral” Mean after Vatican II?**

It is worth taking a moment to consider the words “necessary” and “integral,” since they feature so prominently both in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and in my formulation of a choral ideal. In the pre-conciliar model, and still today in the extraordinary form, we see a clear legal treatment of sacred music at the High Mass, in which the ordinary and proper are both required. In this context, the concept of “necessary” and “integral” music is quite clear: the integral texts are legally necessary, and we merely have the question of who will sing what. The choir plays a necessary and integral role by singing those required texts assigned to it, according to the local practices of choral and congregational singing.

After Vatican II, in the ordinary form, we still have the integral texts of the Mass. However, the concept of “necessary” music is greatly changed. While the Mass ordinary is still legally necessary, the proper may be replaced by a variety of other options. The singing of many integral texts is a choice, rather than a necessity. Given this legal reality, it is easy to see how choirs quickly became seen as one liturgical choice among many after the council. With the congregation capable of singing the ordinary, and the proper replaced by hymns, there was, quite simply, no need for a choir. While some tend to see the eradication of church choirs as some kind of systematic attack, we should remember that prevailing practice had, in the strict sense, rendered choirs unnecessary. The eradication of choirs may have been rooted just as much in simple

pragmatism as in any hatred for tradition.

The clear question for us today is whether we have a compelling justification for the choir's continued existence in the post-conciliar situation. Is there any sense in which we can still say the choir is "necessary," given that it is no longer legally required? Certainly, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* did say that "choirs must be diligently promoted."<sup>4</sup> But why? What are they for? One flawed argument is that we need choirs to help lead congregational singing. In fact, this is not true. We all know from experience that a cantor and organ or other instrument, or no instrument, can also accomplish this. While many music programs give "leading congregational song" as the choir's chief reason for being, this is clearly an insufficient rationale. Choirs are capable of leading congregational singing, but not necessary for leading congregational song.

What is necessary about a choir, then? If we think about it, the only thing unique to the choir is its ability to sing complex settings of liturgical texts; settings that are beyond the musical capabilities of the congregation. In other words, if the choir never sings alone, then there is no compelling reason for it to exist! This statement would be a bit of a shock to liturgists, clergy, and congregants of a certain ideological bent, some of whom do in fact harbor a resentment of the choir's rightful liturgical role. Part of the effect of the cultural shift I mentioned at the beginning of this article, though, is an increasingly widespread acceptance of the unique liturgical contribution of the choir. In my experience, people who believe the choir should never sing alone are only found on the ideological fringes today.

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<sup>4</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶114.

The affirmation of the choir singing alone opens up some new avenues in the argument for choral necessity. The choir becomes an *aesthetic* necessity, adding beauty to the liturgy that the congregation could not supply on its own. The choir also plays a necessary role, as it fulfills the directive from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that "the treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care."<sup>5</sup> Clearly, much of that treasure is choral in nature, and without the choir will not be preserved or fostered at all. Thus, we have also added some legal weight to the argument for the choir. Although the rubrics of the ordinary form do not require choral involvement, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* certainly does require the existence of choirs to preserve and foster the treasury of sacred music. It would seem that after Vatican II, the choir is still a legal and aesthetic necessity.

### **Flaws in the Argument from Necessity and the Treasury**

At this point, it appears that we have all the justification we need to continue building liturgical choirs. We have to be careful, however, because it is all too easy to stop our critical thinking process with a simple quotation from *Sacrosanctum Concilium* ¶114. As it turns out, though, on closer examination the argument from aesthetic necessity and the necessity of the treasury shows some weak points.

First of all, aesthetics is a notoriously difficult concept to define and apply concretely. For example, a classic retort to our necessary-choir argument is that the faithful assembly singing with one voice is actually more beautiful than (or at least, just

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

as beautiful as) any choir could be. One could further support this line of thinking with references to liturgical history before the age of the Roman *schola cantorum*, and to the liturgical reform movement of the twentieth century. The bottom line is that the faithful assembly singing together is, in fact, a very beautiful thing, and a thing mentioned many times in both the pre- and post-conciliar documents in glowing terms. Thus, the liturgy clearly does not *need* the choir in order to be worthily and beautifully celebrated. There is also a difficulty with the treasury. *Musicam Sacram* tells us the following:

¶53. As regards the [musical] heritage that has been handed down those parts which correspond to the needs of the renewed liturgy should first be brought to light. Competent experts in this field must then carefully consider whether other parts can be adapted to the same needs. As for those pieces which do not correspond to the nature of the liturgy or cannot be harmonized with the pastoral celebration of the liturgy—they may be profitably transferred to popular devotions, especially to celebrations of the word of God.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the treasure, or treasury, of sacred music is not uniform. Rather, the church tells us that some parts of the treasury are more valuable than other parts in light of the nature of the liturgy, and of recent liturgical reforms. Further, one mode of preserving and fostering the treasure of sacred music is actually to transfer portions out of the lit-

urgy entirely—to devotions and presumably to concerts as well. The argument from the treasury is easily countered and sidetracked by the reply that this or that portion of the treasury is no longer liturgically useful, and is best enjoyed and preserved extra-liturgically. Further, one might argue that the treasury is in fact preserved and fostered when the approachable portions of it (such as ancient hymns and chant Mass ordinaries) are sung by the congregation.

The aesthetic argument and argument from the treasury also both fail to take into account which texts are being sung. Yet, we have seen how critical it is for music to set the integral texts of the liturgy; those texts most closely connected with the liturgical action. We often criticize the use of freely-chosen hymn texts instead of the integral texts of the liturgy as one of the principal failings of post-conciliar liturgical practice. At the same time, we often proceed to freely choose anthem or motet texts for the choir to sing. Do we accept a double standard here, simply because the choral choice is more aesthetically pleasing, or simply because the piece in question is a valued part of the church's treasury of sacred music? If we are not careful, our prevailing choral practice will be turned right back on us when we try to argue from the treasury and from aesthetics. And maybe that is only just! We cannot argue that we need choirs to sing the treasury of sacred music beautifully, and then turn around and ignore that most fundamental aspect of sacred music: the integral text which it clothes with melody. In any case, we should understand that the argument purely from aesthetics and the treasury is an incomplete justification for the existence of the choir.

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<sup>6</sup>The translation used here is found at <<https://adoremus.org/1967/03/05/musicam-sacram/>>.

## Developing an Integral and Necessary Choir

I have dwelt here on the flaws of the argument from the treasury and the argument from aesthetics, because in my experience these are very often uncritically accepted as complete and compelling (albeit generally in more traditional circles). Thus, we often hear and cheer rallying cries for beauty, and for the restoration of the patrimony of sacred music, and for the building of choirs. This is all well and good, but it is also incomplete. Chanticleer or *Pomerium* or *Stile Antico* or a dozen other famous ensembles might give flawlessly beautiful performances of the great gems of the polyphonic treasury this week—and in sacred spaces, no less! As church musicians, however, we cannot be content with building a music program and repertoire saturated with chant and polyphony and other important works from the treasury, however beautifully sung. Put another way, after enduring decades of low-quality music we cannot claim triumph merely because we have at last transitioned entirely to excellent music. Rather, we have to begin and end with a more fundamental question: is the music we make liturgically integral and necessary? In practice, there are two primary ways we can move toward this ultimate goal.

The first is the most obvious: the most foolproof way to ensure that the choir sings integral music is to choose musical settings of the integral texts of the Mass. Since the ordinary texts are already generally sung, this most often means making greater efforts to include musical settings of the proper texts.

The second way choral singing can be integral is by playing a truly important liturgical role—a role closely connected to

the liturgical action. In practice, this means that we shift our priorities away from choral preludes or postludes, or even post-communion meditations.<sup>7</sup> We also avoid “token” statements of the propers—for example a short chant preceding or following a large-scale congregational hymn or choral anthem. Instead, we move toward choral music that accompanies the liturgical processions in their entirety (at the entrance, gospel, offertory, and communion), or presents integral texts in their entirety to the congregation—for example, the gradual and sequence. In this way we move the choir from the periphery of the liturgical action, to a more central role.

In the process of becoming more liturgically integral, the choir also becomes more necessary. As regards the texts, given the impractical nature of congregational propers, the choir is necessary for the continued liturgical existence of a major body of integral texts. In other words, many integral texts will never be clothed with suitable melody, or heard at all, unless the choir takes on this responsibility. This fact should not surprise us since, from a historical perspective, we know that the choir exists for the propers and propers for the choir. This is true whether one accepts James McKinnon’s thesis that the proper chants were cre-

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<sup>7</sup>Post-communion motets are an optional addition (there is no post-communion proper). Some would also argue that GIRM article 88 precludes the use of a choral post-communion piece: “When the distribution of Communion is over, if appropriate, the Priest and faithful pray quietly for some time. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the whole congregation.” GIRM text available at <<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/general-instruction-of-the-roman-missal/girm-chapter-2.cfm>>.

ated as a compositional project of the Roman *schola cantorum* over a relatively short period of time in the seventh century, or whether we instead side with Peter Jeffrey's view that there was a longer organic development of the specialist (choral or cantatorial) proper tradition—a development centered on monastic choirs and practice after the fourth century.<sup>8</sup> In either case, the origin of the specialist musician or musicians and origin of the proper repertoire are closely connected historically. And today, just as much as before the council, we can say that the choir is necessary for the continued life of the Mass-Propers tradition.

On a more subjective level, the choir *seems* more necessary when it plays an integral liturgical role. The quick statement of a proper before the true 'meat' of the offertory or communion music (in the form of a hymn) feels in some sense disposable—and even at times aesthetically incongruous.

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<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of the foundation of the Roman schola see James W. McKinnon, *The Advent Project: The Later-Seventh-Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 84–89. For a summary of McKinnon's position on proper composition, see *Advent Project*, 1–3, 14–15, and chapter 14. For a critique of McKinnon, see Peter Jeffrey, "The Advent Project: The Later-Seventh-Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 56, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 169–179. Jeffrey also argues for a longer specialist musical tradition in his criticism of what he calls the "pastoral' revision of chant history"—an overgeneralized attempt by Liturgical Movement pioneers such as Joseph Gelineau to describe the rise of the schola cantorum as a sudden departure from the ancient Christian congregational singing tradition. See Peter Jeffrey, *Re-envisioning Past Musical Culture: Ethnomusicology in the Study of Gregorian Chant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 76–86.

*On a more subjective level, the choir seems more necessary when it plays an integral liturgical role.*

However, the regular experience of a full procession covered by choral music gives a very different impression. The choir's singing becomes a substantial part of the liturgical music at Mass, playing an honored, significant role. Something is felt to be missing when the choir is not present. This impression, while not adding any legal weight to the choir's role, is critical from a cultural perspective. The congregation and clergy learn a great deal about why we have choirs—and why we value them—through this lived liturgical experience. In the long run, both the objective fact of the proper texts and the subjective experience of truly integrated music will play important roles in the re-establishment of a "necessary" Catholic choral tradition.

All of this said, we do have to remember that, while integral, the propers are only one of the choices for sacred music at Mass. We also have to remember that having the choir sing at key moments is, ultimately, a choice rather than a requirement. Thus, post-Vatican II in the ordinary form, we will never find the same level of black-and-white *legal* necessity present before the council at the



High Mass.<sup>9</sup> Instead, we have to accept that choral “necessity” after Vatican II exists on a spectrum. Still, by acknowledging that spectrum and looking farther along it, we can craft a more compelling vision for the choir—a vision that provides clear direction and better withstands criticism. For example, based on the conciliar documents and the reality of the post-conciliar liturgical situation, I can formulate the following principle:

- the value of a Catholic liturgical choir is directly proportional to the quantity, prominence, and liturgical appropriateness of its integral-text-singing.

This principle, grounded in the discussion in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the nature of sacred music, is a foundation upon which we can build other important principles:

- the choir’s integral text singing should be of a high aesthetic quality;
- the choir’s integral text singing should preserve and foster the church’s treasure of sacred music, with a special emphasis on chant and polyphony;
- the choir’s integral text singing should balance in some way with the congregation’s singing.

The correct ordering of these principles is

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<sup>9</sup>For what it is worth, we should also avoid an overly-optimistic view of the pre-conciliar choral situation. The choir was necessary at High Mass, yes, but the High Mass itself was not required! The inevitable result in many situations was a preponderance of Low Masses, one of the very things the Liturgical Movement sought to remedy. In that sense, there was a real precedent after Vatican II for the idea that choirs are optional.

critically important. Rather than the icing on the cake for our music program of excellent choirs and excellent repertoire, liturgical integration is the foundation. Liturgical integration is the reason our choirs exist in the first place—and the chief reason that sacred music is the pre-eminent artistic treasure of the church.

It will hopefully be clear from this discussion of principles that a well-constructed intellectual framework for our choral leadership is essential. What is at stake here is not just what we do with our choirs, but how we explain and justify their very existence (and by extension, the investment of time, personnel, and money in choral programs). Even if the pendulum has begun to swing towards traditional music lately, we can never take the current situation for granted. We have to resist the temptation simply to bask in a perceived resurgence of beauty and tradition, or in the ability to finally be able to schedule quality music at our parish. Instead, our task at the moment is to begin to rebuild, to re-establish, an authentically integral and necessary Catholic choral tradition. To be clear, we cannot reach this goal if we are content merely with better aesthetics and a more consistent reliance on the church’s treasury of sacred music.

### **The Elephant in the Room (the Choral Ordinary vs. the Choral Proper)**

Before I move on to some practical examples from my own cathedral choirs I want to briefly mention something that is at the least a central question, and at times even a central controversy in the field of Catholic sacred music: the case of the choral ordinary. One obvious way to incorporate necessary and integral music of great quality

is to have the choir sing the Mass ordinary. At first glance, the choral ordinary even seems to be the most logical choice of repertoire. After all, while the proper is almost entirely optional, the ordinary is still legally necessary in the post-conciliar liturgy. In addition, the treasury of choral ordinaries is vast and of undisputed aesthetic quality and cultural value. It would seem that the choir and the ordinary are a match made in heaven—the best combination for the renewal of sacred choral traditions.

Upon further examination, however, the choral ordinary carries with it a number of troubling issues. I will give just one brief example: If the choir sings the ordinary, then who sings the proper? Also the choir? But *Musicam Sacram* says that “the usage of entrusting to the choir alone the entire singing of the whole proper and of the whole ordinary, to the complete exclusion of the people’s participation in the singing, is to be deprecated” (§16c). Thus, it would seem that a choral ordinary should be balanced with a congregational proper. But do we have a viable option for the weekly singing of at least three new texts by the musically untrained lay faithful? Possibly, although the aesthetic and even textual sacrifices necessary to make continually changing propers accessible to the congregation are daunting, to say the least. The more likely practical reality is that the Mass proper will be sung either by the choir or not at all. Yet both options are poor ones; the former because of the conflict with *Musicam Sacram*, and the latter because an entire set of integral texts is ignored. The choral ordinary seems to create an immediate tension between two central principles of twentieth-century liturgical reform: the principal of singing integral texts and the

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group.*

principle of balancing choral and congregational singing.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, if the choir sings the proper and the congregation sings the ordinary we have a natural balance of singing that plays

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<sup>10</sup>It may be argued that the proscription in *Musicam Sacram* §16 does not apply to every Mass; it is a general guideline. As long as some Masses each Sunday allow for congregational singing, it is ok to have one choral Mass where everything is sung by the choir. In response, I have to ask: when is it possible to entrust the ordinary and proper to the choir, except at the choral Mass (or Masses)? It seems clear to me that in this instance the document can only be referring to those few Masses with choirs present. Thus, this is a comment specifically directed toward choir Masses, not a general guideline for all parish Masses. It could also be argued that it is acceptable to include a full choral ordinary and proper, as long as it is not every week—perhaps only at one or two high solemnities during the year. This also seems illogical to me; as if we are arguing “it’s ok—we only do the thing deprecated by *Musicam Sacram* at Christmas and Easter!” Personally, I find §16c very clear, and its message very difficult to mitigate or reason past.

to the strengths of each group—the choir’s ability to sing new, complex music and the congregation’s ability to become comfortable with recurring music. In addition, we know that the ordinary chants are generally simpler, syllabic, and more conducive to congregational singing, while the proper chants are more intricate and specialist in origin and content. Thus, the chant repertoire itself points toward a certain solution. The development of polyphony even supports this approach: we know that the first important polyphonic compositions were settings of proper rather than ordinary texts. While a 500- to 600-year outlook on the historical repertoire elevates the polyphonic ordinary to an unquestionable prominence, a broader 1500- to 2000-year perspective levels the playing field between choral ordinary and proper.

