

Why the Liturgy Should Be Sung

The worship of God in song is fundamental for man's identity and flourishing.

by William Mahrt



It may be “preaching to the choir” in addressing the colloquium and the readers of *Sacred Music*; you may already understand my basic message. My best argument is what is done in practice at the colloquium and in many parishes—completely sung liturgies of various descriptions, all for which music is an element of the sacred and of beauty. Here are some fundamental reasons for doing what we do—for singing the liturgy.

A basic issue is the relation of the theocentric and the anthropocentric, the theocentric—the way the liturgy is centered upon God, upon the Divine; and the anthropocentric—how it focuses upon man, upon the human. These two principles are sometimes found in conflict, particularly if the focus of the liturgy is principally on the congregation. I propose, however, that the best anthropocentric focus is to place it in the service of the theocentric, as I explain below.

It is fundamental that the liturgy address God. You need only to read the principal

texts of the Mass to see it as principally the action of the church joining Christ in offering himself to the Father. Particularly the text of the Roman Canon bears that out. From beginning to end, it is Christ's offering to the Father and concludes with a doxology incorporating the Holy Spirit in this offering:¹

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¹The Second Eucharistic Prayer similarly says: “Therefore, as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation . . .”

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Per Christum Dominum nostrum.
Per quem hæc omnia, Domine,
semper bona creas, sanctificas, vivi-
ficas, benedicis et præstas nobis.

Per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso,
est tibi Deo Patri omni-potenti,
in unitate Spiritus Sancti, omnis
honor et gloria per omnia sæcula
sæculorum. Amen.

Through Christ our Lord.
Through whom you continue to
make all these good things, Lord. You
sanctify them, fill them with life, bless
them, and bestow them upon us.

Through him, and with him, and
in him, O God almighty Father, in
the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory
and honor is yours, for ever and ever.
Amen.

The same is true of the orations; the collect generally concludes with a doxology:

Per Dominum nostrum Jesum
Christum Filium tuum, qui tecum
vivit et regnat in unitate Spiritus
Sancti, Deus, per omnia sæcula
sæculorum. Amen.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns
with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen

These and many other elements support the transcendence of the liturgy—that it should focus beyond the everyday, it should transcend the here and now.

The direction to the Father is a reason to celebrate the Mass *ad orientem*, i.e., facing East—the priest and the people facing the same direction. When this is done it is clear that most of the action of the Mass is directed outside of us; but when the priest faces the congregation, it may seem that he is addressing them. It is true that at some points in the Mass there is a dialogue between the priest and the people, but that is just the place in a Mass *ad orientem* where the priest turns to face the people, something actually prescribed by the rubrics of the missal of the ordinary form, in both

Latin and English,² which rubrics suggest that facing the altar is the normal posture. On the other hand, when the priest celebrates the whole Mass facing the people and

²At several points in the Mass, the missal prescribes that the priest turns or faces the people; this is true for Latin (*Missale Romanum*, 2002) and for English *The Roman Missal* (2011). The rubrics prescribe that the priest conduct the Liturgy of the Word from the chair (implying facing the people for this portion of the Mass); but when he goes to the altar for the offertory and it is time to invite the congregation to pray, the rubric says, “Stans postea in medio altaris, versus ad populum, extendens et jungens manus, dicit: ‘Orate fratres . . .’”—“Standing at the middle of the altar, facing the people, extending and then joining his hands he says: ‘Pray, brethren . . .’” Before giving the peace, “Sacerdos, ad populum conversus, extendens et

attempts to engage their attention, there is an ambiguity of who is being addressed. It is true that this is ameliorated if he lifts his attention upward and even more if he uses the Benedictine arrangement.³

