

“Worthy of the Temple”: Liturgical Music and Theological Faith*

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The Theological Life and Christian Liturgy

DURING THE COURSE of a calendar year, the Church unfolds in her liturgy the mysteries of Christ’s life. Her purpose in ordering the annual feasts centers on our sanctification. The liturgy nurtures the act of justifying belief that informs every active Christian. The believer enters into the whole mystery of salvation, which is distributed through the liturgical cycles of Christ’s life, death, and Resurrection. Christians begin this saving contemplation with the Incarnation, celebrating Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Then they move through the Sundays of the year and of Lent, which introduces the Paschal Mystery: Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. After Trinity Sunday, the remainder of the calendar is given over to sustaining hope during Ordinary Time.¹ The worshiper encounters Christ by a special act of remembrance that occurs in faith, and which allows him to embrace not just the representation of a given

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¹ Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 102: “In the course of the year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation and Nativity to the Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord.”

mystery, but also the One who embodies and communicates the grace that each mystery unfolds.²

It has become axiomatic that in the Church's liturgy, through perceptible, sacramental signs, Christ meets his Bride. These signs include words, actions, and even melodies, each of which, like the Incarnation itself, renders divine realities accessible to our human nature.³ We meet Christ in the sensible signs, for instance, of bread and wine, of flowing water, and in that uniquely personal sign that is the priest himself. What makes these signs effective agents of divine action? In a word, divine truth. In order to establish created signs as bona fide instruments of God's saving love, they must be informed with a proper enunciation of divine truth. Sacraments, according to received teaching, depend, that is, on both matter and form. As the Second Vatican Council emphasized, God's Word makes the signs effective. In the Catholic tradition, orthodox faith and authentic liturgy remain inseparable.⁴

The liturgy sustains the participated divine life that Christians properly denote the theological life, a life of faith, of hope, and of charity.⁵ Living faith is unique inasmuch as we hold fast through love to truths that escape our comprehension. The saints even speak of a heart of faith. The mystics recognize that this heart cries out for union.⁶ Liturgy creates a place for spousal, a venue to enact the union between God and man.

² Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 12, original emphasis: "The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister."

³ This important intuition is preserved in Aquinas's treatise on the sacraments where he reports a resemblance between the sacramental reality and the hypostatic union. See *Summa theologiae* III, q. 60, a. 6: "Primo enim possunt considerari ex parte causae sanctificantis, quae est Verbum incarnatum, cui sacramentum quodammodo conformatur in hoc quod rei sensibili verbum adhibetur, sicut in mysterio incarnationis carni sensibili est Verbum Dei unitum."

⁴ See for example, the Holy See's 2004 instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 6, which warns against liturgical abuses on the grounds that they mislead believers about the truth of Christ himself.

⁵ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 2607 and 2803.

⁶ The French Carmelite, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, relates the heart of faith to Christ's sacrifice: "At the foot of your Cross, beloved, Jesus, my crucified Love, I come to ask you again, Take my heart beyond return. Heavenly spouse, Savior divine, I give up all happiness, every union here on earth, to be yours alone. To give you love for love." See *Poem*, no. 69, in *J'ai trouvé Dieu: Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1980).

The theological virtues observe an order that reflects the processions of the Trinity. The Son, the Word, proceeds from the Father; and the Holy Spirit, the *persona amoris*, proceeds from them both. Likewise, the heart opens up in love only when it receives the Word in faith. Love follows truth. In the order of spiritual growth, as John the Divine instructs us, our minds are sanctified first by truth (see Jn 17:17). So also, in the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle exclaims: "Faith comes through what is heard."⁷ This Trinitarian order also informs divine worship. While the liturgy avails itself of biblical texts, the liturgical calendar develops around the articles of faith: Thus we have celebrations of the Trinity, Our Lord, Our Lady, the Communion of Saints, the Eucharist, and so forth. In the Church of Christ, truth begets and shapes love.