This is just one line of thinking that points me toward the choral proper rather than the choral ordinary. There is certainly more—I have written a dissertation and now two articles in *Sacred Music* on the topic, in an attempt to scratch the surface! For more discussion, I encourage you to read an exchange of four articles between William Mahrt and myself in *Sacred Music*.<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>11</sup>The first exchange: *Sacred Music*, 142, no. 1 (Spring 2015). The articles in question are: Jared Ostermann, “Twentieth-Century Reform and the Transition from a ‘Parallel’ to a ‘Sequential’ Liturgical Model: Implications for the Inherited Choral Repertoire and Future Liturgical Compositions,” 8–21; and William Mahrt, “The Choral Ordinary in the Ordinary Form,” 22–29. The second exchange: *Sacred Music*, 142, no. 2, (Summer 2015). The articles in question are: Jared Ostermann, “The Case against the Choral Ordinary in the Ordinary Form,” 26–37; and William Mahrt, “Singing the Ordinary of the Mass: A Response to Jared Ostermann,” 38–45. Both of the above volumes are available

those articles Mahrt responds to my reservations but comes to a different conclusion, more in favor of the choral ordinary. I think it is an important exchange not so much because I am part of it, but because it takes place between two individuals who both appreciate the aesthetic and spiritual value of choral ordinary settings in the liturgy. I certainly do not criticize choral ordinaries out of any clichéd worries about choirs singing too much, or the liturgy going too long, or turning into a concert. I do think, though, that if we accept the core principle that the choir’s chief role is to sing integral liturgical texts, then we have an obligation to seriously consider the next obvious question: which texts should we prioritize? I would never criticize a fellow music director for resolving this question differently than I do. I would, however, be concerned if he or she had not given serious thought to the matter. In my experience, the question of choral ordinary and proper is a critical fork in the road. How we resolve the question tends to determine both our short- and long-term liturgical and choral vision. While much more could be said on the matter, and I encourage colleagues to give it further consideration, I will proceed from the assumption that the choral proper is the best path forward.

### **Practical Examples from My Own Cathedral Choirs**

I will conclude this article with some remarks regarding my three cathedral choirs. In my experience most parish choirs fall into one of these three general categories. The major exception is the children’s choir, which we

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free online at: <<http://musicasacra.com/journal/archives/>>.

do not currently have in my parish. I hope these observations bring the discussion to a more practical realm, and also soften what can seem like a harsh or unattainable set of principles. I want to make clear that I have outlined these principles in order to provide a general direction or set of goals for Catholic choirs—I don't claim to have reached the ideal yet myself, by any means! Still, here is some of what I have encountered in the past five years at my cathedral. Hopefully you will recognize some of these challenges and opportunities in your own work.

### **Practical Example 1: The Large SATB Adult Choir**

Typically, the principal parish choir is a large SATB adult choir of amateur volunteer singers of mixed musical background and ability. I inherited such an ensemble upon arrival at my current position, although a previous director's fifty-year tenure made for a difficult period of transition both for myself and for the choir members! After the inevitable trials and tribulations in the first two years the cathedral choir now functions very well. It is comprised of a strong core of long-term members, newer recruits, and a contingent of talented paid choral scholars drawn from area universities.

An ensemble of this kind presents interesting challenges. First of all, the choir usually has a long-standing repertoire, often beloved by the members. I was lucky to inherit a repertoire which included many valuable works from the church's treasury. Pieces such as the Mozart *Ave verum*, the Palestrina *Sicut cervus*, the Casals *O vos omnes*, and the Duruflé *Ubi caritas* were known to the point of memorization by most of the choir. At the same time, the repertoire included various other works of

questionable liturgical value. Thus, the initial process was one of (hopefully) prudent sifting of the repertoire—always with the goal of balancing liturgical suitability and the musical desires and enjoyment of the choir members. Without the trust of these volunteers, which had to be earned over time, the entire enterprise would have fallen apart overnight (and the director would have been out of a job!). This situation is not atypical with well-established adult choirs. The challenge for the director is to engage with and improve the repertoire situation, without destroying the human connections and relationships that make the choir possible in the first place. Practically speaking, this means that building a high-quality repertoire must be a slow and careful process. Each year brings certain discreet retirements from, and careful additions to, the music library.

The musical background of the typical parish adult choir also presents unique challenges. I have found that the hardest thing of all for amateur singers is maintaining the integrity of independent vocal lines. Counting always seems to be harder for these singers than learning melodies, tuning, or blending. In short: truly polyphonic music is the most difficult genre for the standard parish choir to perform. Chant also presents a challenge, with its new (to the choir) notation system and subtle rhythmic nuances that are difficult to impart to a large group. Neither chant nor polyphony is impossible for this kind of choir; however, both genres require significant investments of time and energy for a small musical result. In contrast, choir and organ music from the European Romantic and English Cathedral traditions in particular is a perfect fit for this kind of choir.

Even the *a cappella* works from these later eras tend to be more homophonic and approachable for the amateur choir. In addition, the drama and melodic appeal of later compositions are often more enjoyable for the choir members. Many examples come to my mind, such as the clear climaxes of the Bruckner *Os justi* or *Ave Maria*, or the beautiful melodies of the Gounod, Elgar, and Mozart *Ave verum* settings. Generally, for both practical and political reasons it is easier to focus the parish adult choir on a repertoire weighted toward more recent compositions rather than toward chant and polyphony. Yet, as we know, the chant and polyphonic repertoires are the most likely to include the integral texts of the liturgy.

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How, then, do we make the typical parish choir more integral and necessary? To begin with, I have to admit that this is a daunting task. The temptation is strong merely to improve the quality of repertoire and quality of performance of this ensemble and consider my job complete. But as we have seen, mere aesthetic improvement does not necessarily constitute true liturgical progress. The process of bringing the choir ever closer to the liturgy involves careful consideration, not only of aesthetics, but also of pastoral reality, text selection, and choral traditions. The first step, for me,

was the careful inspecting of known repertoire in order to determine and focus on the most valuable portions. I then attempted to arrange this repertoire as much as possible according to the specific texts of the proper chants. In some cases, an exact match was available. For instance, the Duruflé *Ubi caritas* was a staple of the choir's repertoire. Yet, for some reason it had never been used as the offertory chant on Holy Thursday! Simply by moving the piece to Holy Thursday, it was possible to include a true choral proper during Holy Week with no fuss or hassle. As another example, the Handel *Worthy is the Lamb*, from *The Messiah*, was an old standard for the choir. I was able to schedule this piece as the choral introit for the Solemnity of Christ the King. In other (more common) cases, there was a close, but not exact, connection. For example, the Bruckner *Os justi* was already a beloved part of the choir's repertoire. The text (*Os justi meditabitur sapientiam: et lingua ejus loquetur judicium. Lex Dei ejus in corde ipsius: et non supplantabuntur gressus ejus. Alleluia*) can be translated as follows: "The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just. The law of his God is in his heart: and his feet do not falter."<sup>12</sup> On the Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time the offertory proper (*Meditabor in mandatis tuis . . .*) can be translated: "I shall meditate upon your commandments which I greatly love; I will extend my hands towards your commandments which I love."<sup>13</sup> In addition, the communion proper

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<sup>12</sup>Translation from <[www.cpld.org](http://www.cpld.org)>.

<sup>13</sup>There are no official translations of the Offertory texts; this translation was taken from the Solesmes Gregorian Missal for Sundays, p. 574, available online at <<http://media.musicasacra.com/books/gregorianmissal-eng.pdf>>.

for Ash Wednesday (*Qui meditatibitur . . .*) can be translated as follows: “He who meditates day and night on the law of the Lord, shall bear fruit in due season.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, the offertory proper for the Second Sunday of Lent is again *Meditabor in mandatis tuis*. The choir in no way minded singing this favorite selection three times during the year, so I scheduled it for all three of these days (minus the closing alleluia during Lent, of course). Not a perfect solution, to be sure, but still a way to bring the choir’s music closer to the liturgy quickly and painlessly. At times, naturally, the connections were not this close—in which case, it was simply a matter of settling for appropriate and hopefully high-quality repertoire on a particular day.

In the process of scrutinizing our existing repertoire in this way, I learned two important things. First, that there was a great deal of value already present in the choir’s known repertoire—especially when it was more carefully matched to the liturgical texts and actions. I believe that every choir director willing to make this careful propers-based examination of the choral library will find many useful connections with the official texts. In fact, this is probably the most helpful first step for any music director starting in a new position or attempting to reinvigorate his or her approach to choral programming. At least in my case, this process improved my knowledge of the choir and its repertoire, as well as my familiarity with the propers themselves. The second important insight I gained was a clear understanding of the gaps in our repertoire. By thoroughly studying the propers throughout the choir year, I could see the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

most pressing needs in terms of new repertoire. For example, soon after my arrival the solemnity of All Saints fell on a Sunday. I realized the summer before that we did not have any setting of the Beatitudes (the communion proper for All Saints) in our repertoire. This allowed me to prioritize the Arvo Pärt Beatitudes in our fall rehearsal schedule. I could give other examples, but I want to avoid being too specific here—each music director has to explore the available repertoire with an eye to the specific size and abilities of the parish choir in question. The important thing is that the propers can give a clear sense of direction to the repertoire selection and planning process. They can guide our arrangement of the choir’s existing repertoire, as well as our rehearsal plans throughout the year. This process of sifting and re-arranging known repertoire, coupled with a steady series of useful additions, can lead us slowly but surely closer to the ideal of a truly integral choir.

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In addition to improving the specific repertoire in use at a parish, we can also change choral practices during the liturgy. I was fortunate in this regard, since it was

already parish practice to have the choir sing during offertory and during or after communion. In some situations, especially those where priests or liturgists have long substituted personal ideology for actual church legislation, the very idea of a choral offertory or communion piece may have to be carefully introduced to a parish. In my case I was able to start by simply refining and re-arranging repertoire during offertory and communion. The first major change in praxis I introduced was the phasing out of communion hymns in favor of communion propers at all Masses. I began with the *Simple English Propers*, but soon transitioned to my own settings—English translations meant for congregational singing, with choir or cantor singing the appropriate psalm verses in between. The important thing was that the choir could lead the singing of the communion antiphon during most of the communion procession every week. The antiphon is followed by organ improvisation while the choir receives communion, then the choir's post-communion piece (which is also as closely matched to the proper as possible, as described above). Typically, the choir's post-communion meditation covers the very end of the congregational procession and the purification of the vessels, and ends when the priest is seated. In this way we always offer the congregation ample opportunity to participate in singing the communion proper (and give the proper pride of place), without impeding the ability of the choir to sing alone during communion.

This is the current situation at my parish, tailored to where we have been and to the particular lengths of time involved in our processions. Other music directors and pastors will need to find solutions specific

to their own buildings, congregation size, and choir. Still, I think that the refinement of the choir's involvement at offertory and communion is the most productive short-term goal. Certain extreme cases aside, it is nearly always possible to let the choir sing at these times without any undue backlash from the congregation. The music director simply needs to seek continual improvement in what the choir sings during these processions.

What is the next step for our parish choir? The question looms large, as I become increasingly content with the quality of our choral offertory and communion. It is certainly tempting to focus more and more of our energy on choral ordinary settings, especially Classical- and Romantic-era settings that would fit well with our skill level. However, as discussed above, I see the choral proper as the best path forward. The next major undertaking, then (assuming there is an ongoing refinement of the offertory and communion repertoire), would be to assign another proper to the choir each week. Unfortunately, in most places there is a significant cultural barrier to the choir singing for more than the offertory and communion processions. Leaving aside the gospel verse for a moment, the two remaining propers are the introit and gradual. This means that either the congregational responsorial psalm or the entrance hymn must give way in order for the choir to sing another proper. Replacing either with a choral piece can be a dangerous proposition for choir director and pastor! Still, the choral introit and gradual are both entirely licit options in our current rubrics. The sung Mass with dialogues, responses, and congregational ordinary certainly does balance choral and congregational singing, even when the entirety of

the proper is taken by the choir. It is also worth noting that very large spaces or very slow processions with incense can often allow ample liturgical time for both introit and congregational hymn. For those willing to brave the pastoral dangers, the choral introit and gradual are the next logical step forward.

Naturally, any major change in choral praxis should most likely be a gradual one (no pun intended) focusing on one proper or the other first before moving to the second, perhaps even years later. As I see it, though, the true ideal and future of the choir in the post-conciliar liturgy is the fully-choral Mass proper. Whatever particular logistical solutions we find, we as music directors or pastors simply must find ways of successfully navigating the cultural difficulties involved. This work is central to rebuilding an authentic and liturgically-integral Catholic choral tradition. In our parish we are contemplating the next small step in this direction this fall, with a choral introit covering the procession from the sacristy to the rear of the cathedral, followed by the congregational hymn as the procession moves down the nave to the sanctuary. We are also considering switching the order of these two pieces. We have already incorporated choral introits to the exclusion of a hymn on Christ the King Sunday and on All Souls Day, with an appreciative response from the congregation. Thus, although we will proceed carefully, the potential for a new (or *renewed*) choral praxis may be greater than we think.

In addition to cultural headwinds, the primary ongoing challenge for large amateur choirs is the lack of approachable yet aesthetically-pleasing proper repertoire. A great deal of the proper repertoire is complex Renaissance polyphony, which my

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choir simply cannot prepare and sing on a constant weekly basis. There is a desperate need for worthy proper repertoire that a skilled amateur choir could navigate each week. The English anthem tradition, and especially music for the Anglican Divine Office by composers such as Stanford, Wood, and Wesley, seem to me to provide a good model here. But, there are no doubt other good models and solutions to fit the skill levels of different choirs. Regardless, we need composers to step forward and fill this void today. Until we begin to see fresh cycles of choral propers emerge (whether grouped by day or by proper type), we will be limited to the imperfect process described above. We will have to continue to cobble together choral pieces from many different sources and with various original intended uses—anthems, motets, devotional pieces,



oratorio movements, etc.—and match these works as well as we can with the church’s liturgy. Certainly, this work can be aesthetically and spiritually rewarding, and will usually represent a noteworthy improvement on what came before. However, to take the final steps toward an ideal based on the nature of sacred music, we will need composers capable of clothing the words of the liturgy with suitable melody in this time and place. In short, we need worthy repertoire custom-tailored to the choral situations and skill-levels most of us face from day to day.

All of this said, I do believe that every parish choir can and should make a steady improvement in its repertoire and level of liturgical integration to the best of its abilities. I think that any improvement in this area will be aesthetically and spiritually rewarding both for the singers and for the congregations they serve. There is plenty of good work to be done while we look and wait for (and perhaps attempt to write) compositions specific to our needs.

### **Practical Example 2: The Chant *Schola***

In many cases, the available choir (or one available choir) in a parish is a *schola* devoted to Gregorian chant. These ensembles have the advantage of singing unison music, and can thus be fairly small and easy to manage. In many cases the chant *schola* is the first logical addition to a parish music program comprised of a larger mixed choir like the one described above. In my case, I inherited a men’s *schola* that was founded as a chant *schola* but, for various reasons, had drifted mostly toward TTBB music from various sources. In addition, when singing chant the *schola* had used modern-notation sources such as the Pius X hymnal. Thus,

the members did not read square-note chant notation.