There can be a problem at the “minor elevation,” the lifting of the Sacrament in

jungens manus, subdit: ‘Pax Domini . . .’—“The Priest, turned towards the people, extending and then joining his hands, adds ‘The peace of the Lord . . .’” When he offers the host to the congregation, again “versus ad populum, clara voce dicit: ‘Ecce Agnus Dei . . .’”—“while facing the people, [he] says aloud, ‘Behold the Lamb of God . . .’”; afterwards “versus ad altare, secreto dicit: ‘Corpus Christi custodiat me . . .’”—“The Priest, facing the altar, says quietly: ‘May the Body of Christ . . .’” Before the postcommunion prayer, “stans ad altare vel sedem, sacerdos, versus ad populum, junctis manibus, dicit: ‘Oremus.’”—“standing at the altar or at the chair and facing the people, with hands joined, the Priest says: ‘Let us pray.’” Then before the dismissal, “Sacerdos, versus ad populum, dicit ‘Dominus vobiscum.’”—“The Priest, facing the people and extending his hands, says: ‘The Lord be with you.’” Finally, “Diaconus, vel ipse sacerdos, manibus junctis, versus ad populum dicit: ‘Ite missa est.’”—“Then the Deacon, or the Priest himself, with hands joined and facing the people, says ‘Go forth . . .’” These prescriptions occur in the Mass when the priest directly addresses the people. They would make no sense for Masses in which the priest constantly faces the people.

³In Masses celebrated facing the people, the Benedictine arrangement is the placement of the crucifix at the center facing the celebrant, with three candles on either side. It is so called because of its strong advocacy by Pope Benedict. His *ars celebrandi* included this arrangement when he faced the people, and, as one could easily see in televised Masses, he constantly looked directly at the crucifix and never the congregation. Cf. Peter Kwasniewski, “Putting Christ at the Center: On the Benedictine Arrangement,” web site, *New Liturgical Movement*, Dec. 16, 2013, <<http://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2013/12/putting-christ-at-center-on-benedictine.html>>.

offering at the doxology at the end of the Canon, the culmination of the offering of the sacrifice of Christ to the Father. When the Mass is said facing the people, some might read this gesture as offering the sacrament to the congregation rather than to the Father, especially if the priest looks at the congregation.

This attitude of transcendence in the celebration of the Mass is reinforced by the use of the Latin language: it takes the proceeding out of the realm of the everyday, and expresses its sacredness. This was to some extent even true of the hieratic language of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in its old form, but that has been reduced in the present, though retained for the Ordinariate.⁴ Even the use of only a few phrases of Latin conveys something of this sacredness.

But the attitude of transcendence is even more strongly the case when the text is sung. The singing of the liturgy, with its elevated tone of voice and sacred melodies makes it unambiguous that it is special, outside the everyday; it is distinct from the ordinary speech, it is sacred. Because of God’s transcendence, we address him in a transcendent way. If we understand that God’s transcendence is beautiful—he is Beauty

⁴The provision of a liturgy for Anglicans who come to the Catholic Church as a group and celebrate the liturgy in traditional translations with some adaptations from the Anglican tradition; cf. *Divine Worship: The Missal in Accordance with the Roman Rite* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015); for example, a prayer after Communion, which begins “Almighty and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost feed us in these holy mysteries . . .” (p. 655), or in a hieratic translation from the Roman Missal, “O Lord Jesus Christ, who saidst to thine Apostles, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you . . .” (p. 651).

himself—then we must address him in the most beautiful way possible. Singing makes this much more possible; it has always been considered the proper way to address God.

Singing has been a feature of the liturgy through its history. In the Jewish tradition even the lessons were delivered with singing. When Jesus read from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue, as reported in the Gospel of St. Luke (4:16–22), he probably would have intoned it in the Jewish manner of cantilation, not entirely different from the manner of our singing the lessons today, a kind of formulaic singing; this was normative.⁵ Abraham Z. Idelssohn, in his book on Jewish music says that the Torah was not read in the synagogue without singing until the nineteenth century.⁶

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earliest melodies. It was always understood that when Mass was celebrated, it would be sung. The origins of the low Mass was in the private Mass, *missa privata*, a Mass celebrated by a priest of a religious order at a side altar, who, nevertheless was obliged to attend the sung chapter Mass. This appears as early as the ninth century, but was an accommodation which did not compromise the basic practice of always singing the Mass.⁷ As far as I know, the evidence does not say whether these Masses were sung or merely read; the fact that in the late Middle Ages in England, such Masses were celebrated in small chapels called chantries, suggests that private Masses were still sung.

But another factor was in play with the read Mass, *missa lecta*: mendicant friars, who did not always stay with a religious community but conducted a mission of preaching, being outside a community, which sang the Mass in common, had to celebrate a *missa privata*. But this was still an exception, The Dominican order is a good example: their founding was as a branch of the Augustinians, whose charism was the singing of the liturgy—Divine Office and Mass. They maintained their offices, although under Humbert of Romans, the offices adopted a slightly briefer form, for the purpose of allowing the friars more time for study.⁸ Their constitutions prescribed that “All the

⁵Cf. Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 53ff., 533.