The Church holds that the movement from biblical revelation to creedal formulations occurs under the inspiration of the one Holy Spirit of God. This explains why the Church looks upon the profession of faith as a foundational document for her life.⁸ Since the Church receives the Creed as a principle instrument for her sanctification, she looks for ways to enhance and to prolong the believer's embrace of those truths that the Creed announces. She wants us not only to recite but also to ponder these truths. Sacred music affords one of the most effective means to accomplish this saving meditation. When it remains true to its theological character, sacred music enables the mind to contemplate what is being announced and celebrated in the Creed, namely, the mysteries of faith.⁹ The Church has always encouraged this singing of her truth, of her mysteries. They form the hymns of our redemption, and of the theological life that Christ's passion initiates.

French Initiative and Roman Calls for Renewal

In 1983, the former abbot of Solesmes, Dom Jean Prou, delivered an important discourse at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. This successor of Dom Prosper Guéranger reminded his United States audience of the proper place that music, especially Gregorian chant, enjoys

⁷ Rom 10:17. The Latin Vulgate of this verse inspired large portions of the Church's theology of faith: "Ergo fides ex auditu, auditus autem per verbum Christi."

⁸ Even canonists recognize the place that the Creed holds in the Church's jurisprudence. For further information, see Francis G. Morrissey, OMI, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the Code of Canon Law* (Ottawa: Faculty of Canon Law, Saint Paul University, 1995), 9ff.

⁹ Theology and contemplation spring from the same source and virtue, and shape complementary vocations in the Church: the theologian and the contemplative. No Christian, however, is exempt from engaging in both activities, although some obviously discover themselves more suited to developing one rather than another.

in the life of the Church. Music, he argued, meets a social need. Dom Prou observed that certain Christians are not destined to become members of the class that some title “intellectual.” Prolonged study is not their metier. Since, however, some education remains indispensable for sustaining the life of faith, he pointed out another kind of instruction that is able to inform a sustained life of contemplative faith. Although arguably conditioned by French cultural outlooks, his insight still merits our attention. Dom Prou locates this alternate form of study in the fine arts: “But the Church, in her motherly care, has always sought to meet the needs of all her sons without exception. . . . This fully explains why the arts are used in Christian worship.”¹⁰ He devotes the rest of his discourse to the place of the musical arts, which, he underscores, can afford a unique kind of catechesis: “In addition to catechetical instruction of an intellectual type, the Church has made a point of providing another catechism, of a lyrical nature, in order to embrace man in all his faculties, intellectual and sensitive.”¹¹ By his appeal for a lyrical catechesis, the abbot calls his audience to a new appreciation for the union of sense and sensibility. While all the arts serve the life of the Church, liturgical music, the Solesmes abbot opines, renders a unique contribution. As the well-known musical tradition of his monastery would suggest, Dom Prou privileges Gregorian chant. He also anticipates an emphasis recently underscored by Pope John Paul II.

In two recent allocutions, the Holy Father signals the importance of sacred music, and emphasizes the theological unity of sense and sensibility. He first affirms that “we must pray to God with theologically correct formulas and also in a beautiful and dignified way.”¹² Since sacred music touches the heart of faith, the Holy Father warns against an ugliness that is incompatible with inspired truth. His words suggest reform as much as they give encouragement. “The Christian community,” he exhorts, “must make an examination of conscience so that the beauty of music and hymnody will return once again to the liturgy.”¹³ One may infer that the pope expresses his displeasure with some contemporary enactments of the sacred rites. So he asks the Church to weigh the music that accompanies liturgical offices, and for each to ask the question: How does a given piece

¹⁰ Jean Prou, “Gregorian Chant in the Spirituality of the Church,” in *Gregorian Chant in Liturgy and Education: An International Symposium, June 19–22, 1983*, The Catholic University of America, Center for Ward Method Studies (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Pope John Paul II, “Music, Hymnody Should Be Worthy of the Greatness of the Liturgy,” Wednesday general audience (February 26, 2003), *L’Osservatore Romano* (English), March 5, 2003.