The first step I took was a critical examination of the repertoire, as described above for my SATB choir. The repertoire in this case was much smaller, partly because good TTBB sacred compositions are more difficult to find than SATB works. The choir also faced the same challenge as the larger SATB cathedral choir, in that Renaissance polyphony was difficult for its amateur singers to master. This greatly limited its access to one of the primary sources of excellent music for low voices. Interestingly, the move away from chant had served to limit the *schola*’s options instead of expanding them.

From my first rehearsal with the *schola* I began to reintroduce chant. With the exception of one member who loudly berated me and then quit after the first day, never to be heard from again, the singers approached the chant enthusiastically. I even heard from more than one singer who had originally joined to sing chant, and appreciated the re-introduction of that repertoire. We started with the *Simple English Propers* for the first year, beginning with communion chants. This allowed us to learn the basics of chant notation without also dealing with a language barrier. The next step was to move into the full *Graduale* chants, beginning with the communion chant, followed by some larger introits and offertories. By the third year the men’s *schola* was chanting the communion chant with verses during the entire communion procession each week, as well as chanting the offertory during Advent and Lent, and often the introit as a prelude piece. During this year I was confident enough in their abilities to begin posting the Latin text and translations in our seasonal liturgy guides well ahead of

time. By the fourth year we were proficient enough to sing the offertory chant from the *Graduale* (with through-composed rather than simple chant verses) for the entire offertory procession, and the communion chant with verses for the entire communion procession, every single Sunday. The next logical step, as mentioned above, is to incorporate the introit during the entrance procession in some way. During all of this time, I should note, the *schola* also learned and polished various pieces in TTBB configuration—as time and personnel allowed (finding true high tenors is always a particular challenge). This music provided the singers and the congregation some welcome stylistic variety.

The benefits of a chant *schola*, from the perspective of choral-liturgical integration, are enormous. The many challenges in repertoire and programming discussed above for the SATB choir disappear entirely with the chant *schola*. The *schola's* repertoire, taken mostly from the *Graduale*, consists almost entirely of integral texts sung at the appropriate liturgical time. There is a real beauty to simply opening the chant book of the church each week, and singing what is assigned to the day!

Given that the goal of textual integration with the liturgy is almost automatically accomplished with a chant *schola*, I will just mention our approach to choral praxis with this ensemble. First of all, I was fortunate to inherit a situation in which the chant *schola* is responsible for its own Mass. This means that the chant *schola* does not share liturgical time with a larger mixed ensemble, as is the case in many places, and can sing without displacing (or making way for) other choral repertoire. Building on this opportunity, I insisted from very early

on that the *schola* could carry full processions on its own—beginning with communion and expanding to offertory. Thus, we avoided the common pitfall of relegating the chant *schola* to short statements of a proper before or after the main offertory or communion music. Instead, Gregorian chant is heard for the entirety of two substantial processions and has true pride of place every Sunday at the *schola* Mass. This also moves the chant *schola* farther along the spectrum toward truly necessary and integral liturgical involvement.

I should note here that I do not mean to denigrate the common practice of including a chant proper before or after a hymn or choral anthem. In many cases this can be a helpful and non-combative first step; a way of beginning to introduce chant propers. I have certainly done it myself. I would simply caution against seeing this practice as an ideal endpoint for a fully-developed music program. It seems to me that when we sing a unison *a cappella* chant before or after an organ-accompanied, louder, and more impressive hymn or anthem, we are not giving chant a real chance to shine in the liturgy—not allowing this repertoire true pride of place. It is true that in very large churches there is often sufficient time to allow for multiple repertoires at each lengthy procession. Assuming there is sufficient time, skillful organ improvisation can also help bridge the stylistic gap between chant and more recent repertoires such as hymns or anthems. In addition, the incensation of the altar during the offertory and entrance processions can create a need for more repertoire. More often than not, though, the amount of liturgical time available necessitates a more reductive choice. The typical Sunday offertory at my cathedral, for exam-

ple, will only accommodate one significant piece (a chant proper, hymn or choral piece). In such cases, I would encourage colleagues to make that one piece a chant proper for the entire procession. If possible, allow the *schola* responsibility for its own Mass each Sunday. If all choirs sing at the same Mass, consider ways in which chant can retain true pride of place alongside other repertoire. Perhaps assigning different propers or processions to different choirs is the best option. For instance, the choral Mass practice each week could be a chant gradual and communion procession, paired with an SATB introit and offertory. Whatever the particular solutions in our local situations, I believe that the chant *schola* and its repertoire can play a central and substantial role in our liturgies. Do not underestimate the potential of this ensemble at your parish!

### **Practical Example 3: The Polyphonic *Schola Cantorum***

The third common type of choir is the *schola cantorum*—a skilled, small group that can sing Renaissance polyphony at a high level without excessive rehearsal time. Usually this kind of ensemble is made up of advanced singers such as professional vocalists, fellow music directors, or music majors at area universities. Often the paid section leaders of a larger parish choir will sing together as the *schola cantorum*, either at their own liturgies or concerts, or even at the same liturgy as the regular choir. In other cases this small paid ensemble is the primary parish choir. My experience was somewhat different. Given that I already had choirs assigned to the two principal Masses on Sunday, I formed my *schola cantorum* specifically to sing Vespers (our current cathedral practice is to have choral Vespers with the bishop

on Sundays in Advent and Lent). Before sharing our approach to Vespers, though, I would like to consider what this kind of ensemble can contribute to the Mass.

As discussed above, the most important repertoire of choral Mass Propers (outside of the chant repertoire itself) is found in collections of Renaissance music. Much of this repertoire remains out of reach for the typical parish choir, due to the skill level of the musicians. On the other hand, the semi-professional ensemble has the unique ability and opportunity to explore this polyphonic proper repertoire. This ability opens up an extensive and artistically-worthy body of choral works integral to the Mass (most notably the *Gradualia* of Byrd, the *Choralis Constantinus* of Heinrich Isaac, and the offertories of Palestrina and Lassus). Thus, if one has the opportunity to build a music program from scratch, and the resources to field such an ensemble weekly, the transition to prominent choral propers can be accomplished relatively quickly and with a high level of musical quality. The professional or semi-professional *schola*, either alone or in conjunction with a chant *schola*, certainly provides the easiest and most fool-proof path toward a choral ideal at Mass. If there is a pitfall, it is that the director will be satisfied with excellent repertoire sung with a high level of polish—and forget the more fundamental goal of singing integral texts. Given the wealth of proper repertoire available to a proficient polyphonic choir, there is really no reason to make music selections for the *schola cantorum* using the same imperfect methods we might for an amateur choir. As beautiful as the music in question might be, the non-integral *schola cantorum* is possibly the greatest lost opportunity in church music today.

In my own case, it was not possible (or desirable) to supplant our two regular choirs, each with its own Sunday Mass. In addition, this is a volunteer *schola cantorum*, and the available local talent generally had other Sunday morning responsibilities and leadership roles. For those reasons, the *schola cantorum* at our cathedral became associated primarily with Vespers. Since this liturgical assignment is not uncommon for a *schola cantorum*, I will offer some brief observations specific to Vespers. First and foremost, I very often see Vespers turn into a sort of freely-crafted choral evening prayer service, loosely based on the official layout of the Divine Office. Even in places which follow the official Liturgy of the Hours closely, I often see the choir “featured” primarily in a freely-chosen motet or two. The services I have in mind are often extremely high in quality and beautiful, and certainly are appropriate to the sacred space. However, I would suggest that a more “integral and necessary” approach to Vespers should focus on the received texts of the Catholic liturgy. Certainly, the Magnificat, the psalms, the office hymn, and the responsories offer ample opportunity for the choir and for fostering the treasure of sacred music, without any need for freely-chosen “choir feature” motets.

In my current position, I insisted from the start that the *schola* sing a polyphonic Magnificat at each Vespers—thus making an integral and necessary contribution. This is supplemented by polyphonic *alternatim* settings of the appropriate Office hymns for the day, and by settings of the seasonal Marian antiphon as a recessional. The *schola* also sits divided in order to lead antiphonal singing of the psalmody, which is chanted by all present in English to simple psalm

tones. There are many other opportunities moving forward, found in polyphonic settings of the psalms, responsories, and antiphons. In some cases, it may be preferable to pair a polyphonic antiphon with a simply chanted text, rather than the reverse. For example, at a choral vespers for *Corpus Christi* I have used a polyphonic setting of the Magnificat antiphon (*O sacrum convivium*), to frame a chanted Magnificat. Whatever the particular local solutions, the Liturgy of the Hours offers vast and mostly unexplored possibilities for a liturgical choir—particularly an ensemble proficient in chant and polyphony.

In addition to these practical opportunities, choral Vespers often offers us a golden political opportunity. I always feel a sense of relief when preparing choral Vespers, because the liturgy is so seldom used in Catholic parishes. This fact is sad, in a way, but it also means that the Liturgy of the Hours has escaped some of the radical polarization and politicization that so often taints the Mass. For most parishes, choral Vespers (or other liturgical hours) will be a novelty. Parishioners are often able to approach this part of the church’s liturgy with a clean ideological slate. The choir cannot “take away” something the lay person has never gotten used to singing! For this reason, especially in contentious parishes, the Liturgy of the Hours may be an excellent way to introduce beautiful sung liturgy *sans* political squabbles. A new choir—perhaps a chant *schola* or polyphonic *schola*—can be founded without displacing any existing ensembles. Chant and polyphony can be brought into parish liturgy without displacing hymns, thus increasing the likelihood that this repertoire will be heard and appreciated for its own sake. Everything

sung in the public Liturgy of the Hours can be integral rather than freely-chosen, without raising any eyebrows. The resulting growth in formation can sometimes pave the way for much more in the liturgical and musical life of the parish.

In any case, and whether the *schola cantorum* sings at Mass or Vespers (or both), the ensemble has the potential to be a true model and leader in the renewal of the Catholic choral tradition. As musicians, it is our job to help the *schola cantorum* fulfill its inherent potential.

### **Conclusion**

As I hope this article has shown, the nature of Catholic sacred music—laid out for us in the conciliar and pre-conciliar documents—can and should provide the blueprint for our work as church musicians. Music is the pre-eminent sacred art form specifically because it forms a necessary or integral part of the sacred liturgy. This is the most fundamental principle, upon which we can build a discussion of other important considerations—aesthetics, repertoire, choral-congregational balance, inculturation, and so forth. The farther we drift from this foundational principle—however beautiful our music making—the farther we remove our music from the ultimate source of its dignity and importance.

Far from being some esoteric ideal, this principle of integral music can guide our work in a very practical way, and can give us both a short- and a long-term vision or direction for our efforts. This principle moves us beyond that summertime habit of por-

ing through anthem anthologies and internet resources looking for things we think the choir might like (or we might like) next year. Rather than starting with repertoire (again, however worthy) and then looking for appropriate places to insert it into the liturgy, we are able to start with the liturgy and then search for appropriate melodies to clothe its integral texts. In short, by properly ordering our priorities we get outside of our own head and into the mind of the church. We begin to re-integrate the choir with the true source of its value and dignity—the liturgy of the church. In so doing, we give our ensembles a real reason for being and motive for acting.

This is the kind of vision that can help us properly channel the current widespread renewal of interest in beauty and tradition. Without such a clear vision, we will no doubt bring about notable improvements in our work as leaders, music directors, teachers, and conductors. However, improvement of the current status quo is, if we are honest, a fairly low bar to set for ourselves. We need to think bigger, to ask key questions and find specific answers. Now that we *can* accomplish great things, *what*, exactly, is it that we want to accomplish? What is the goal? What practices, what repertoires, are most in keeping with the mind of the church? In the end, and if we are well-prepared for the current cultural movement toward excellence in liturgical music, we have the potential to re-build not just choirs, but an authentic Catholic choral tradition as a necessary and integral part of the post-conciliar liturgy. ♦

# Gregorian Chant Is Too Hard for Our Parish: A Myth Exploded

*How can a small, rural parish incorporate chant into its regular liturgical praxis?*

by Joseph Swain



Because writers and musicians wax eloquently so often and with such grand language about the nuances and subtle beauties of plainchant, its symbolic power, its capacity to transcend and bring close some sense of the divine, Catholic plainchant may have acquired for casual observers a reputation too lofty for its own good: plainchant is esoteric, other-worldly, and just too hard for the average parish.

St. Malachy's parish is located in the township of Sherburne, in upstate New York, and is home to the villages Earlville and Sherburne with a total population about four thousand. St. Malachy's has a weekend mass attendance of about 180. The nearest sizeable city is Binghamton, New York, about fifty miles distant.

A Sunday Mass typically begins with a Lutheran or Anglican processional hymn. Then the celebrant chants the greeting in English. The *Kyrie eleison* (*Graduale Romanum* XVI) follows shortly thereafter in

Greek, the celebrant or cantor alternating with the congregation. Then the celebrant or cantor intones "Glory to God in the Highest" and the entire congregation responds with *Gloria XV* in English, unless it is Christmastide, when they sing *Gloria VIII* in Latin.

The singing of this long prayer is full and confident from beginning to end. Never is there any electronic amplification; the sound that fills the church is the sound of real people really singing. During Christmastide and Eastertide there is an organ accompaniment, but in Ordinary Time they sing *a cappella*, with no loss of vigor.

The chanting does not stop there. Parishioners sing one of Theodore Marier's English antiphons in one of the eight traditional church modes while the tiny choir chants the verses to the traditional Gregorian formulas for the responsorial psalm. The gospel acclamation is chanted, as are all the dialogues between celebrant and congregation. The Sanctus (XVIII) and Agnus

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Dei (XVIII), in Latin, the Our Father (Roman Missal) in English, and a Communion psalm (Marier) are all chanted. Sometimes there are plainchant hymns or votive antiphons, such as *Attende Domine* (during Lent) and *Salve Regina*.

The lesson of this small parish's musical practice is simply this: chant is *not* too hard for the "average parish." Sherburne is not cerebral Cambridge, Massachusetts or populous New York or Chicago. This is a small, rural community in the middle of nowhere. Farmland surrounds the parish. These parishioners are not upper-middle class intellectuals and professionals settled into an oasis college town. They are farmers, schoolteachers, small businessmen, and parents with children. In other words, Sherburne and Earlville are Hometown, U.S.A., small American villages of average, good American people.

And how do these good people learn these subtle and esoteric chants? By singing them, every week. All the liturgical music is printed in the weekly bulletin; that single resource eliminates all shuffling and searching through missalettes or hymnals. Some chants appear in modernized melodic notation (noteheads only), but the long Gloria VIII appears in traditional chant square notation. The instruction for reading it: "when the notes go up, the melody goes up, and when they go down, the melody goes down." When the time is judged aright to introduce a new plainchant, the celebrant and cantor and choir simply sing it, week after week, and the congregation catches on and joins in as quickly as it can. No rehearsal, no pressure, no alteration. The growing critical mass of singing congregants encourages the shy member to join better than any verbal exhorta-

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tion. Learning the Gloria XV took about six weeks before one could say that it had become routine.

And routine is very much part of the program. As the sociological study *The Emerging Parish: The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life Since Vatican II* concluded some time ago, the music sung best in parishes is the music sung week after week. What better candidates for congregational singing could there be than the Ordinary of the Mass sung at every Mass?<sup>1</sup> The decision to learn a particular setting is therefore a grave one, a decision made for generations, not for a season or two.