⁶Abraham Z. Idelssohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), p. 35.

⁷Joseph A. Jungmann, S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (Missarum Sollemnia), 2 vols., tr. Francis A. Brunner, C.Ss.R. (New York: Benziger, 1951, 1955), vol. 1, p. 223–33.

⁸See William R. Bonniwell, O.P., *A History of the Dominican Liturgy* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1944), p. 131.

⁹Innocent Smith, O.P., “Dominican Chant and

hours in the church should be said briefly and succinctly.”⁹ This quite understandably contrasts strikingly with the rule for the Carthusians, who are hermits, and who sing only part of their office in common; it is sung very slowly.¹⁰ My experience of the Dominican order in the 1960s was that, even in small communities, they chanted the Divine Office in common.

The normative form of the liturgy remained the sung form, and even up to the time of the Second Vatican Council, the low Mass was officially seen to be a spoken form derived from the sung Mass, although in many places it had practically replaced the high Mass. The council actually intended to reaffirm the role of the high Mass:

Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when the divine offices are celebrated solemnly in song [*solemniter in cantu celebrantur*], with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people.¹¹

For the fathers of the council this was unambiguous: *solemniter*, solemnly, meant the solemn Mass with sacred ministers (priest, deacon, subdeacon, assistant priest [in pontifical Masses], master of ceremonies, and acolytes); and *in cantu*, not *with* but *in* chant, i.e., completely sung, as was the rule for the Solemn High Mass until the council.

Critics of the Constitution on the

Sacred Liturgy claim that “time bombs” were incorporated into the document, provisions that could be read in a traditional way and therefore be accepted by the fathers of the council, but which, upon the conclusion of the council, could be the basis of reforms the council fathers would never have authorized. While the tradition was that the High Mass was the norm—practically everything to be said aloud is to be sung—the constitution said it was the more noble form, but this hardly has the force of law. The result is that, even now, although the melodies are incorporated into the missal, rarely is a true High Mass celebrated. Rather, what we have at best is a *missa mixta*, a Mass in which the sung elements are thoroughly intermixed with spoken elements.

A similar situation exists in the prescription of the use of Gregorian chant. The conventional translation of the constitution gives an ambiguous message. The place of Gregorian chant in the liturgy is, as the council said, “*Ecclesia cantum gregorianum agnoscit ut liturgiae romanae proprium: qui ideo in actionibus liturgicis, ceteris paribus, principem locum obtineat*,”¹² which has normally been translated, “Gregorian chant, . . . other things being equal, should be given pride of place in liturgical services.” “Pride of place” is a weak translation of “*principem locum*,” which literally means “first place.” “Pride of place” might be the place you give an old uncle at the table but don’t let him speak. Rather, “first place” means that Gre-

Dominican Identity,” *Religions*, 2014:5, 964.

¹⁰Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), ¶113.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Second Vatican Council, Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, *Musicam Sacram* (March 5, 1967) <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_instr_19670305_musicam-sacram_en.html>.

gorian Chant is normative for the liturgy; it is the normative music of the Roman Rite. But the time bomb was *ceteris paribus*, “other things being equal,” which is legal terminology for allowing exceptions in rare cases. It was then said “other things are never equal,” and the chant was given no place at all. This is, however, absurd: why would the prescription even be made, if all things are never equal? Rather, *ceteris paribus* allows only rare exceptions, not common practice.

The role of the High Mass is confirmed by *Musicam Sacram* of 1967.¹³ This document attempted to resolve questions about sacred music which arose in the first three years after the council: it prescribed that

the distinction between solemn, sung, and read Mass, sanctioned by the Instruction of 1958 (n. 3), is retained, according to the traditional liturgical laws at present in force (§28).

This is, however, followed by a compromise:

For the sung Mass (*Missa cantata*), different degrees of participation are put forward here for reasons of pastoral usefulness, so that it may become easier to make the celebration of Mass more beautiful by singing, according to the capabilities of each congregation (§28).

Then follows the well-known three degrees of the employment of music (§§29–31): 1) essentially the dialogues between priest and people including the Sanctus and Lord’s Prayer; 2) the remainder of the Ordinary of the Mass and the intercessions; and 3)

¹³Ibid.

the Proper of the Mass and potentially the lessons. These three degrees were to be employed in progressive order, beginning with just the first, and adding the others in turn. The ostensible purpose of this prescription is to allow congregations which are inexperienced in singing the high Mass the time to learn their parts progressively. It is clear, though, that the intended end stage is the completely sung Mass.