¹³ *Ibid.*

of music help the believer to embrace and ponder the mysteries of Christ? Those who have recognized the place that sacred music holds in both sanctifying the mind and forming the affect understand connaturally what is at stake in this papal exhortation. These men and women achieve the union of sense and sensibility that the Holy Father, in a later address, describes as essential for achieving excellence: “Only an artist immersed in the *sensus Ecclesiae* may try to perceive and translate into melody the truth of the Mystery that is celebrated in the liturgy.”¹⁴

The latepresent Holy Father’s appeal is not new. Pope John Paul II reprises a theme that has engaged the pontiffs of modern times. For instance, Pope St. Pius X supplied a foundational liturgical document for discussing the place of music in the Roman Rite when he issued in 1903 his *motu proprio* “*Tra le sollecitudini*.”¹⁵ At the beginning of the twentieth century, this Successor of Peter emphasized Gregorian chant and the special place that it holds in the Latin rite. He also mentioned two other musical forms: “classical polyphony,” which deserves, so he affirmed, to be used in more solemn offices precisely because it finds inspiration in Gregorian Chant, and “more modern music.”¹⁶ Modern music, Pius X however warned, requires a quality of composition that is both serious and dignified.¹⁷ He argued that “greater care must be taken, when admitting it, [so] that nothing profane be allowed, nothing that is reminiscent of theatrical pieces, nothing based as to its form on the style of secular compositions.”¹⁸ We may conclude that Pius X revealed himself fully aware of the modern penchant to separate sense and sensibility, truth from feeling.

For our present purposes, the 1903 *motu* merits special notice inasmuch as it underscores the relationship between liturgical music and the mysteries of Christ.

¹⁴ Pope John Paul II, “Chirograph for the Centenary of the *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini*,” signed by the Holy Father on the feast of Saint Cecilia, patroness of music, November 22, 2003, and released December 3, 2003, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2003/documents/hf_jpii_let_20031203_musica-sacra_en.html.

¹⁵ *Tra le sollecitudini*, *motu proprio* (November 22, 1903, the feast of St. Cecilia), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 36 (1903), 329–39.

¹⁶ It is important to note, however, that polyphonic music differs from chant insofar as the former combines several simultaneous voice parts of individual design, whereas the latter employs a single melodic line.

¹⁷ In *Tra le sollecitudini*, Pope Pius X sets down a golden rule: “The more closely a composition for the Church approaches in its movement, inspiration, and savor the Gregorian form, the more sacred and liturgical it becomes; and the more out of harmony it is with that supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple” (no. 3).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 5.

Its chief duty is to clothe the liturgical text, which is presented to the understanding of the faithful, with suitable melody; its object is to make the text more efficacious, so that the faithful may through this means be the more roused to devotion and better disposed to gather to themselves the fruits of grace which come from the celebration of the sacred mysteries.¹⁹

We see in this excerpt the antecedents of the Second Vatican Council's emphasis on the Word of God in the liturgy. Or better, the perennial realization in the Church of the biblical given that "Faith comes through what is heard" (Rom 10:17). The Christian people exercise a theological synaesthesia; they hear the mysteries.²⁰ No wonder a century later, Pope John Paul II is asking the Church to make an examination of conscience concerning her liturgical music. He also wants the worshiper to embrace the mysteries in faith. He wants the liturgy to remain a place where saints can develop a heart of faith, where each of the faithful can meet the Bridegroom.

Note the diachronic unity: Pope Saint Pius X in 1903 and Pope John Paul II in 2003 announce the same truth: Sacred music is meant to glorify God and to sanctify the hearts and minds of the faithful. This common outlook on singing the mysteries unites us to the earliest days of Christian worship: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). When the worshiper ponders God's love, shown forth preeminently in the mysteries of Jesus Christ, he experiences the "fruits of grace." Like the Eucharist, which is her source and summit, the Church's liturgy transforms us as we ponder the mysteries of our salvation. Each one of us is made ready to "meet" the Bridegroom (see Mt 25:6).