And that is how plainchants that lie well within the competence of the "average parish" also make the wisest investment of spiritual resources. The mundane practicalities are obvious: plainchant requires no expensive instruments, no sophisticated multi-voice choir, no sound systems, just

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<sup>1</sup>Jim Castelli and Joseph Gremillion, *The Emerging Parish: The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life Since Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

people willing to raise their voices. The spiritual practicalities are richer.

St. Malachy's chose Gloria XV out of the many possible plainchant settings because it is among the easiest to learn, and also because that is the one provided in the American edition of the Roman Missal, the "default" Gloria whenever a Mass is sung. What if all American parishes adopted the chants provided in the Roman Missal? Then, wherever a Catholic traveled, wherever one moved and chose to live in the United States, one could be sure of being able to sing at Mass with comfort and enthusiasm. In one sense of "active participation" no one would ever be new, an outsider, a stranger to the parish. American Catholics would enjoy a very practical liturgical universality binding us all together. That is why Pope Paul VI published *Jubilate Deo*, a small collection of the easier Gregorian chants, for all to learn: "You will thus be performing a new service for the Church in the domain of liturgical renewal."<sup>2</sup> The children of St. Malachy's will carry this music with them wherever they go, and know that it is the music of the universal church.

And we can be sure that such a universality would last. The classic plainchants of the Roman Gradual do not go out of style. Apologists search for lofty language to praise their lasting qualities because they are so deep, already been tested by time, surviving the centuries of passing fashions. And yet, unlike commercial recordings of pop tunes, they are never the same every time. The flexibility of rhythm alone guarantees a uniqueness to every performance of a single one, and there are always possibilities

of dressing up the fundamental plainchant melodies with choral or organ accompaniments for the high seasons or special celebrations without disguising its essential identity. Ever-constant, ever-new.

No one pretends that all congregations are capable of all the chants in the Roman Gradual. Like any great musical repertory, Gregorian chant owns many different kinds of composition of various levels of difficulty. Many chants indeed have an intricacy that puts them beyond the competence, not just of an average congregation, but most any congregation. That is why a complete litur-

*Like any great musical  
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gical program needs the *schola cantorum* or church choir. But such pieces should never put off a congregation from singing those easier ones well within their competence. No parish need deny itself the inestimable riches of this cornerstone of liturgical music. For if it can work so well for the good people of St. Malachy's in Sherburne, it can work well anywhere. ❖

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<sup>2</sup>Voluntati Obsequens, letter accompanying the publication *Jubilate Deo* (Vatican City: Congregation for Divine Worship, April 1974).



# The Divine Office and the Dominican Life

*The liturgy gives shape to the lives of Dominicans and allows their apostolates to flourish.*

by Innocent Smith, O.P.

## Introduction

**A**s we begin our reflections today on “The Divine Office and the Dominican Life,” I’d like to start off with a quotation from Raymond of Capua’s *Life of Catherine of Siena*, that captures the essence of the place of the Divine Office in our life as Dominicans:

Our Lord appeared to her very often, and his visits lasted longer than before. Sometimes he brought with him his glorious Mother, sometimes Saint Dominic, and sometimes both together. . . . But for the most part he came alone and held long conversations with her like one intimate friend with another. . . . Our Lord would even recite the Psalms with her as they walked to and fro in her room, like two religious or two clerics reciting their Office together.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*,

This beautiful passage captures two fundamental points that we must grasp when considering the meaning of the Divine Office for us as Dominicans:

First, the public liturgy of the church, including the Mass and the office, is essentially a participation in the prayer of Christ. As the church teaches,

Christ is always present in his church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. . . . He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the church. He is present, finally, when the church prays and sings.<sup>2</sup>

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tr. Conleth Kearns (Washington: Dominicana Publications, 1994), pp. 103–104.

<sup>2</sup>Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7; cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*, ¶20. The theme of Christ’s instrumental presence in

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*“By the Divine Office  
Christ continues  
through his church  
his priestly work of  
praising God and  
interceding for the  
salvation of the world.”*

As your congregation’s *Constitutions* state, “By the Divine Office Christ continues through his church his priestly work of praising God and interceding for the salvation of the world.”<sup>3</sup> In the experience of St. Catherine, Christ’s presence is experienced in prayer in an especially vivid way. Although most of us do not have the privilege of sensing that Christ is beside us as we pray the psalms—indeed, we might sometimes feel quite the opposite depending on who we’re sitting with in choir!—we are assured by Christ himself that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

Second, this story of Catherine’s encounters with Jesus reminds us that the public

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the performance of the liturgy has a rich tradition, particularly in the works of St. Augustine.

<sup>3</sup>*The Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Saint Cecilia of Nashville, Tennessee Approved November 22, 1985 Feast of Saint Cecilia*, §48, p. 33; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

liturgy of the church, as exalted and wonderful as it is, does not take away the necessity of a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus that extends beyond the communal worship of the Mass and office. “For the most part he came alone and held long conversations with her like one intimate friend with another.” The church clarifies that “the spiritual life . . . is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father, in secret.”<sup>4</sup>

At the foundation of the Order of Preachers, St. Dominic instituted both communal prayer and the necessity of preserving time for what was then called “secret prayer”—a term which a recent general chapter of the Dominican friars decided to restore in place of the more modern term “private prayer.”<sup>5</sup> Humbert of Romans, who can hardly be called a detractor of the official liturgy, makes the wry observation that although the office is instituted by the church, secret prayer is instituted by God!<sup>6</sup>

Although we won’t fully explore the

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<sup>4</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶12.

<sup>5</sup>*Acts of the Elective General Chapter of the Order of Preachers: Rome, 1–21 September 2010, Celebrated under Fr. Bruno Cadoré* (Rome: Santa Sabina, 2010), §78, p. 44: “[Petitio] We ask that the term *oratio privata* (LCO 40 et 66 § I) be replaced by the term *oratio secreta*, in conformity with our Dominican tradition.” Cf. Antolin Gonzalez Fuente, “From ‘Secret’ Prayer to Meditation,” trans. Tomás Martín Rosado, *Dominicana*, 55:1 (2012), 90–107.

<sup>6</sup>Humbert of Romans, “Expositio in Constitutiones,” in *Opera de vita regulari*, ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier (Rome: A. Befani, 1889), vol. 2, pp. 1–178. For further reflections on Humbert’s understanding of the liturgy, see Innocent Smith, “Dominican Chant and Dominican Identity,” *Religions*, 5 (2014): 961–71.

connection and distinctions between communal and individual prayer in this context, it should be recalled that individual prayer both flows from our communal prayer and helps us to approach communal prayer with greater devotion. In other words, a discussion of the Divine Office in the Dominican life does not exhaust everything that could be said about Dominican prayer.

I will now focus on two aspects of the Divine Office in Dominican life: first, the relationship of the liturgy to study and the apostolate; second, the meaning of the Divine Office as an *officium*, that is, a duty or office.

### **Laudare, Benedicere, Prædicare**

One of the mottos of the Dominican Order is *Laudare, Benedicere, Prædicare*—to praise, to bless, to preach. I'd like to suggest a somewhat unusual interpretation of this phrase that might help us to consider the place of the office in the Dominican life, connecting the three words *laudare*, *benedicere*, and *prædicare* with liturgy, study, and the apostolate.

In the first case, the church is fond of speaking of the office as a “sacrifice of praise.” As Pope Paul VI eloquently wrote:

The sacrifice of praise is the offering of lips honoring the Lord in psalms and hymns, devoutly consecrating the hours, the days, and the years as times of worship, with the sacrifice of the Eucharist at its center, like a shining sun, drawing all the rest to itself.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter, *Sacrificium Laudis* (August 16, 1966); cf. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 1080.

In the second case, consider the literal meaning of “benedicere”: “to speak well”—and what is study, but the effort to grasp the meaning of reality, to be able to speak well or to articulate the truth?

In the third case, as Dominicans we should be sensitive to the fact that preaching is an analogous concept: we can think of God the Father speaking or rather *preaching* the Word, who is himself the fullness of revelation; the preaching of Christ, revealing the Father by his words and deeds; the preaching of the apostles, instituted by Christ; the preaching of bishops and their priestly delegates; and finally, the forms of Christian teaching, life, and worship that transmit to each generation all that the church herself is and all that she believes.<sup>8</sup> In this broad sense of the concept of preaching, Dominican apostolates such as teaching play an integral role in the transmission of the faith.

How do these three dimensions fit together?

Inherent to the Dominican life is a certain tension between the active and contemplative aspects of our vocation. Leaving aside for the moment the specific vocation of cloistered nuns within the Order of Preachers, Dominican friars and Dominican sisters are called to develop a balance between the apostolate of preaching and teaching and the contemplative dimensions of communal prayer, regular observance, and the common life. Throughout the history of the order, there have been some moments at which the balance has been lost, and it is thus a con-

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965); ¶8, “the church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.”

stant duty of Dominicans to examine and renew their own fidelity to this balance. As the great historian of the Dominican Order William Hinnebusch has written, “Every reform and every restoration of the Order of Preachers has been accomplished by a renewal of the contemplative apostolic spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

One central text for understanding this balance is St. Thomas Aquinas’s reply to the question “Whether a religious order that is devoted to the contemplative life is more excellent than on that is given to the active life?” In this article, Thomas concludes that a mixed life of contemplation leading to apostolic preaching and teaching is the ideal: “For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one’s contemplation than merely to contemplate.”<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that for Thomas the two dimensions are intrinsically joined: it is not just a matter of fulfilling one’s prayer quotient and fulfilling one’s apostolate, as if these were both necessary but unrelated aspects of the religious life, but rather that contemplation will bear fruit in the apostolate.<sup>11</sup>

In the Dominican Order, liturgy and study are not only ends in themselves,

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<sup>9</sup>William A Hinnebusch, *Renewal in the Spirit of St. Dominic* (Washington, D.C.: Dominicana, 1968).

<sup>10</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1947), II-II.188.6 (Second Part of the Second Part, Q. 188, Art. 6), Vol. 2, p. 1998–99.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas makes an important distinction between activities that flow from contemplation, such as preaching and teaching, and activities that consist entirely in external operation, such as almsgiving and hospitality.

*In the Dominican Order, liturgy and study are not only ends in themselves, although they possess an inherent dignity, but in addition prepare us for and sustain us in the apostolate.*

although they possess an inherent dignity, but in addition prepare us for and sustain us in the apostolate. In turn, the fruits of the apostolate flow back into prayer and study: we have the opportunity to pray for those we encounter and praise God for the blessings we receive in our apostolate and have a renewed motivation to study so as to address the questions and problems we encounter in our apostolate.

Here we might consider a passage from St. Catherine’s *Dialogue*, in which God the Father addresses the problem of self-serving contemplation:

These people find all their pleasure in seeking their own spiritual consolation—so much so that often they see their neighbors in spiritual or temporal need and refuse to help them. Under pretense of virtue they say, “It would make me lose my spiritual peace and quiet, and I would

not be able to say my Hours at the proper time.” . . . But they are deceived by their own spiritual pleasure . . . For I have ordained every exercise of vocal and mental prayer to bring souls to perfect love for me and their neighbors, and to keep them in this love.<sup>12</sup>

In Fr. Hinnebusch’s view, the love of God and love of neighbor are balanced in what he describes as the “vertical” and the “horizontal” dimensions of the Dominican life. The vertical dimension concerns our relation to God, and the horizontal concerns our relation to other people—both our brothers and sisters in community, and those who we encounter in the world. For Fr. Hinnebusch,

It is the vertical phase which primarily produces the Dominican; the horizontal permits him to develop further discharge into the world of the love of neighbor which he has learned when grace opened his soul to God.<sup>13</sup>

As Fr. Hinnebusch further states, “The vertical phase of Dominican life creates consecrated persons—men and women committed to the things of God.” And yet, it is important to emphasize that this “creation” of consecrated persons is not a one-time thing—liturgy, after all, is not just a matter of initial formation, but something we continue to participate in throughout our lives as Dominicans. Through the liturgy, then, we are continually being created

anew as Dominicans—we continue to be *formed* in the image of St. Dominic.

In the treatise on sacraments in the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas uses the evocative phrase “the rite of the Christian life.” In a sense, every aspect of the life of a Christian has a liturgical character. The sacraments, ranging from baptism to the anointing of the sick, accompany us at every moment of our lives as Christians, from birth to death,<sup>14</sup> and in the Eucharist the faithful are exhorted to offer up all of their joys and struggles along with the sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>15</sup> As Dominicans, in addition to the sacramental rites that are the privilege of all Christians, we have a proper set of liturgies that are suited to our life as religious. Just as baptism *makes* us Christians, we are *made* Dominicans through our vestition. We are strengthened in our Dominican identity through our daily round of prayers and community observances—and here, the sacramental economy and the Dominican liturgy intertwine in our daily participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We are confirmed in our Dominican vocation through the rite of Profession. Finally, we are commended to God through the last rites and funeral observances that are proper to the dying and departed Dominican. When we take this wider view of the Dominican liturgy, we can more fully understand that it is a life-long practice that informs our whole Dominican experience. As Fr. Hinnebusch observes, “Dominic chose the liturgy as the chief ingredient of the Dominican envi-

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<sup>12</sup>St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, tr. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), §69, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup>Hinnebusch, *Renewal*, 17.

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III.65.1.

<sup>15</sup>Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, (November 21, 1964), ¶34; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶48.

ronment.”<sup>16</sup> This is not because it is the sole purpose of the order, but because it is the liturgy which makes us Dominicans; it is the liturgy that gives the shape to our lives and allows our apostolate to flourish.

## Officium

Having considered the role that the liturgy plays within our lives as Dominicans, we’ll now focus on the place of the Divine Office in particular within the liturgical life of the order.

In the middle ages, the Dominican Order used the term *officium* or office to refer to the whole of the liturgy, including both the hours of the liturgy and the Mass. One advantage of this terminology was that it showed very clearly the interconnected reality of the Mass and Divine Office as a duty and privilege of the church.<sup>17</sup> Both the Mass and the Divine Office are forms of the “sacrifice of praise” spoken of in the psalms. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, Christ

continues his priestly work through the agency of his church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office.<sup>18</sup>

As we go forward, we will focus on the

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<sup>16</sup>Hinnebusch, *Renewal*, 4.

<sup>17</sup>In the medieval Dominican liturgy there was a particularly sophisticated set of cross-references between the Mass and Office within the readings, antiphons, and prayers employed in each part of the liturgy.

<sup>18</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

Divine Office in the contemporary sense of the term, but it is important to bear in mind that the office flows from and into the Eucharist in a way that is analogous to the relation of the active and contemplative life.

It may be that we have become so accustomed to hearing the words “Divine Office” that we might not think about the basic meaning of the words: what is an “office” in the first place? The word “office” has several different meanings: apart from the obviously inapplicable meaning of a room or building where one does one’s work, an office can be “a position of authority, trust, or service, typically one of a public nature,” or “a service or kindness done for another person or group of people.”<sup>19</sup> The Latin word, *officium*, likewise denotes either a freely undertaken service or the fulfillment of a duty.

For Dominicans, the Divine Office fulfills both of these senses of *officium*, for it is a *duty* that is freely undertaken as a *privilege* of our state of life. The Divine Office is indeed a *duty* of religious, but it is also an honor, for it affords us a special mode of access to the Lord as official representatives of the church. The Second Vatican Council describes the role of religious praying the office in exalted terms:

when this wonderful song of praise is rightly performed by priests and others who are deputed for this purpose by the church’s ordinance . . . then it is truly the voice of the bride addressed to her bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His body, addresses to the Father.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>New Oxford American Dictionary.

<sup>20</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶84.