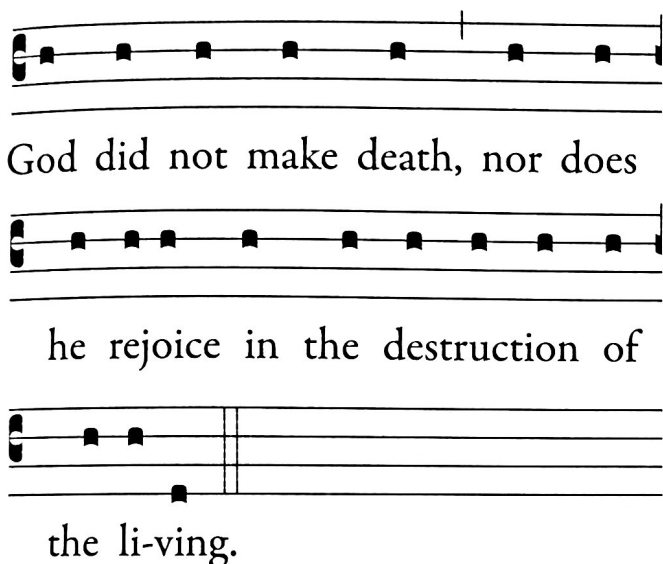
However, the allowance of a progressive employment of music (for the sake of learning the entire sung Mass) has been co-opted, and the American bishops’ *Sing to the Lord*¹⁴ articulated it as a principle, now called “progressive solemnity” (§IV.A), which results in what I have called the *missa mixta*, in which the normal Mass consists of a constant alternation of spoken and sung parts, without the aim of developing the completely sung Mass, a substantial compromise of *Musicam Sacram*. The principal of the sung Mass is further undermined by the final provision that some parts of the proper or ordinary may be sung in low Masses (§36). The General Instruction on the Roman Missal does not retain the hierarchy of elements of *Musicam Sacram*, nor does it contradict it. The maintenance of a completely sung Mass is completely consistent with the rubrics of the General Instruction.

The principle of the singing of everything to be said aloud is important. Consider the lessons of the Mass. As they are read in the average parish, there is generally little differentiation in the way they are read. But when they are sung, their melo-

¹⁴United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* (November 14, 2007) <<https://www.yakimadiocese.org/pdf/SingToTheLord.pdf>>.

dies differentiate each lesson from the others, emphasizing its character and giving it an elevated tone of delivery, suitable to a sacred text.

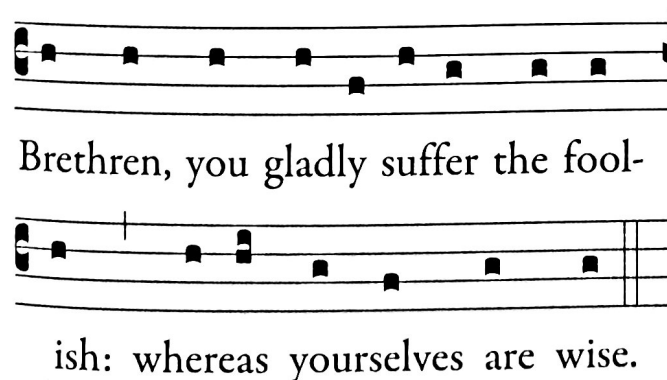
All the parts of the sung Mass are ordered. The prophesy has a tone that represents the slight harshness as well as the sense of proclamation of a prophet.



God did not make death, nor does
he rejoice in the destruction of
the living.

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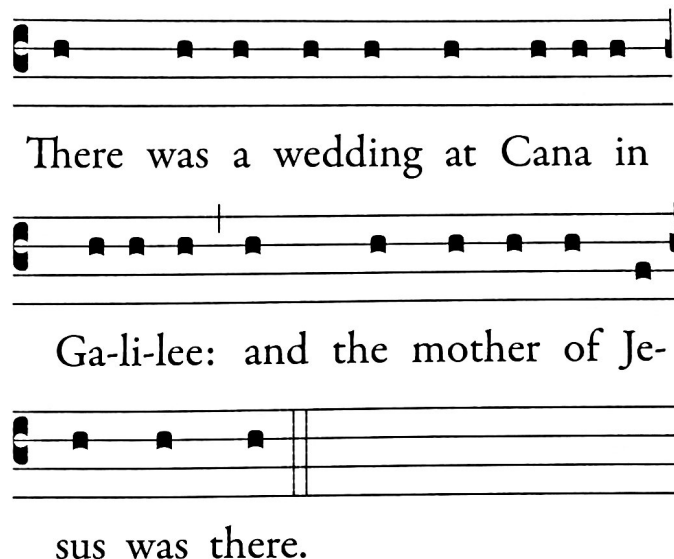
The epistle best represents the letters of St. Paul in its hortatory melody:



Brethren, you gladly suffer the foolish:
whereas yourselves are wise.