"The Delight of Melody with Doctrines"

Pope John Paul's 2003 exhortation on sacred music alerts us that bad musical usages have developed in certain liturgical contexts. While some

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that the first mention of "active participation" in the liturgy occurs in the context of urging the laity to learn to sing Gregorian chant. In the introduction to *Tua le sollicitudini*, the pope writes: "It being our ardent desire to see the true Christian spirit restored in every respect and be preserved by all the faithful, we deem it necessary to provide before everything else for the sanctity and dignity of the temple, in which the faithful assemble for the object of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable fount, which is the active participation in the holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church" (introduction).

texts fall short of expressing the Christian mysteries, many liturgical texts have been set to musical lines that distract from their sacred character. One may generalize and observe that contemporary liturgical music tends toward the anthropocentric. Bouncing meters, stirring tunes, pealing accompaniments, all conspire to push man toward the center of the liturgy. These musical expressions start us thinking about ourselves. This sort of musical “anthropological turn” ill serves a Catholic liturgy that is ordered to preparing the Bride for the Bridegroom. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council declared that One other than man holds the center place in the liturgy. He is Christ our High Priest.²¹ Others remain expectant, like brides. As long as the sacred liturgy is celebrated in the Church here below, the member of the Church may only receive from Christ the benefits that the liturgy promises.

Because it promotes the act of faith, Gregorian chant enjoys a certain pride of place in the Church’s worship.²² The chant provides a sacred rhythm that enables the worshiper to both ponder and contemplate the mysteries of Christ. The melodies that clothe the liturgy should persuade the believer to listen to what is proclaimed in the texts. It is easy to recognize, even when no words are involved, that music moves. Think of the soothing quality of Bach’s *Air from Suite No. 3 in D Major*. The sounds of strings and other instruments create an atmosphere of pastoral serenity. On the other hand, Jeremiah Clarke’s *Trumpet Voluntary*, or *The Prince of Denmark’s March*, accomplishes a majestic tone of triumph and enthusiasm. Music does speak for itself. If we abstract for a moment from the symmetry of words and music that the liturgy requires, we can observe that in the case of Gregorian chant, for example, the simple chant lines that clothe the texts create a spirit of recollection.

Gregorian chant fosters contemplation. There is something instinctually symbiotic between chant and doctrine. Chant endows the texts with sounds that promote our hearing them. St. Basil the Great (c. 330–79) captures this didactic dimension of sacred music, which he even ascribes to a deliberate act of the divine pedagogy:

²¹ See for instance, Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 83: “Jesus Christ, High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He attaches to himself the entire community of mankind and has them join him in singing his divine song of praise.”

²² See what is stipulated in *ibid.*, no. 116: “The Church recognizes Gregorian chant as being specially suited to the Roman liturgy. Therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.”

For when the Holy Spirit saw that mankind was ill-inclined toward virtue and that we were heedless of the righteous life because of our inclination to pleasure, what did he do? He blended the delight of melody with doctrines in order that through the pleasantness and softness of the sound, we might unawares receive what was useful in the words.²³

Basil recognizes the profound rift that sin introduces between sense and sensibility, and so he images God instituting for our salvation “the delight of melody with doctrines.” This Doctor of the East even goes so far as to conjecture that God uses sacred music to overcome our indisposition after original sin to listen to the truth. Music, he alleges, is therapeutic.²⁴

The tradition is unanimous in holding that sacred music develops a heart of faith. Music is ordered to open up the mind to the mysteries so that the heart can be moved to love the truth. Is it any wonder that a book of Josef Pieper is given the English title *Only the Lover Sings*? This twentieth-century German Catholic philosopher argues that music and silence are ordered to one another in a complementary way:

To the extent that it is more than mere entertainment of intoxicating rhythmic noise, music is alone in creating a particular kind of silence, though by no means soundlessly. . . . It makes a listening silence possible, but a silence that listens to more than simply sound and melody.²⁵

Pieper’s appeal for silence while listening is equivalent to recommending contemplation, even while singing.