According to the council fathers, it is this very dignity that gives to the office both the sense of duty and privilege:

all who render this service are not only fulfilling a duty of the church, but also are sharing in the greatest honor of Christ's spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the church their Mother.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth pausing to consider the ways in which the Divine Office is both a duty and a privilege of us as religious. We might begin by considering Psalm 116: "I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people" (Ps. 116:14). As religious who are called by our constitutions to perform the public prayer of the church—that is, to pray in the presence of the Lord's people—our participation in the Divine Office is done in accordance with our vow of obedience.<sup>22</sup>

All human beings, as creatures of God, are obligated to pay God honor and reverence by worshiping him. But as religious wholly dedicated to God by the vow of obedience, our worship has a special character. We should recall here St. Thomas's teaching that "it is better and more meritorious to do one and the same deed with a vow than without."<sup>23</sup> Because a vow is an act

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<sup>21</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶85; cf. ¶98.

<sup>22</sup>We should recall that according to the Constitutions of your congregation, "Neither the sisters nor the community are required under pain of sin to recite the office." (*The Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Saint Cecilia*, §54, p. 34).

<sup>23</sup>St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.88.6, Reply 3.

of religion, it gives all of our actions performed under obedience a deeper purpose and meaning as being directed to God, to whom our obedience is ultimately due. When we exercise the virtue of religion under obedience, our prayer itself is more deeply consecrated to God, and we are sustained in our fulfillment of the general human duty of divine worship.

The obligatory character of the office also helps us recall that the meaning and value of the liturgy extends beyond our momentary feelings or desires. Individual prayer requires a good deal of spontaneity on our part and is often legitimately focused on our present preoccupations or joys. The liturgy, on the other hand, invites us to participate in the prayer of a wider community. One consequence of this is that the liturgy doesn't always express our personality or our feelings at a particular moment. Sometimes we have to pray a psalm of thanksgiving, for instance, when we are personally experiencing struggles that seem overwhelming. A related issue is that sometimes we don't happen to enjoy the music we're asked to sing, or the decorations in the chapel, or whatever it may be. All of these issues are real and should not be ignored. Given the centrality of the liturgy in our lives, tensions such as these can sometimes seem daunting.

At the heart of a personal response to these difficulties is the recognition that the liturgy transcends our personal preferences, allowing us to worship God together in the official liturgy of the church. The recollection that we are fulfilling our obligation to pray with the community helps us to remember that the community itself is fulfilling its duty of participating in a form of prayer that extends beyond its own boundaries.

*The liturgy is not  
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community's prayer,  
but the prayer of the  
whole church.*

The liturgy is not just my prayer, or my community's prayer, but the prayer of the whole church. This is actually a tremendously liberating fact. The obligation of the office, far from rendering our participation toilsome, in fact frees us from the tyranny of the moment. This means that even if I don't *enjoy* praying the liturgy at this particular moment, I'm still participating in the prayer of the church. I don't have to say "I like this," when it comes to a particular hymn or mode of singing. After all, obedience is in the will rather than in the intellect. Nevertheless, these moments present us with the opportunity to internalize the action of prayer. When we take part in the liturgy of the church, the burden is not only on me—I am a part of a whole community at prayer. "Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Despite being an obligation, the communal office helps remind us of Christ's words that "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).

### **Divine Office as Privilege**

In addition to its obligatory character, it is important to also emphasize that the Divine Office is a privilege of our religious

life. This is so for several reasons: first, it gives us a place of honor in the worship of God, allowing us to fulfill a public role in the church's praise; second, it gives us a special share in the heritage of our Order of Preachers; and third, it delegates to us a particularly effective power of prayerful intercession.

According to the Second Vatican Council,

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.<sup>24</sup>

When we consider the heavenly character of our earthly worship, the following passage from Psalm 68 captures the place of honor we have through our deputation to the Divine Office:

They see your solemn procession, O God, the procession of my God, of my king, to the sanctuary: the singers in the forefront, the musicians coming last; between them, maidens sounding their timbrels. (Ps. 68:25–26)

Through the privilege of being called to recite the hours, we are given a place of honor in the meeting place between the earthly and heavenly liturgy. Nevertheless, this honor is not intended to puff us up, but to bring us into closer contact with Jesus. As the Master of the Order of Preachers, Bruno Cadoré, wrote in a Letter on the Liturgical Celebration of the Hours,

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<sup>24</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶8.



We do not go to the choir primarily to fulfill an obligation which we have assumed; but rather we assemble in choir to await together Him who comes, to welcome Him and, above all, to learn to recognise Him.<sup>25</sup>

In the office, we are deputed to act in the name of the church, performing the public liturgy in the presence of the faithful. Fr. Bruno observes that

Dominic asked his friars to celebrate the Hours publically. During the course of each day our communities are invited to open their prayer to the world. . . . Liturgical celebration is thus a compelling part of our mission of evangelisation (to spread the church to the ends of the earth). It is an aspect of our office of preaching.<sup>26</sup>

An anecdote from the early days of the order reveals the value that was placed on the public celebration of the liturgy. When the friars first established the Priory of St. Jacques in Paris, the new priory fell within a territory controlled by the canons of Notre Dame Cathedral. Fearing perhaps the loss of revenue that would come from the faithful flocking to the Dominican church, the canons refused to permit public worship at St. Jacques—the friars could celebrate the office, but had to do so with the doors locked. St. Dominic became aware of the situation and informed Pope Honorius III,

<sup>25</sup>Fr. Bruno Cadoré, “Laudare, Prædicare, Benedicere: Letter on the Liturgical Celebration of the Hours,” May 31, 2012, p. 2 <[http://www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier\\_cadore\\_letter\\_hours-en.pdf](http://www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier_cadore_letter_hours-en.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup>Cadoré, Letter, 5.

who in November 1219 intervened in favor of the friars’ right to celebrate the liturgy publically as part of their apostolate to the city of Paris.<sup>27</sup> Among the first fruits of this liturgical apostolate were the vocations of Jordan of Saxony and Henry of Cologne. As Blessed Jordan describes the occasion,

The three of us met at Saint-Jacques and, while the brethren were chanting “Immutemur habitu,” we presented ourselves before them, much to their surprise, and, putting off the old man, we put on the new, thus suiting our actions to what they were singing.<sup>28</sup>

It may be the case that in practice some community chapels are inaccessible to the public. At times and places when the laity *are* able to be present, there are sometimes delicate questions that arise concerning the participation of people who are not used to our particular modes of singing or praying. This in fact is an issue that goes back to the early days of the order—in Humbert of Romans’s essay on the Office of the Cantor, he notes that one duty of the cantor was to “rectify” the mistakes that were made when visiting clerics attempted to sing with the brethren!<sup>29</sup> The question of how to make our celebrations of the liturgy truly public without diminishing the distinct character of communal prayer is one

<sup>27</sup>William Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: 1. Origins and Growth to 1500* (New York: Alba House, 1966), p. 63.

<sup>28</sup>Jordan of Saxony, *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, tr. Simon Tugwell, Dominican Sources (Chicago: Parable, 1982), §75.

<sup>29</sup>William Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: 2 Intellectual and cultural life to 1500* (New York: Alba House, 1973), p. 242.

that must be approached with prudence and sensitivity. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the public nature of the liturgy of the hours does not depend on the presence of outside guests, but on the nature of the action itself, even in the case of an individual religious praying the breviary alone.

The public nature of the liturgy is partially a result of our status as human beings with soul and body. The document on religious freedom from the Second Vatican Council has a striking teaching on the relationship of the liturgy to the body:

The exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind. The social nature of man, however, itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community.<sup>30</sup>

For Humbert of Romans, there was a profound unity of the heart, the mouth, and the body in divine worship.<sup>31</sup> According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the use of the body and the voice in divine worship helps to arouse devotion in the heart of the worshipper, and allows one to “serve God with all that he has from God, that is to say,

<sup>30</sup>Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965), ¶3.

<sup>31</sup>Humbert of Romans, *Expositio in Constitutiones*, in J. J. Berthier, ed., *Opera de vita regulari* (Rome: Typis A. Befani, 1889), vol. II, p. 160.

not only with his mind, but also with his body.”<sup>32</sup> The voice, in particular, helps to “excite interior devotion, whereby the mind of the person praying is raised to God.”<sup>33</sup> As Thomas clarifies, “Vocal prayer is employed, not in order to tell God something He does not know, but in order to lift up the mind of the person praying or of other persons to God.”<sup>34</sup> As Thomas writes elsewhere,

we employ words, in speaking to God, not indeed to make known our thoughts to Him Who is the searcher of hearts, but that we may bring ourselves and our hearers to reverence Him. Consequently we need to praise God with our lips, not indeed for His sake, but for our own sake; since by praising Him our devotion is aroused towards Him.<sup>35</sup>

Thomas points out further that “the use of music in the divine praises is a salutary institution, that the souls of the faint-hearted may be the more incited to devotion,”<sup>36</sup> although he makes a characteristically Dominican clarification by pointing out that “to arouse men to devotion by teaching and preaching is a more excellent way than by singing.”<sup>37</sup>

A further privilege of the office that might be mentioned is that it affords us a special mode of intercession to God. In the Divine Office, we join our voice with Christ

<sup>32</sup>St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.83.12, Response.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., II-II.83.12, Response.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., II-II.83.12, Reply 1.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., II-II.91.1, Response.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., II-II.91.2, Response.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., II-II.91.2, Reply 3.

who “continues His priestly work through the agency of His church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world.”<sup>38</sup> We could rephrase this in starker terms by saying that when we pray the office, we are playing a role in salvation history, for the church has entrusted this intercessory role to us as consecrated religious.

The office is also a privileged mode of praying for the deceased. One indication of this fact is the insistence in the constitutions of your congregation that the Office for the Dead be offered each time a sister dies, in addition to the celebration of a Mass for the Dead.<sup>39</sup> A confirmation of this practice is found in St. Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue*, in which God tells Catherine about the importance of praying the office for those in purgatory: “By giving alms and having my ministers say the Divine Office, by fasting and praying while you are in the state of grace, you can by my mercy shorten their time of punishment.”<sup>40</sup>

Fr. Bruno’s letter on the Divine Office includes a striking treatment of the intercessory character of the office:

Humbly receive the grace God gives us to intercede with Him for the world and to speak to him of those whom we commend in our prayer. Accept as well that grace by which God touches our lives when we ask Him for the world’s salvation. Dare to believe that day after day through intercessory prayer the Spirit conforms us to the

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<sup>38</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

<sup>39</sup>*The Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Saint Cecilia*, §66, p. 37.

<sup>40</sup>St. Catherine, *Dialogue*, §149, p. 313.

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in our life.*

true image of the Son’s praying to the Father, despite the clumsiness and indignity of our words.<sup>41</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To conclude briefly: For Dominicans, the office is a duty and a privilege that plays a central but not exclusive role in our life. It prepares us for the apostolate, helps us to stay rooted in a life of prayer, and most of all establishes us in a close communion with Christ. Although we might not sense his presence in the way that St. Catherine was privileged to experience, we may nevertheless be assured that when we pray the Divine Office, Our Lord is reciting the Psalms with us. ❖

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<sup>41</sup>Cadoré, Letter, p. 5.

## *Interview*

# Dom Jacques-Marie Guilmard, O.S.B.

by Ann Labounsky

**AL: What difference do you observe in your daily life compared to the time when you entered Solesmes in 1973?**

We are fewer in number than previously and daily responsibilities consume more of our time. As a result, we have less leisure time to study doctrine, spirituality, history, or to practice the art of the sacred. This phenomenon is not only at Solesmes it concerns all Western religious or ecclesiastical orders. It is time consuming, for if Christian faith enriches knowledge of the arts—it transforms them—it receives in return an assist that man's reason and sensibility needs in order to avoid becoming seriously brittle. Today, students as well as professors have deserted certain clerical and para-clerical disciplines. As a result there are fewer students interested in Gregorian chant. On the other hand, non-Christian students are more numerous, but this risks a secularization. Hope comes from young African or Asian Catholics.

**AL: And for you personally?**

With age, I hope, comes a certain wisdom and drawing back from these set-

backs—in relation to doing nothing. Besides, in a dechristianized world, a monk-priest meets people who come to the monastery. He consoles them—gives them hope and leads them to God. It is even more precious that our society rejects Christian values. Here is real joy, and one could say: “My autumn will be my spring.”



*Dom Jacques-Marie Guilmard*

**AL: You have been a monk for forty-three years. Have these years gone by quickly?**

Yes, the more one ages, the more one realizes that time passes quickly. But that

This interview was conducted with Dom Guilmard, a monk at Solesmes, May 30, 2016.

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does not matter, we are here on earth to love God and to help our neighbor. Whether one is seventy or thirty, if one loves God, all is good.

**AL: Besides the liturgical offices, what are your principal activities?**

I am involved with the study of Gregorian chant and the process of the canonization of Dom Guéranger—the Abbot of Solesmes (1805–1875), and I am a host [cashier at the bookstore]. This work takes much of my time.

**AL: Are you pessimistic in regards to the church in France?**

We must make a distinction. Pessimism and optimism are natural feelings. In contrast, hope resides on the spiritual plain: it is a Christian virtue. One can be pessimistic about what is around us but still keep hope. Hope should dwell in the heart of Christians, even in catastrophic times. It consists in depending on God to obtain divine Goodness. It does not weaken and should not weaken. Saint Paul says, “hope does not disappoint.” God surely cannot wrong us nor make us fail. In France, many things are going badly: the culture, the economy, immigration, Islam, and above all the destruction of the true model of society. In addition, the reasons for fear about faith are abundant: the large dechristianisation of our country, lack of vocations . . . One could be very worried. However, there are positive reasons for hope, for Catholic foundations have not disappeared in France. Today, in the country of Saint Theresa there are many families for whom education is profoundly Christian, and where the love of Jesus and

the church are taught to children; and if children are led to God, they embrace it. This is a cause of great joy. The French soil is even if our society no longer is. And in this soil, holiness is ready to be reborn.

**AL: What is necessary for Christians?**

Prayer, the catechism, and the sense of the majesty of God.

**AL: And Solesmes? What is the place of your monastery today in the spread of Gregorian chant?**

Solesmes has a particular place in the church because of Dom Guéranger. He reinstated the prayer of the church, and it was he who made new the prayer of the church, and forged a liturgical movement. The impetus coming from Solesmes will not cease to bear fruit, even if we, the sons of Dom Guéranger have faults. That is especially true for Gregorian chant.

**AL: What importance do you give to the technique of Gregorian Chant?**

Technique is never a priority, neither for art, nor for prayer. The singers should *pray through Gregorian chant*. In this regard Solesmes is and will remain a model; it is the heritage received from Dom Guéranger, as I have just said. If, in a technical domain, the monks of Solesmes have deficiencies, we should not be alarmed, it will pass: the following generation will sing better, and a practice session will correct whatever anomalies there are. Besides, a monastic choir always has enough good qualities to compensate for occasional lapses in technique.

**AL: Agreed! but the world analyses the Solesmes recordings. People want to chant with the best interpretation.**

I do not recommend imitating the Solesmes recordings, as if they represent an absolute interpretation. Also because each choir should conserve its particular qualities (of pronunciation, of legato, etc.) And also, because the interpretation should refer to the neumatic notation of the ancient manuscripts that Dom Cardine explained so well, and not because of the interpretation of a particular choir. Rely on the neumes as guides, and soon you will experience the ineffable joy of “praying in beauty,” according to the wish of Saint Pius X. The overall shape of chant at Solesmes has scarcely changed in the last one hundred fifty years, because of the rapport of the choir to the text and to prayer which has not changed. On that point, one should imitate Solesmes without reserve.

**AL: What do you say about the numerous musicologists who attach themselves to the details of Gregorian chant but for whom it is not prayer?**

They then understand nothing about Gregorian chant, and they will not be able to sing it! A soprano who interprets the *Trojans* by Berlioz, should believe in the authenticity of the mythology of the plot. When you sing Gregorian chant, even if you are an atheist you must enter into the heart of prayer, or your chant will be false. Gregorian chant is prayer; there is nothing to be lost in approaching it as it is. That is not to say that one is a saint.