Brethren, you gladly suffer the foolish:
whereas yourselves are wise. (2 Cor. 11:19)

And the simplicity and elevation of the gospel is set to a melody that has a simple rising cadence:



There was a wedding at Cana in
Ga-li-lee: and the mother of Je-
sus was there.

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee:
and the mother of Jesus was there.
(John 2:1)¹⁵

These, together with the beautiful singing of the gradual and alleluia give the Liturgy of the Word a shape which leads to and focuses upon the gospel, the pre-eminent lesson. Similar comparisons of style and character could be drawn between the parts of the ordinary and of the proper.¹⁶

¹⁵There are several tones for the gospel; this one sets the distinction between the lessons well.

¹⁶Cf. my "Gregorian Chant As a Paradigm of Sacred Music," *Sacred Music*, 133, no. 1 (2006), 5–14; <<https://media.musicasacra.com/publications/sacredmusic/pdf/sm133-1.pdf>>, reprinted in *The Musical Shape of the Liturgy* (Richmond: Church Music Association of America, 2012), pp. 115–29.

Thus, our liturgy should be unambiguously directed toward the transcendent worship of God. The paradox of it is that He does not need it. God is perfect in Himself. It is we who need to worship Him. In the discussion about the theocentric versus the anthropocentric, the paradox is that the best anthropocentric thing—the ideal focus of the congregation—is to be theocentric. And it is the singing of the liturgy that enhances the theocentric. We sing “*Sursum corda*,” “*Habemus ad Dominum*,” and after the preface, “*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*.” We lift up our hearts to the most high and most holy God, and that is the proper liturgical attitude. The singing of the liturgy gives it an elevated tone of voice that is appropriate to the worship of God; it is the highest thing a human can do; it is fitting that its mode of expression is high.

But there is an immanent aspect to this singing as well. Music contributes spiritual, aesthetic, and liturgical, even cosmic aspects, and these can be viewed as “anthropocentric.”

Plato has described the effects of music upon the soul in the *Timaeus*. Here he gives the sense of hearing a high function of perceiving and responding to music.

So much of music as is adapted to the sound of the voice and to the sense of hearing is granted to us for the sake of harmony. And harmony, which has motions akin to the revolutions of our souls, is not regarded by the intelligent votary of the Muses as given by them with a view to irrational pleasure, which is deemed to be the purpose of it in our day, but as meant to correct any discord which may have arisen in the courses of the soul, and to be our ally in bringing

her into harmony and agreement with herself, and rhythm too was given by them for the same reason, on account of the irregular and graceless ways which prevail among mankind generally, and to help us against them.¹⁷

The effect of music is the internal harmony of the soul. This notion was expanded by Boethius in his definition of the three kinds of music: heavenly music, human music, and sounding music.¹⁸ Sounding music allows us to order human music, the internal motions of our souls; since they may have become disordered, music provides a model of order, of internal order. But what is even more important, those two kinds of music reflect heavenly music, the so-called music of the spheres. This was described in the Middle Ages as the motion of the planets in relation one to the other; they were imagined to move in proportional motions that were harmonious. There are those who say that all this has been discarded, with the discovery of the immensity of the universe. But I say that everything in the observable universe manifests the order of creation. Astronomers can predict the recurrent motion of planets, comets, and practically everything observable in the sky. This would not be possible if the immense

¹⁷Plato, *Timaeus*, 47, c–e, tr. Benjamin Jowett in *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series, 71 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), p. 1173.

¹⁸*Musica universalis, musica humana, and musica instrumentalis*. Manlius Severinus Boethius, *Fundamentals of Music*, I:2; cf. *The Early Christian Period and the Latin Middle Ages*, ed. James McKinnon, *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*, gen. ed. Leo Treitler, vol. 2 (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 30–31.

universe were not ordered by a creator. Likewise, the structure of the atom: physicists break it down into particles, and those particles into smaller particles and those into smaller; thus the structure of the atom has order that a century ago was not imagined. DNA as well shows a kind of productive order that practically pulls the carpet

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out from under theories of atheistic evolution. Rather the immense creation from the smallest to the grandest shows the result of order and purpose on the part of the Creator.