Three Christian Festivals

In order to grasp how music assists the contemplation of the mysteries, we will examine the Gregorian melodies that the Church employs for three major feast days: Christmas, Easter, and Ascension. By way of contrast, we will also exhibit commonly used hymns in the English-speaking world for the same holy days. The realization of what we suggest here does not mean that the best of English hymnody, or other national melodies, should be excluded from liturgical planning, although the less noble elements of these compositions no longer would be required. Our suggestion would, at the same time, entail a retrieval of the spirit of Gregorian chant in new

²³ St. Basil, *Homily on the First Psalm*, PG XXIX: 209.

²⁴ In the same homily, St. Basil in fact mentions the practice of “wise physicians, who, when they give the more bitter draughts to the sick, often smear the rim of the cup with honey.” Ibid.

²⁵ Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings*, trans. Lothar Krauth, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 55.

compositions. The descriptions of the musical designs that follow illustrate the way that chant fosters silence for hearing, whereas the modern compositions, which date from after the seventeenth century, seem to be governed by some other psychological principle.

Christmas

Dominus Dixit

Intr. 2.
D O-mi- nus * dí- xit ad me : Fí- li- us mé- us
 es tu, é- go hó- di- e gé- nu- i te.

In the introit for Christmas Midnight Mass, the Church sings: “Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te.” This simple arrangement in Mode II prepares the Church to welcome the birth of her Savior. We are caught up in the eternal generation of the Son: “The Lord said to me: You are my Son, today I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7). Written in an uncomplicated style, this introit belongs to the neumatic class of Gregorian chant.²⁶ Mode II, akin to the minor in modern music, creates a hushed environment.²⁷ This modality ranks among the most commonly employed modes within the entire body of Gregorian chants. In midnight darkness, the Church celebrates the mystery of God-made-man by turning us toward the hidden life of the Blessed Trinity.

At first look, the chant appears to suggest a playful movement between the interval Re–Fa. This ascending and descending design between the Final and the Dominant of the mode hints of a rocking motion. Visibly one can see this in the neumatic notation above the words “Dominus

²⁶ There are diverse styles of ornamentation throughout the *corpus* of Gregorian melodies. In addition to the neumatic style of chant, there exist also the syllabic and melismatic styles. The syllabic style represents those chants in which each syllable of the text usually receives one note of the melodic line. In the melismatic style the text is suspended while long lines of musical interpretation are devoted to single syllables, as occurs in the solemn alleluias sung at the Easter Vigil. The authors acknowledge the kind help of Edmund and Chalon Murray in writing this section of the paper.

²⁷ Unlike western music, which only uses two modes, the major and minor, the medieval system employs four pairs of modes. Each of the eight modes possesses a characteristic sound as well as short melodic patterns that identify the chants of that mode.

dixit ad me.”The musical language complements the text and elevates the words by shrouding them in a sort of lyrical silence that corresponds to the hushed mysteries of God. The combination of the mysterious minor mode and the simple motion through a limited set of pitches gives this chant a special place among other chant compositions. Something of genius is at work here. The reference pitch grounds the chant, giving it a sense of sobriety while the frequent movement of the ascending pitches fosters the expressive musical line. The chant draws the listener into an intimate mystery. In the silence of this night, Christ is born. The rocking movement through the musical line returns the Christian to the heart of the Trinity where the Father, as it were, lullabies his Eternal Son. The chant draws us into this *mysterium*, this divine secret, by allowing us to meditate serenely on the Incarnation. We find ourselves ready for the Mass at dawn when shepherds hasten to the place where Mary cradles her Son.

This introit, with its simple progression of notes, clearly evokes human sentiments different than what normally arise when we hear familiar Christmas carols. Take for example, “Angels We Have Heard on High,” a popular Christmas hymn that dates back to the eighteenth century.