**AL: Dom Mocquereau was an excellent choirmaster, wasn't he?**

No. The great director was Dom Gajard; he obtained what he wanted from his singers. The memory of the Solesmes monks regarding Dom Mocquereau was that he did not have a particular gift in that area, and that he profited from the fact that Dom Gajard was able to replace him as choir director. Dom Gajard directed the Solesmes choir for fifty-six years !

**AL: According to you, what place does Dom Mocquereau have in the restoration of Gregorian chant?**

He had an important role. But before him, Dom Guéranger was the only author of the plain-song renaissance. At the time of Guéranger, several musicians were passionate about Gregorian, but it was he who began the reform in an effective and durable manner. He wanted to document the ancient manuscripts, when this practice was not common. Our archives have kept copies of medieval antiphonaries copied by hand around 1860. Note in passing that most of the chant specialists worked in the area of non-Gregorian music. It was in that way that ancient modality was known at the end of the nineteenth century; known and appreciated, and these non-Gregorian forms unexpectedly became very frequent in musical composition.

After Dom Guéranger, there was Dom Pothier; he is called “the restorer of Gregorian melodies.” After him and for several decades, Dom Mocquereau became the spokesperson for Gregorian chant; he gave the name a face. In particular, his publication and work became the basis for the scientific study of Gregorian melodies. He deserves the honor to have demonstrated that the Gregorian

repertoire of the Mass is a unique source in space and time. Dom Mocquereau deserved our gratitude.

**AL: And the rhythm? He wanted to define natural rhythm.**

Of course, everyone knows it. On the other hand, it has scarcely been pointed out, that he was the first to put into practice the *systematic* return to what was given in the manuscripts, as Dom Guéranger requested. We can see his personal antiphony where he had copied the neumatic signs of Hartker's manuscript by hand. And so, we can see that Dom Mocquereau was the precursor of Dom Cardine. Both of them wanted to understand the genius of Gregorian rhythm found in the notation.

I would like to conclude about Dom Mocquereau, in recalling the friendship that united Madame Justine B. Ward to him. This musician codified a remarkable method for the teaching of solfège, which still bears abundant fruit.

**AL: How would you summarize your studies on the history of Gregorian chant?**

For a long time, I have been working on the history of the creation of Gregorian chant. At this point in time, we can affirm the following: the repertoire of the Mass was created around 765 in Metz; the repertoire of the secular office was created in Tours around 800; and the repertoire of the office of the Benedictine monks was created at Saint-Denis, near Paris, around 835. In a parallel path, I determined that there was already a primitive Gregorian chant. Take the example of Bach. Many pieces from his time period make us think of Bach, but

they were composed in the style of the cantor by his sons or by his students. You must know what was due to the genius of Bach. So I have attempted to specify which pieces were the pieces that existed at the origin of Gregorian chant in the eighth to ninth centuries—for the Mass and for the office.

**AL: You have done many other things besides studying the history of chant. I read with great interest your article on the liturgical recitatives. What are you working on now?**

A publisher asked me to do a book about Gregorian chant. In addition I have to prepare a session which will take place at Solesmes—the subject of it will be the *restitution* of Gregorian melodies. I have not given up the idea of the spirituality of this chant . . . I also should make earlier articles known. So, in 2014 in Venice, I delivered a paper titled, “Dom Guéranger and Saint Pius X,” which explained what attracts our time to Dom Guéranger, through Pius X and Gregorian chant. I would like it to be translated and made available in the United States!

**AL: Paraclete Press is going to publish an American version of your *Practical Guide to Gregorian Chant*. May this work be in the hands of the faithful! To whom is it addressed?**

This manual is first of all addressed to priests. A priest should be able to sing the Mass in Latin—in other words, know how to sing the opening salutation, the orations, the preface, the eucharistic prayer, etc. After practical advice and several charts, I presented a study-guide for the singing

of the psalms. And so the Gregorian practitioners will possess an elementary manual not only for the parts of the Mass, but also for the repertoire of the office. Every singer of Gregorian chant should practice psalmody (which forms the backbone for the repertoire of the office). In effect, one cannot sing the ornate chants of the Mass if one has not mastered the practice of psalmody. Psalmody is easy, indispensable, and it is beautiful! In the beginning of the book the reader will find spiritual advice. The book has already been published in France and in Italy. A Spanish version is being published.

**AL: Let's speak again about Dom Guéranger. Your founder greatly influenced the French organist Charles Tournemire when he was composing *l'Orgue mystique*. For each office, he referred to the work of Dom Guéranger. This is admirable! The documentation is found in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, but unfortunately, it is difficult to access. *L'Orgue mystique* is experiencing a growing interest. The Church Music Association of America has organized three conferences representing it, and several university theses have treated it. This organ cycle has helped many people—organists and listeners. Since the cause for canonization of Dom Guéranger is open, do you know if healings have occurred in listening to *l'Orgue mystique* which owes so much to Dom Guéranger?**

For the moment, no miracle has been obtained in this way. But permit me to advise you to pray to Dom Guéranger: your regularity in praying to him will be rewarded. Ask him to provide access to the

archives of Tournemire! [AL: I was able to see these at the Bibliothèque Nationale the following week.]

**AL: You are occupied in the process of canonization of Dom Guéranger.**

Yes, and it is a great joy, because this monk was a great saint, an extremely good being, a man of the church (*vir ecclesiae*). The church has been praying for eighteen centuries, but Dom Guéranger led us to understand that the church should reflect deeply about prayer.

**AL: But, this is important! Is the teaching of Vatican II on the liturgy the fruit of this reflection?**

Yes, the liturgical movement, which found its roots in the twentieth century, from its beginning it explicitly refers to the understanding of the liturgy that came from Dom Guéranger. This movement then developed into the practice of Gregorian chant and in the line of directives given by Pope Pius X. The outcome of this process led to the Second Vatican Council.

**AL: Did the Benedictine monasteries have a role in that?**

Of course. Dom Guéranger reestablished the Benedictine orders that the Revolution had suppressed. His concept of monasticism has been known and extended principally in Bavaria, in Bohemia, then in Belgium, and liturgical reform has been transmitted by the Benedictine monasteries.

Naturally, church musicians have also felt the influence of Dom Guéranger. At that same time when the Solesmes abbot published an important biography of Saint



Cecilia, Cecilian Institutes, which cultivated sacred music and liturgical chant, multiplied in the West.

**AL: Are these institutes working for his canonization?**

No. They have forgotten Dom Guéranger, although since that time they knew well what he had done; certain musicians, like Tournemire, were close to him.

**AL: One feels that in the music of Tournemire. One sees and hears there the images of which Dom Guéranger spoke. It is marvelous!**

Dom Guéranger had a charism that is little known. According to him, the liturgy should be penetrated with unction—of gentle sweetness—because this unction is the fruit of the Holy Spirit; but in his writings he himself proved that an unction raises the soul delicately. Tournemire felt it in *l'Année liturgique*, and his genius, which was impregnated with the notions and images used by Dom Guéranger, knew how to pass on a rich spirituality in his works. Why should it surprise us that his music reaffirms the divine action?

**AL: How did Dom Guéranger acquire this unction?**

He received it as a gift from God. I would note that he knew the history of the church from the inside out (since its origins), and I would say above all that he prayed through the great mysteries of the church, daily, in the liturgy; his personality was purified by his familiarity of the church and its prayer. This is why his writing express such a pro-

found, sure, equilibrated, and abundant thought from both the doctrinal and spiritual point of view. There are theologians expert in their fields, but less clairvoyant for that matter, and that is why his writings express. Dom Guéranger was not an academic theologian, nor a professor, nor an author of treatises, but a mystic of the church. He put the unction that he received from the Holy Spirit into *l'Année liturgique*, and Tournemire benefited from it.

**AL: What has *l'Année liturgique* brought to you?**

The love of the church! I took up *l'Année liturgique* as a novice. In this work, Dom Guéranger teaches us to live the liturgy in depth. And so we love the church in an intimate way because we pray with her. To tell the truth, I have always had a love for the church, because I participated in the liturgy. My parish was in the communist suburbs of Paris [St. Denis] but the liturgy and the chants there were beautiful and dignified.

Prayer is the exchange between man and God. “Tell me how you pray, and I will tell you who you are.” In the liturgy we discover the church in ecstasy, in a state of penitence, in thanksgiving, bringing alive the marvels of God in his saints. When one prays with the church, one understands it and loves it. “One loves the church while in prayer.” ❖

Repertoire

# The Ambrosian Trisagion: A More Correct Melody?

*A comparison of different sources uncovers new theoretical possibilities for the transmission and reception of texts and melodies.*

by Terence Bailey

Ἅγιος ὁ Θεός, Ἅγιος ἰσχυρός, Ἅγιος ἀθάνατος  
*Agios o Theos, Agios ischyros, Agios athanatos*



he acts of the Council of Chalcedon in 451<sup>1</sup> record that “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal” were among the exclamations of the participants, and it may be supposed that these simple formulations were already in wider use. Controversial texts came to be interpolated in the “hymn,” a practice that led the Byzantine church in 692 to expressly forbid them:

Whereas we have heard that in some

places in the hymn, Trisagion, there is added after “Holy and Immortal” [*sic*, evidently the last of the three exclamations is meant], “Who was crucified for us, have mercy upon us,” and since this . . . was by the ancient and holy Fathers cast out of the hymn . . . we . . . anathematize those who after this present decree allow in church this or any other addition to the most sacred hymn.<sup>2</sup>

It may be (but see below) that about the time of this canon the *Thrice Holy* was sung in the Gallican liturgy. In the *Expositio antiquæ liturgiæ gallicanæ*, a document found

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<sup>1</sup>*Catholic Encyclopedia* (1907–14), s.v. “AgiOS O Theos”; *Acta Concilii Chalcedonensis*, Actio I, ed. Edward Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, ii.i (1933), 195, line 30.

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<sup>2</sup>From the eighty-first canon of the Council of Trullo, accessed online at <<http://www.tertulian.org/fathers2/NPNF2-14/Npnf2-14-136.htm#P70911493593>>. Trullo, “a domed hall” in Constantinople, was the specific venue.

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in a single manuscript of the ninth century—but written as early as the seventh—we read: “opening the proceedings, he who is presiding in the church sings the *Aius* [a transliteration of Ἀγιος] in Latin and in Greek.”<sup>3</sup>

The Trisagion is found in the Gregorian graduals<sup>4</sup> of Corbie (after 853) and Senlis (877–882),<sup>5</sup> but not in those that are earlier, and it may be, as is generally believed, that it was an inheritance from the superseded Gallican liturgy, one of the additions made by the Franks to the Roman liturgy.

The gradual from Corbie includes the addendum ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς (have mercy on us) that was expressly forbidden as early as 692, i.e., during Charlemagne’s reign; but this does not rule out that the Gallican church had already adopted the Trisagion with the appended *have mercy on us* from the East.<sup>6</sup> Or possibly from Spain. There, manuscript evidence is scanty, but three chant books are witnesses that the Trisagion was a component of the Mozarabic liturgy at least as early as the tenth century.<sup>7</sup> Bearing in mind that Louis

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<sup>3</sup>“Incipiente præsule ecclesiae Aius psallet dicens Latinum cum Græco,” E.C. Ratcliffe, ed., *Expositio antiquae liturgiae gallicanae*, Henry Bradshaw Society (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1971), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Those containing the Roman liturgy with Frankish revisions; these ancient books contain only texts.

<sup>5</sup>*Corpus antiphonarium officii*, ed. René-Jean Hesbert (Rome; Herder, 1963–1979), K78b, S78b.

<sup>6</sup>The Greek Orthodox church did come to append “have mercy on us” and a doxology when the Trisagion was sung at Mass.

<sup>7</sup>Philippe Bernard notes the appearance of the *agios* in the León antiphoner, Cathedral Library, MS 8 (tenth century), Toledo, Bibl. capit. 35.7 (tenth–eleventh century) and British Library add. 30844 (eleventh century). See his “Hagius/Agios/Aius. Les avatars d’un calque dans la latinité tar-

Duchesne, the greatly respected French liturgist, believed that Milan was the centre of the Gallican rite,<sup>8</sup> it is reasonable to speculate that before the Romanizing revisions of the Ambrosian liturgy after the Frankish conquest of Milan in 774, the Trisagion hymn had been sung at Mass in Milan, as in Toledo, Lyon, and Constantinople.

### Latin Textual Tropes

Although textual insertions in the Trisagion were widespread enough in the East that they came to be forbidden by a general council of the church, they are not attested to in Gallican books; the *Expositio* mentions only the word “Aius.” It may be that this implied something more than the simple Thrice Holy, that is to say it may have included texts such as were forbidden in 692—and not just the *miserere nobis*. But it may also be that the Gallican “Aius” implied something entirely different: it might conceivably refer to the other Trisagion, a Gallican counterpart, in Greek, of the *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus* sung in the Roman Mass.

But if not in Gallican books, there are Western instances of the troped Trisagion. The *Missale mixtum*,<sup>9</sup> promulgated by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros as part of a revival of the Old-Spanish liturgy, includes, in Latin only, the Trisagion with three textual insertions and an appended *miserere nobis*, but there is no hard evidence for

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do-antique,” in ALMA, Bulletin du Cange, LXII (2004), 172.

<sup>8</sup>Louis Duchesne, *Christian Worship, Its Origin and Evolution, A Study of the Latin Liturgy Up to the Time of Charlemagne*, 5th ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), pp. 88 et seq.

<sup>9</sup>The online facsimile is available at <<http://www.hispanomozarabe.es/Liturgia/libros/biblioteca-01.htm>>. The Trisagion is found on f. 194.

this particular set<sup>10</sup> of tropes before 1500, the year the Mozarabic missal was printed. While it is certain that not all of the contents of the missal are authentically Old Spanish,<sup>11</sup> it does seem plausible—since additions to the original hymn (other than “have mercy on us”) are not found in Gregorian documents, nor would have been used in the Byzantine liturgy circa 700, nor are known to have been used in the Gallican liturgy—that the Trisagion and the three textual tropes found in the *Missale mixtum* are genuinely Mozarabic.

Following are the “verses” sung in front of the altar after the officium (the Old-Spanish introit chant) on Easter Day:

*Sanctus deus qui sedes super cherubim solus invisibilis*

*Sanctus fortis qui in excelsis glorificaris vocibus angelicis*

*Sanctus immortalis qui solus es (sic) immaculatus salvator miserere nobis.*

In Milan, the Latin Trisagion was sung with textual insertions in a psallenda<sup>12</sup>—a processional chant.<sup>13</sup> Its text is as follows:

<sup>10</sup>But see Charlotte Roederer, *Festive Troped Masses from the Eleventh Century*, Collegium Musicum, Yale University, Second Series, XI (1989), where similar textual interpolations are seen in Aquitanian sources; see especially p. xliii.

<sup>11</sup>Bernard, “Hagius,” 172, concerning the lines added to the Trisagion, writes “ces farcitures et ces versets ne sont certainment primitifs.”

<sup>12</sup>For transcriptions of all 593 of these chants see Terence Bailey, *Psallendæ: The Ambrosian Processional Antiphons*, Musicological Studies, CIX (Kitchener, Ont.: Institute of Mediæval Music, 2018).

<sup>13</sup>The ‘Aius ante evangelium’ was sung in the Gallican Mass during a procession bringing the Gospel

*Sanctus deus qui sedes super cherubim solus invisibilis*

*Sanctus fortis qui archangeli Michaelis orationem suscepisti*

*Sanctus immortalis qui solus immaculatus salvator miserere nobis.*

Two of the three Ambrosian tropes are the same, or very nearly, as those in the *Missale mixtum*, and it may be that the Mozarabic and Ambrosian texts are related through an intermediary. But it may also be that Spain was the immediate source of most of the text of the psallenda (although not, presumably, of its melody). The Mozarabic occasion—at the beginning of Mass on Easter Day—would have been particularly memorable, and descriptions may have come to Milan by means of the Franks,<sup>14</sup> or by way of other travelers who had heard the chant in Toledo.