All of this is epitomized by the order of music. Various musics represent various kinds of order: chant represents the order of human speech, especially that of the scripture, and of the order of liturgical actions. Polyphony represents the order of the cosmos in the mutual coordination of parts, as well as the internal order of the soul. But

in all of these, there is a harmony implicit: in chant, the harmonious relation of the pitches of melody; in polyphony, the purposeful order in the layout of polyphonic parts in imitation; in harmonized music, the directly perceivable simultaneous harmonies. In each of these cases, the listener internalizes the perceived harmonies, modeling his affections upon those of the music. When these harmonies are intrinsic to sacred compositions and when they set sacred texts, the ordering of the “courses of the soul” is a part of the liturgy, directing us to the worship of God.

The singing of certain music elicits recollection. Singing the psalms of the Divine Office is meant for meditation. A monk once told me that the alternating of the choirs in the Divine Office facilitates each half of the choir ministering to the other. When one half chants the psalm vocally, the other half listens and meditates upon what they hear; and so for the singing of the alternate side as well. This suggests an attitude in our performance of liturgical music. While we must attend to the details of performance, we must also always keep in mind what we are doing—keeping in mind the significance of the text *and* of the music. This is one purpose of the pause in the middle of the psalm verse in the Divine Office: at this pause, one has just an instant to think of the significance of the first half, before singing the second half; and since the structure of the psalm verse is parallelism, the relation of the two halves is enhanced by such reflection.

But more fundamental recollection takes place in the singing of melismatic chants—graduals, alleluias, tracts, and the responsories of the office. The pattern is a sung reading followed by the melismatic chant. I sang graduals and alleluias at Mass

for at least a decade or so before I realized their purpose. After the beautiful singing of a gradual, one could notice a pin-dropping silence in the church. All white noise ceased, something not observed except here and at the elevation of the Host. With these chants, listeners follow the music as something beautiful and attractive, and as a result distractions cease, and internal focus, recollection, is established. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal describes the purpose of the “responsorial psalm,”¹⁹ as “meditation,” a traditional designation for the melismatic chants. I cannot imagine the current parish version to be the occasion for much recollection: the congregation is asked to sing a trivial antiphon in response to psalm-tone singing of the verses of the psalm. This repeated activity is not likely to elicit recollection; the solo chanting of the psalm verses is usually done to psalm tones—melodies that were

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¹⁹The GIRM (§61) does not distinguish between the gradual and the responsorial psalm heard in the average parish; in fact, “responsorial psalm” is the title given the gradual in the earliest manuscripts of Gregorian chant.

devised for an entire monastic community to sing all one hundred fifty psalms during the week; these are practical and communal, not solo chants. What is required after the singing of the lesson is not practicality and activity, but rather quiet and reflection. I fear it will be a long time before the gradual replaces the parish responsorial psalm, but one should work for this. Perhaps on major feast days, the real gradual could be sung, observing its reception by the congregation. Either gradual or alleluia could be sung in a meditation chant and the other in a congregational piece

This raises the question of the singing of the lessons. We do it at the colloquium, partly as a realization of the completely sung Mass, but more importantly because it makes the lessons central to the sung liturgy. If the gradual and alleluia are sung, they create a crescendo of expectation, which is fulfilled by the ceremonial singing of the gospel, accompanied by ministers, lights, and incense. If, rather, it is read, this is a letdown and does not honor to the gospel in the same way.

Readers are frequently recruited in great numbers, so they can have an opportunity for “participation.” I think this is mistaken: the proper participation of the congregation in the lessons is to hear them attentively and take them to heart. This happens best when the lessons are read by someone versed in the study of scripture and skilled in their delivery, preferably sung. When a melismatic chant precedes or follows a lesson, the listener has been prepared to hear it attentively through recollection, meditation.

After all, what is the purpose of the lessons in the liturgy? We are told it is information—the lessons are instruction for the congregation. I contend that their primary

purpose is more than information; we hear the same lessons year-in and year-out, even with the three-year cycle; the gospels from year-to year often relate the same event from different evangelists. Rather, it is the year's cycle of gospels which narrates, even celebrates, the history of salvation; it is a festive event. Thus it is important to sing them, to emphasize their festive character.