Angels We Have Heard on High French Traditional

An - gels we have heard on high Sweet - ly sing - ing o'er the plains,
 And the moun - tains in re - ply e - cho - ing their joy - ous strains
 Glo - ri - a
 in ex - cel - sis De - o, Glo - ri - a
 in ex - cel - sis De - o.

Though nothing is recorded about the author of the text, we do know that this carol originates in *la belle France*. What we hear in this traditional French carol differs significantly from what the *Liber usualis* provides in Gregorian form for Christmas. Whereas the “Dominus dixit” leaves the listener to ponder the mystery of the Incarnation in silence and awe, “Angels” stirs in us a feeling of unmeasured exuberance, of heady cheeriness, and even of secular festivities. Written in the genre of the French “carole,” this musical construct finds its origins in medieval non-Christian customs. A “carole” refers to a closed circle dance associated with early pagan celebrations of the winter solstice. The musical language suggests lyrical expression, evidenced in the melodic line of the verses, whose simple chord progression and light movement sing of “joyous strains.”

The music seems to conform well to the text, especially in the “gloria” refrain at each verse. This refrain resembles the melismatic flourishes of complex chant, yet the metrical restrictions of the strophic hymn obliges singing to a set beat. The chant’s melodic design observes a flowing pulse. The metrical hymn, on the other hand, is bound to a steady tempo from phrase to phrase. The free rhythm inherent in the chant’s construct is not characteristic of metrical hymns. Like a well-performed waltz, meters are ordered to measured movement. Binary and ternary pulse units that govern the movement of chant introduce a different sense of time called free rhythm.²⁸ “Angels We Have Heard on High” sings of Christmas, but it more prompts wide-eyed toe-tapping than the serene listening that conduces to contemplation. This familiar carol may warm our hearts as we repeat the “glorias” of the angels. It, however, does not succeed as well to prepare our mind to ponder the saving truth about the eternal generation of the Son and his coming among us as a man. Sanctification is born of faith. The joy of the angels and shepherds becomes ours to the extent that our minds retain prayerfully the mystery of “Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.”

Easter

On Easter morning, we often hear trumpets blaring, organs pealing, and voices sounding in honor of the Lord’s Resurrection. Such an atmosphere stands far removed from that created by the introit for Easter Sunday morning. In the Gregorian, the music remains utterly calm and completely

²⁸ Justine Bayard Ward held the following view: “Rhythm is said to be ‘free’ when binary or ternary pulse units succeed each other randomly, freely alternating as in prose speech. In fact, most of the Gregorian chant repertoire is composed in free rhythm and can accurately be called ‘prose music.’” See the collection of her chant instructions in *Gregorian Chant Practicum*, ed. Theodore Marier (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 37.

restrained, without the loud flourishes commonly identified with popular Easter hymns. Set in the plagal Mode IV, this long melody moves with ease in a relatively restricted range. Its melodic design again suggests a musical sense of the modern minor key. This effect produces a reflective mood in that attention to the text takes priority. The chant is intoned below the Final of the mode's scale. The musical line only reaches the Dominant in the second phrase of the chant over the third syllable of "po-su-i-sti," drawing our attention to the divine at work in Christ's Resurrection. The music punctuates the text as tone rises in pitch and intensity. The excitement of this line carries over into the third phrase, particularly in the neumatic formation over the word "tua," where tune and text ascend to communicate the core of the Easter mystery. We celebrate the triumph of God's hidden plan. In the simplicity of the chant, which one can visibly recognize in the music, the Paschal mystery is left to envelop the intellect. "Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum, alleluia." These are the first words the Church sings on Easter morning: "I have risen, and I am still with you, alleluia." The text interprets what the bright angels announce on Easter morn to the women: "He is not here, but has risen" (Lk 24:6). The Mode IV, called hypophrygian, exudes the quiet serenity we assume enveloped those first witnesses of Christ's Resurrection. The temper of modern Easter hymns, however, points in another direction, as "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today," amply illustrates.