If the set of tropes found in the *Missale mixtum* (and perhaps sung elsewhere as well<sup>15</sup>) was the basis of the psallenda, the second of the three elements was replaced, and—for reasons that will soon be apparent—the substitution was certainly Milanese. The Mozarabic and Ambrosian textual

book to the place where the pericope for the day was read aloud (Rattcliffe, *Expositio*, 7).

<sup>14</sup>It is widely accepted that in 870 Charles the Bald, the Frankish King, “wishing to see what the ancient Gallican Rite had been like, had priests sent from Spain to say the Toledan Mass before him” (see *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Mozarabic Rite”). But see also André Jacob, “Une lettre de Charles le Chauve au clergé de Ravenne?” in *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique*, LXVII (1972), 409–22, especially 412, where the authenticity of the “lettre” (Epistola Karoli Calvi Imp. ad clerum Ravennatem) is challenged—although not the events at issue.

<sup>15</sup>See note 10, above.

tropes of the Trisagion both refer to angels.<sup>16</sup> But “who in heaven are glorified by the voices of angels” is not *particularly* appropriate for Easter, whereas “who received the prayer of the archangel Michael”—and the text of the Trisagion itself—were both precisely appropriate for the Milanese assignment.

*Sanctus deus, Sanctus fortis* and *Sanctus immortalis*, were widely, if controversially, understood to refer to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and it seems clear that a Trinitarian interpretation of the Thrice Holy and the added text with the particular reference to St. Michael were

employed in the psallenda because its assignment (its only assignment) was in the procession from the Church of St. Lawrence to the *balneum*, the bath where, on the Monday in Holy Week, a leper was ritually bathed. The connection is revealed in the following:

Tradition relates that St. Michael in the earliest ages caused a medicinal spring to spout at Chairotopa near Colossae, where all the sick who bathed there, *invoking the Blessed Trinity and St. Michael*, were cured.<sup>17</sup>

Sanctus de- us qui sedes super cherubim solus in-

vi-si-bi- lis sanctus for- tis qui archange- li Mi-

cha- e- lis orati- o-nem susce- pis- ti sanctus immorta -lis qui

solus imma-cula-tus salva- tor mise-rere nobis.

<sup>16</sup>Angels were also associated in the Gallican liturgy: we read in the the *Expositio* (Ratcliffe, 7) that the *Aius* was sung “as it was by the angels in Christ’s presence at the gates of hell” (*Aius in specie angelorum ante faciem christi ad portas inferni*).

<sup>17</sup>*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “St. Michael the Archangel.” For further detail see Richard .F. Johnson, *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), p. 33.

Only two manuscripts (both late copies of the Ambrosian ordiinal) are known to contain the melody of the psallenda: Milan, Biblioteca capitolare, D.2.28, copied in 1268,<sup>18</sup> and Biblioteca ambrosiana C23 inf, which has been dated to 1336.<sup>19</sup> Just above is *Sanctus deus qui sedes* transcribed from the earlier manuscript.<sup>20</sup>

### Melodic Analysis of *Sanctus deus qui sedes*

In Figure 2, where it is shown that pitch-series operate in the melody (as is typical of responsories and antiphons), some interesting details suggest deficiencies in its transmission. The schema also makes it clear that the textual insertions in the Milanese Tris-

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<sup>18</sup>“Biblioteca capitolare Beroldus novus, copié ... par le prêtre Jean Boffa en 1268 (Roger Gryson, Hermann Josef Frede, *Altlateinische Handschriften, deuxième partie Mss 300–485* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004), item 401, p.190.

<sup>19</sup>Milano, Biblioteca ambrosiana, C 23 inf., membranaceo, 1336' (Catalogo Unico Delle Biblioteche Italiane, 1975–, item 466), available online.

<sup>20</sup>The melody included in C 23 inf is unreliable. In both manuscripts containing the psallenda, the level of the last part of the chant is the same, and both conclude on *d*. But in the manuscript from the Ambrosiana it *begins* on *f* (not *a*) and subsequently the interval between the pitch notated for the last syllable of *invisibilis* and the pitch following is a very unlikely sixth (in Helmholtz letter-notation, *A* to *f*). There are also other concerns with the melody that need not be detailed. There is nothing to suggest that the first pitch in C 23 inf was not meant to be an *f*; it is placed squarely on a red line. But there are, not infrequently, indications in other Ambrosian manuscripts that such coloured lines were sometimes drawn, carelessly, *after* the neumes were entered in campo aperto, and this seems the best explanation for the disagreement between the two manuscripts about the pitch level of the first two thirds of the melody.

agion were not prosulæ, i.e., new text added to an existing melisma and, therefore, are likely not from the first period of troping. Milan took part in that widespread fashion but in a limited way only. *Melodic* tropes, known as *melodiæ*,<sup>21</sup> were added extensively in Ambrosian chant—they are found in all the antiphoners beginning with the earliest—but text was never added to the host chant, at least not before *Sanctus deus*, which is all the more interesting for being unique.

Before the “schema” (the word is meant in the sense of *outline*) is presented, a few words of explanation are necessary.<sup>22</sup> Empty brackets (in grey to make them less obtrusive) draw attention to pitches available in the series but not employed in the particular iteration. The brackets are seldom meant to indicate something missing in the melody, but serve principally to make the alignment of the successive rows in the schema more obvious. In schemata such as is given in Figure 2, pitches that were immediately repeated, even several times, are represented by a single letter (following this policy makes the operation of the series clearer, and is only minimally reductive: in the resulting outline of the melody no pitches are omitted and their exact order is preserved). But exceptions to this rule are sometimes called for—when, for example, a letter represents the last pitch of a series

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<sup>21</sup>These “longissimæ melodiæ” (to use Notker’s term), were produced by the immediate repetition of longer and shorter segments of existing melismas.

<sup>22</sup>The compositional procedure is explained more fully than is necessary here in “Pitch Series in Chant Composition, a Demonstration,” *Journal of the Plainsong & Medieval Music Society*, 27/1 (April 2018), 27–40.

and also the first of the next—in such cases, and in a few others whose explanation will be equally obvious, a letter may be repeated, but it is always entered in parentheses (also in grey).

In the simple notational system of Figure 2 (a system I have employed in other publications) it is unnecessary to specify the octave, except for the first pitch in a series, and then only if it does not fall within the pitch-range where Helmholtz employed lower-case letters (serendipitously, the central range of ecclesiastical chant). Once a series has begun, the assumption is that all intervals are a fourth or less. When an interval is larger (a relatively rare occurrence) a small arrow (↑ or ↓) is inserted to indicate the direction. A vertigule (|) indicates the final pitch of the last syllable of the word that is given as a cue in the same line (see line 10, 19 etc.).

The melody of *Sanctus deus qui sedes* is based on three pitch-series whose relationship is shown in Figure 1.

<i>f-g-</i>	<i>f-e-d</i>
<i>f-g-a-</i>	<i>g-f-e-d</i>
<i>f-g-a-b-c-b-a-g-f-e-d</i>	

*Figure 1: The pitch series employed in  
Sanctus deus qui sedes*

The longest of these series accounts for the whole of the first phrase and the melodically almost-identical second (the ends of series are marked in the schema with a raised period; see lines 18, 37, 49 and 51). Although the series whose apex is *c'* is used only once, it suffices by means of repetitions of segments. In Western ecclesiastical chant, not least the Ambrosian, the principal sense-units end—ideally, and in most cases actually—with a cadence on

the finalis, and to emphasize these major divisions cadential extensions were frequently employed. In the present instance, the extension marking the end of the first phrase is *c-d-e-d* (in *Sanctus deus*, as we know the melody, this figure is sometimes incomplete), and this extension is repeated (see Figure 2, lines 18 and 19). It would seem that the conclusion of the *second* musical phrase should have been marked in the same way as the end of the first, but the melody as it has been transmitted to us appears to have been adapted awkwardly to the extra syllables in phrase 3; presently, the same cadential extension repeated in lines 37 and 38 has no function.

The last phrase of the chant employs only two of the series in Figure 1: the one with *a* as its apex in lines 42 to 49, and the shortest and narrowest series of all in lines 50 and 51. (It happens too often to be a coincidence that the shortest pitch-series will be found at the beginning and conclusion of a chant—a sign that it was the basic component.)

Cadential extensions are not explained by the series; presumably they are casual elaborations—to be expected, over time, in an oral tradition. The other elaboration outside the series, also frequently found in Ambrosian chant, is an introductory figure (doubtless suggested by the initia of psalm tones) preceding the beginning of some or all of the iterations. In the case of the psallenda, the figure *d-e* is found, somewhat unusually, only toward the end of the chant (see the beginning of lines 42 and 50). It may be that these pitches are better explained as another symptom of an uncertain transmission of the melody, and were suggested in the present instance by the irregular employment of the cadential extensions.

	[ ] a				
	g a b				
	a b c b a g				
		a [ ]			
		b a g f			5
		a [ ] f			
	a [ ] c [ ]	a [ ] g			
		a [ ]			
		b a g			
		a [ ] f			10
		a g		sanctus	
		a g f			
		g f e			
		f [ ]			
		g f e d			15
		[ ] f			
		g f e			
		f e d · c [ ] e d			
		c d e d   ↑		invisibilis	20
	[ ] a				
	g a b				
	a b c b a g				
		a [ ]			
		b a g f			
		a [ ] f			25
	a [ ] c [ ]	a [ ] g			
		a [ ]			
		b a g			
		a [ ] f			30
		a g		fortis	
		a g f			
		g [ ]			
		a [ ] f e d			
		e [ ]			
		[ ] f			35
		g f e			
		f e d c d e d			
		c d e [ ]			
		[ ] f			
		g f e			40
		f [ ] d   ·		susceptisti	
(d) e	f g				
	f g a				
	g   a				
	f [ ] a				45
	a			immortalis	
	f g a				
		g			
		g			
		[ ] f e			
		g f e			
		f [ ] d ·			
(d) e	f g				50
		f e			
		f [ ] d   ·		nobis	

Figure 2: Schema of Sanctus deus qui sedes



## Correction of the Usual Melody of the Gregorian Trisagion?

One might reasonably expect that the melody of a chant consisting of three analogous text phrases would have the overall form A A A; in fact, the form of the traditional melody of the Trisagion in Gregorian manuscripts is A A B, as in the transcription below from the twelfth-century antiphoner, Porrentruy, Bibliothèque cantonale jurassienne, ms 18 (p. 176).<sup>23</sup>

A-gi- os o the- os Agi- os is- chy- ros

A-gi- os athana- tos ele- i- son y- mas.

A close melodic relationship of the third phrase of this melody (on the second staff, above) to that of the first two phrases is not immediately obvious. But if, as below, the clef of the first staff is changed, transposing the first two phrases of the melody from Porrentruy a third higher, the similarities become apparent and the overall form is seen to be the expected A A A'.

Agi- os o the- os Agi- os ischy- ros

A-gi- os athana- tos ele- i- son y- mas.

<sup>23</sup>This manuscript, consulted online via the Cantus Database ([cantus.uwaterloo.ca](http://cantus.uwaterloo.ca)), contains almost the same melody as that found in all the editions of the Graduale Romanum, where the sources of the melodies are not given.

*The radical suggestion  
that the first two  
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by the melody of the  
psallenda.*

The radical suggestion that the first two phrases of the Gregorian Trisagion were meant to be a third lower is suggested and supported by the melody of the psallenda. In Figure 3 are compared, in alphabetic notation (where similarities and differences are more easily seen than on musical staves) the outlines of the partially-transposed Trisagion from Porrentruy 18 and, untransposed, the corresponding phrases (omitting the three textual tropes and their melody), from Milan, Bibl. capit. D.2.28. Pitch-letters in bold type represent the melody of Porrentruy; those in unemphasized type, that of D.2.28. The vertigules, as in Figure 2, are placed in the letter series after the last pitch of the last syllable of the words given in the same line on the far right.

The Gregorian Trisagion concludes on *g*, the finalis; the Ambrosian concludes on *d*, the finalis of the psallenda. But, nonetheless, the relationship of the two melodies seems clear.

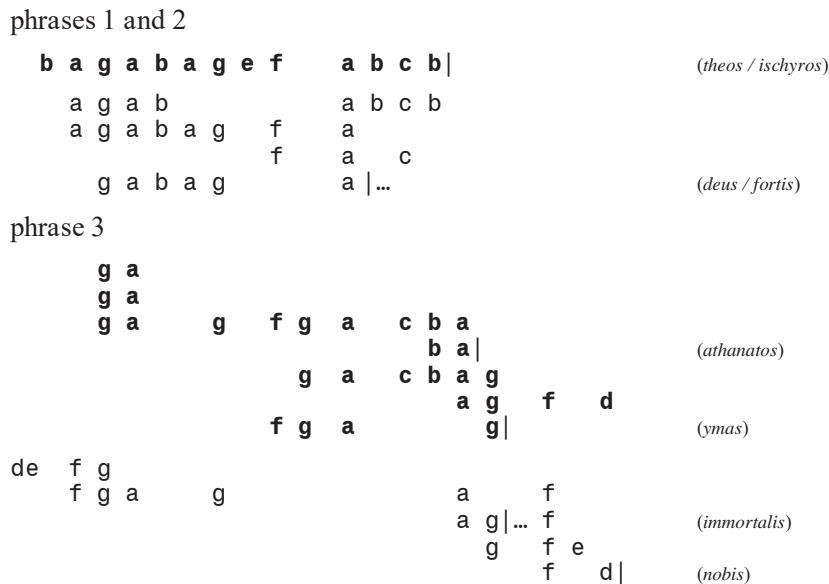


Figure 3: Melodic outlines of the partially transposed Trisagion in the Porrentruy antiphoner and the untransposed Trisagion in Ambrosiana D.2.28 compared

### The Source of the Melody of the Trisagion in the Psallenda *Sanctus deus qui sedes*

Spain may have been the source of the text shared by the officium and the psallenda, but considering the circumstances, likely not of its melody; this was probably found closer to home. The only use of the Trisagion in the Gregorian liturgy was as a component of the *Improperia* sung at Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday. This observance—not necessarily including the *Improperia*—was taken over from Jerusalem in the seventh or eighth century, and if some form of the Adoration was not already known in Milan it seems likely that the Milanese would soon have followed the Romans. But the Ambrosian Adoration is simpler: only two psallendæ are provided for the procession bringing the cross from the sacristy and the ceremony did not include the *Improperia*. This does not mean that the melody of the Trisagion was unknown to the Milanese. It is perhaps too much to speculate that it was remembered from a time when it was a regular component of the Mass, but

the Milanese came to be surrounded by the Gregorian rite in cities as close as Monza (less than fifteen kilometers away), and not merely surrounded: the Gregorian liturgy, by special permission, was used in some of the churches in Milan itself.

The melodic setting of the Trisagion incorporated in *Sanctus deus qui sedes* is not the same as that of Porrentruy or the *Graduale Romanum*. The latter, the received melody, is the most widely known, but it was not the only melody for the hymn.<sup>24</sup> And it may be that, adventitiously, a better source was chosen by the Milanese when an appropriate processional antiphon was needed for the procession of the priests to accompany the leper to the place of his ritual bathing. ♦

<sup>24</sup>The sources of the *Improperia* listed in the Cantus Database include a sixteenth-century gradual from Augsburg, København, Det kongelige Bibliotek Slotsholmen, Gl. Kgl. S. 3449, 80 [05] V. On folio 211r the three syllables of the first ‘Agyos’ are set to the pitches *f-f-gaaag*.