There is a practical dimension to singing in the liturgy. Most of us have heard a spoken response to the invitation "Orate fratres," "Pray brethren," in which someone seems to think it is his task to get to the end before the rest of the congregation. And then there is a group of voices who take their time and complete the prayer after everyone else. However, when these verses are sung, everyone sings together. The early- and late-comers are all drawn into the singing and do it together. Thus, singing can actually create a unity of voices, which leads to a unity of hearts. Singing together affirms and joins the affections of those singing and brings them together. Dante describes such unity as a concord of hearts. When the music they sing is extrinsic to the liturgy, the benefit to the liturgy is not as great as when what they are singing is the liturgy itself.

This leads me to describing the desirable characteristics of sacred music: distinct, unambiguous, excellent, and ample. Music for the liturgy must be distinct from other kinds of music. Gregorian chant fills that bill perfectly. It is sometimes used in motion pictures to evoke the sacred, but it can do that because of its pre-eminent role as liturgical music. I once heard the recording of chant that was made so popular by effective sales devices; it was in a toney clothing store: my reaction, "what is that

doing in here?" It was clear that it did not belong there. It is somewhat like incense: if you go into a church and smell incense you sense immediately exactly where you are. Music also has the capability of evoking a place: cocktail music, military music, dance music, Flamenco music, and so forth. Of all music, Gregorian chant evokes the church most effectively, although harmonized hymns can do that to a certain extent.

Another characteristic of sacred music is excellence. Nothing but the most excellent is good enough to present to the Lord. The Lord is the most perfect being we can approach, the most excellent music should be used. But, as I have said, it is we who need this excellence to address Him best.

This music should be unambiguously sacred. Much of the repertory performed at the colloquium is clearly sacred. But music in our churches is often in current popular styles. There is a real danger here; if you observe that what you hear in church you can get that at home; you may say, I don't need to come here for it.

There is the claim that in the Renaissance, masses were composed on secular tunes. Some of these masses might well be ambiguously secular; these I would avoid. But I have performed a mass of Orlando di Lasso upon a secular song, *Il me suffit*,²⁰ in order to explore whether it was truly sacred or whether it might be compromised by the secular character of its tune. What I found was a tune so drastically transformed by being set in an unmistakably sacred polyphonic style that left little room for ambiguity. I later learned that J.S. Bach had

²⁰Orlando di Lasso, *Messen 18–23*, ed. Siegfried Hermelink, *Sämtliche Werke, Neue Reihe*, Bd. 5, (Kassel: Bearenreiter, 1965), pp. 137–56.

employed that same tune as a chorale in one of his cantatas and in his *St. Matthew Passion*.²¹

Sacred music should be ample; this is an element of avoiding ambiguity. When an alleluia melody includes a melisma of a great number of notes, this amplitude makes it clear that the chant is not just there for the presentation of its text. This can be said of many of the genres of the proper. For example, the introit: its fully neumatic style (a few notes to most syllables) projects a sense of motion that is suitable to the procession

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into the church of the clergy, moving to the altar as the focal place of the liturgy, and its amplitude projects a solemnity very

²¹The melody received numerous settings as a Protestant chorale under the title, *Was mein Gott will, das g'schehe' allzeit*, including of J.S. Bach's *Cantata* 111 and *St. Matthew Passion*.

appropriate to the beginning of the celebration of Mass.²² The currently-used settings in English are not quite ample enough for this function; they adequately present their texts, but they may not sufficiently project a sense of solemnity.

There are, thus, many reasons to follow the tradition of the church and the documents after the council, maintaining the principle of a completely sung Mass. Some say you are holding on to the Reform of the Reform, a movement that has lost its momentum (which is not quite the case anyway); but I say we are not simply trying to go back to a time before the present, but rather we are following a principle articulated by Pope Benedict: the hermeneutic of continuity. The CMAA has always maintained the same tradition of the sung Mass articulated by the council and *Musicam Sacram*; we do not recapitulate a practice from a previous era, but rather maintain a perennial practice in continuity.

A statement from *Musicam Sacram* eloquently summarizes my case: through the sung solemn form

prayer is expressed in a more attractive way, the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices, minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the sacred rites, and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.²³ ♦

²²Cf. Mahrt, "Paradigm," 10–11 (124).

²³*Musicam Sacram*, ¶5.