## Review

# Keeping the Faith: The Power of Great Sacred Music

*To Sing with the Angels: A History of the Twin Cities Catholic Chorale* by Virginia A. Schubert. St. Paul, Minn.: Saint Cecilia Publications, 2015. 243 pp., paperback. ISBN 9780692421055. \$24.95. Available from [www.saintceciliapublications.com](http://www.saintceciliapublications.com).

by Jane Schatkin Hettrick



In this book Virginia A. Schubert presents a narrative history of the Twin Cities Catholic Chorale, the resident choir in St. Agnes Church located in St. Paul, Minnesota—the story of a remarkable undertaking and lasting contribution to the great heritage of music in the Catholic Church. Dr. Schubert was in a good position to write this story because she has been singing in the Chorale from the time of its residency at St. Agnes, she knew its founder and director before that, and she witnessed its struggles and triumphs. At the same time, the chronicle contained in *To Sing with the Angels* is more than a study of a fine church choir in that the experiences

recorded could have broader application for music and liturgy in the Catholic Church and even the Church catholic.

St. Agnes Church has a long and venerable history. Founded in 1887, it has a continuous custom of celebrating the Latin mass *ad orientem* (priest facing the altar). The church has roots in Austrian Catholic tradition; even the building is modeled on the Austrian Baroque design, including the typical *Zwiebelturm* (onion tower). Its liturgical/musical practice looks to the German Caecilian reform movement, founded by Fr. Franz Xaver Witt in the mid-nineteenth century and reflected in the motu proprio on sacred music (1903) of Pope Pius X, which

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*Jane Schatkin Hettrick is professor of music, emeritus, Rider University and director of music at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Bayside, N.Y. She has edited the complete masses, symphonies, and organ concerto of Antonio Salieri, as well as music by other 18th-century composers. Her critical edition Antonio Salieri: Requiem with Two Related Motets was published in 2017 by A-R Editions. Dr. Hettrick has written widely on sacred music, with more than 150 articles, reviews, and book chapters.*

stressed the recovery of Gregorian chant as an integral part of the solemn liturgy.

The Twin Cities Catholic Chorale was founded over sixty years ago in 1956 by the Reverend Father (later, Monsignor) Richard J. Schuler (1920–2007). It grew from the earlier St. Paul Catholic Choral Society, established by Slovene immigrant Fr. Francis Missia in the 1930s. Missia’s vision for the church centered on the concept of “definite traditions,” and this view has remained a guiding principle through the life of the Chorale. While Schuler inherited an existing group, his journey to building the Chorale had many twists and turns, and as documented in this study, met with numerous obstacles.

Fr. Schuler was a scholar, having earned a doctorate in musicology. His research focused on the Renaissance composer Giovanni Maria Nanino, pupil of Palestrina and member of the papal choir. His dissertation included an edition of Nanino’s works. So from the beginning he brought to the practice of church music an understanding grounded in historical perspective. Lest we define “historical” as “out-of-touch” with today’s worship, let us remember that the church has always built its music on the past. As articulated by Pope Benedict XVI, the hermeneutic of continuity is essential for music. Fr. Schuler affirmed this principle: “Every age must stand squarely on the shoulders of those who have gone before. Musical styles develop with their roots in the past; eliminate the past and one finds that the wellsprings of musical inspiration and composition dry up too.” (p. 159) Through his charisma of music, applied with unflinching dedication, Fr. Schuler created living proof that in the church today, liturgical worship is not only compatible with,

but can flourish when combined with works from the great heritage of Catholic music.

Now in its forty-fifth season, the Chorale commands a repertoire of more than fifty masses, ranging from Palestrina to Rheinberger, but concentrating on composers of the Austrian Classical period, Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert. New masses are added year by year. Along the way the Chorale has presented a number of first American performances, including the Requiem of Michael Haydn and Mass in E (Op. 87) by the little-known Austrian Heinrich von Herzogenberg (1843–1900).

It should be pointed out that Fr. Schuler’s goal was always to carry out in practice the intention of Holy Mother Church with regard to music. Indeed, the church has always endeavored to preserve sacredness and weed out secularity in liturgical music. And if read correctly, the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council maintained that goal. According to the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, chapter 6, articles 112, 114, 116) two elements are required for the liturgy: “it must be sacred and it must be art.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the council did not ban the Latin Mass, and certainly did not outlaw Gregorian chant; on the contrary, it was given pride of place. But as most Catholics know, that is not what happened. The American bishops hastened to install the vernacular, at the same time creating the impression that it was wrong to celebrate Mass in Latin. Moreover, together with the widespread misinterpretation of the wording “*actuosa participatio populi*,” this new dispensation led to the

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia Schubert, *To Sing with the Angels: A History of the Twin Cities Catholic Chorale* (St. Paul, Minn.: Saint Cecilia Publications, 2015), 15.

approval of “folk music,” and from there it went on to allow guitar masses, later even to rock bands with microphones in the chancel. According to Joseph Ratzinger (later, Pope Benedict XVI), the term “active participation” “was very quickly misunderstood to mean something external.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, he defines action in the liturgy as “the action of God himself,” in which we are privileged to participate.<sup>3</sup> Added external actions too quickly turn into the theatrical, thus missing the real “theo-drama” of the liturgy.<sup>4</sup> Fr. Schuler asserts: “liturgical music *is* liturgy and listening *is* active participation.”<sup>5</sup>

While building the Chorale, Fr. Schuler served many years as editor of the journal *Sacred Music*, writing many of the articles himself. In those writings<sup>6</sup> we find apologia for and persuasive exposition of his liturgical knowledge and thinking. Briefly stated, this philosophy holds with the council that “Music in the liturgy . . . must be sacred and it must be art. Whatever is not true art is not worthy of the *servitium Dominicum*, God’s service; what is not sacred does not fulfill its purpose, God’s worship.”<sup>7</sup>

Because his work coincided with the upheavals of the 1960s, Fr. Schuler had to struggle repeatedly with controversial, even hostile ecclesiastical environments. There were radical elements in the church that tried to stamp out what he wanted to accomplish. For example, in 1966 the Consociatio

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worship.”*

Internationalis Musicae Sacrae (International Church Music Society), together with the Church Music Association of America, organized the Fifth International Church Music Congress, with Fr. Schuler as the chairman of its general committee. The purpose was to demonstrate the implementation of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, using a theme quoted from Saint Augustine, “*Cantare amantis est*” (To sing is an expression of love). The liberal Catholic press reacted with anything but love, some writers unable to hide their animus. In a largely sarcastic piece, reviewer Robert J. Snow ridicules what he calls “conservatism only,” “self-assembled . . . experts,” and shows his contempt for the “high” Mass (i.e., celebrated in music). Their goal, he says, is “the banning from the liturgy of all present-day experiments at making church music relevant to the various cultures and subcultures of the

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 175.

<sup>5</sup>Schubert, *To Sing with the Angels*, 118.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., appendix G.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 15.

twentieth century and requesting a return to ‘our great heritage.’”<sup>8</sup> Again, Ratzinger questions “experimentation” in liturgy: “True liturgical education cannot consist in learning and experimenting with external activities.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding cultural relevance he writes: “Everywhere these days the liturgy seems to be the proving ground for experiments in inculturation.” . . . only to produce “dismal distortions” of the liturgy.<sup>10</sup> “The liturgy becomes personal, true, and new, not through tomfoolery and banal experiments with the words.”<sup>11</sup>

Even before the congress convened (Milwaukee, August 1966), opposing forces had secretly planned to disrupt the final session and resolutions, a plot that took some strategy to foil. In his article “The Hero of the Mighty Musical Struggle,” Jeffrey Tucker gives the reasons why Fr. Schuler was heroic and why the struggle was mighty.<sup>12</sup> He reminds us of the state of the culture when Fr. Schuler began his music program at St. Agnes: “This was the Age of Aquarius. . . . the world was slogging in the mud at Woodstock and the folk Mass was sweeping all before it.” “It took incredible courage and conviction in those days to continue singing Gregorian chant, Palestrina, Byrd, Mozart, Haydn, and Schubert—Mass in the Roman and Viennese tradition.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, relentless attacks

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>9</sup>Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 175.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 200–201.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>12</sup>Jeffrey Tucker, “The Hero of the Mighty Musical Struggle,” *Crisis*, August 29, 2013 <<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2013/the-hero-of-the-mighty-musical-struggle>>.

<sup>13</sup>Schubert, *To Sing with the Angels*, 52.

from many corners dogged Schuler for years. Being the “lone voice crying out in the wilderness,”<sup>14</sup> he was criticized for living in the past, personally vilified, often the subject of derision. In addition, the negative label of being a “pre-Vatican II parish” was attached to St. Agnes Church.

For his part, none of this mattered to Fr. Schuler and it did not deter him from his personal mission (as phrased by one observer), “to preserve the richness of the sacred liturgies.”<sup>15</sup> To those who accused him of “living in the past,” he always responded: “I am not behind the times. I am forty years ahead of the times.”<sup>16</sup> Also working against Schuler (in the minds of his detractors) were his undeniable qualifications and achievements. William Mahrt, President of the Church Music Association of America, states it outright: Schuler was “a triple-threat as a pastor.” He was an “accomplished musician,” a “noted practical liturgist,” and an “accomplished pastoral theologian.”<sup>17</sup> Confident in his vision for the future, Schuler led the Chorale to many important achievements and glorious moments, along the way gaining “converts.” A highlight was the Chorale’s 1974 singing tour in Europe—to choir members, it was a pilgrimage. It included stops in south Germany, Austria, and also Rome (St. Peter’s). The author remarks on the spiritual dimension of the program to the participants. “Through the daily High Masses, celebrated in the Roman Rite, sung in the common tongue of Latin, and in the musical styles of many periods, the singers and accompanying pilgrims came to understand what

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 75.

it means to belong to the universal Church.” “We experienced the bond of a common faith expressed in a universal liturgy. We also felt united with the historical church.”<sup>18</sup>

Looking back from over fifty years since the beginnings of the Chorale, it is fitting to speak of Fr. Schuler’s legacy. Most visible is that the musical program he established at St. Agnes Church lives on after his death. The Twin Cities Catholic Chorale, with orchestral accompaniment, sings a Latin High Mass according to the liturgical calendar every Sunday and feast day, excepting Advent, Lent, and summer break. To my knowledge, St. Agnes is the *only* church in the United States where a Classical orchestral Mass along with the chanted propers can be experienced regularly within a worship service. I know of only two other places where every Sunday works from this repertoire are heard, and both are in Vienna—the historic source of so much great Catholic music. One is the court church (*Augustinerkirche*) and the other, the former imperial chapel (*Hofkapelle*), home of the Vienna Boys Choir.

In his own words, Fr. Schuler sums up his contribution: “What we have done is take the beautiful, inspiring musical masses out of the concert hall and the theaters and bring it back where it belongs, as part of the Catholic liturgy.”<sup>19</sup> The value of this achievement can hardly be overstated. In the present time of arid culture, the Catholic Church needs to reclaim its musical patrimony. Indeed, evidence suggests that in worship and in evangelism, “Beauty matters.” “Beautiful liturgies, with substantial and powerful music . . . can move believer and unbeliever alike,

reminding us of our great hunger for Truth and Goodness. For the unbeliever, it can even be the first stirrings of Faith.”<sup>20</sup> A few years ago I was in Minneapolis for a meeting of the Mozart Society of America, and the group of scholars attended Mass at St. Agnes to hear the Chorale sing Mozart’s *Missa longa* (K 262). What I observed was a large congregation, families with children, students, older people, and visitors—all receiving the Christian message through great Catholic music. This gathering bears witness to the truth in Fr. Schuler’s statement: “It is through art that man comes to God.”<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, *To Sing with the Angels* is an important book for several reasons. First, it documents the history of the Twin Cities Catholic Chorale, which, as a church-serving ensemble based in a small city in Middle America, might not be noticed in the major musical press. In doing so, it preserves, beyond the continuation of the Chorale, the posterity of Msgr. Richard Schuler. For choir directors, there are lessons here as well as inspiration. While a music program of orchestral masses depends on a big budget, smaller forms of sacred music require only the training of willing singers to attain a level of excellence. (This is from my own experience as a choir director in a small congregation.) Finally, these stories shed light on the conflicted environment in the church following the Second Vatican Council and remind us of the fragility of truth and beauty in a fallen world. *To Sing with the Angels* is strongly recommended for church musicians, music libraries, Catholic colleges and seminaries, and readers interested in the history of church music. ♦

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 95.

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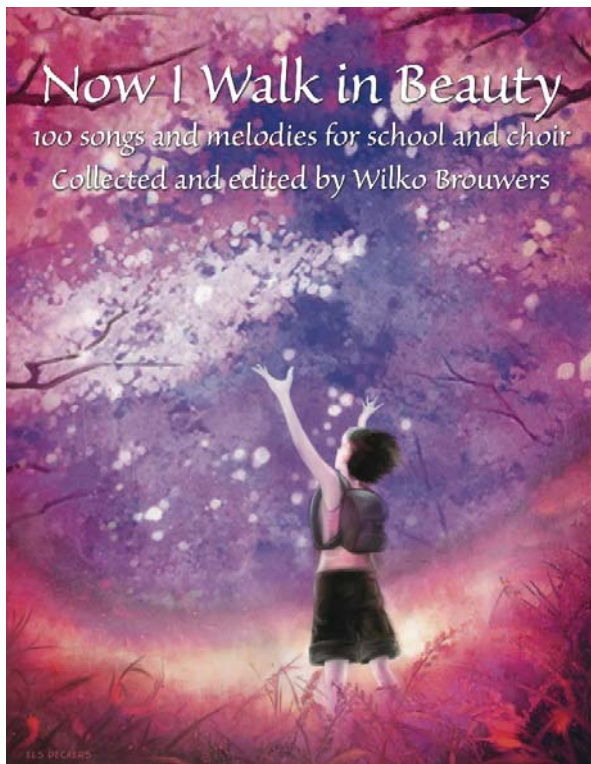
<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 107.

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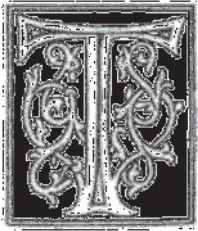
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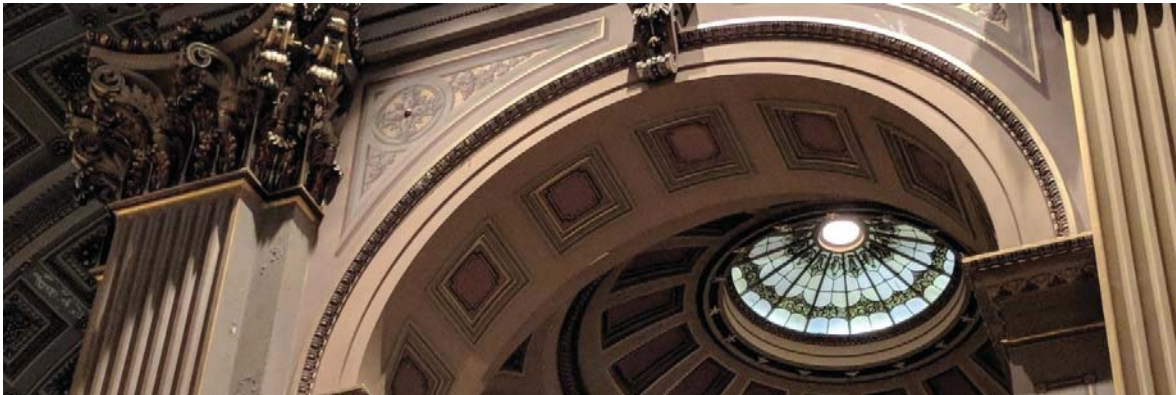
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