Resurrexi

Intr. 4
R Esur-réxi, * et adhuc técum sum, al- le-
 lú- ia : po- su- f-sti su- per me má- num tú- am,
 al- le- lú- ia : mí-rá- bi-lis fá-cta est sci- én-
 ti- a tú- a, alle- lú-ia, al- le- lú- ia.

This popular hymn radiates the majestic tone that characterizes most Easter celebrations that one ordinarily encounters in parochial settings. The first stanza translates a fourteenth-century Latin hymn "Surrexit Christus hodie." When paired with the musical line, this hymn sounds

noble and joyful. The objective joy of Easter breaks forth in its strong isometric rhythm. The rhythmic structure of its four-four time signature, the “common meter,” resembles a stately march. “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today” leaves the listener in a mood of exuberance and excitement, whereas the “Resurrexi,” as we have observed, creates another sort of spiritual environment.

Jesus Christ Is Risen Today

Je - sus Christ is ris'n to - day Al - - - le - lu - ia!

Our tri - um-phant ho - ly day Al - - - - le - lu - ia!

Who did once up - on the cross, Al - - - - le lu - ia!

Su - fer to re - deem our loss, Al - - - - le - lu - ia!

This eighteenth-century English hymn, which Charles Wesley (1707–1788) embellished with a doxology, is clearly ordered to warming hearts. It suits the revivalist enthusiasm that the Wesley brothers introduced into the Anglican church of their age. In the third strophe of the hymn a brief modulation to the Dominant produces an expansion in the melodic range. This expansion results in the range of a tenth above the tonic. It is interesting to note that most hymns restrict their range to an octave. The sheer thrill of this musical accompaniment speaks for itself. It rings of a royal fanfare announcing the joy of the Resurrection. The “alleluias” at the end of each strophe resemble the melismatic flourishes of the “glorias” in “Angels.” These vocal decorations supply added embellishments to the tune. The thunderous tone of this hymn resonates with much of the service music that fills churches on Easter morning.

The musical integrity of the hymn admittedly possesses its own merit. Within the context of the present investigation, however, we can recognize the significant departure from the tone set by the Gregorian melodies. Easter joy is a gift of faith, as Christ himself taught the Apostle

Thomas: “Blessed are those who have not seen and believed” (Jn 20:29). The Latin introit respects the mystery that Easter faith depends neither on vision nor sensible consolations. Absent these, the heart is free to ponder in faith the truth of Christ’s triumph over death, his Paschal mystery.

Ascension

Viri Galilaei

Intr.
7.

V I-ri Ga-li-laé- i, * quid admi-rá-mi- ni aspi-
ci-éntes in caé-lum? alle- lú- ia : quemádmodum vi-dí-
stis é- um ascendéntem in caé- lum, i-ta vé- ni- et, alle-
lú- ia, alle- lú-ia, alle- lú- ia.

The introit for the feast of the Ascension is based on the text of Acts that is read during the Mass: “Men of Galilee, why are you looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11). The victorious Savior ascends to heaven by his own divine power. The musical line of this Gregorian melody suggests an ascension of its own. Written in Mode VII, the chant uses pitch and intensity to achieve the impression of rising. The first two words of the chant “Viri galilaei” exemplify this movement. In a short span of time, the melodic line quickly ascends from the Final to the Dominant. This melodic line is characteristic of the central intervals of the Mixolydian mode. The authentic range movement from the Final, Sol, up to the Dominant, Re, respects the same melodic scale as the major. The rising of neumes in this Sol Mode sounds the same as the 1-3-5-note sequence of a major scale. The first incise demonstrates this movement and sets the festal tone for the rest of the chant. The intensity of the musical line is maintained throughout the musical phrase and is finally resolved in the cadence before the three alleluias. The soaring alleluias that make this chant highly expressive manifest the Church’s sober excitement at the Ascension of her Lord. The melismatic style attached to the “alleluias” adorns the chant with a musical meditation of joy. The beauty

and dignity of this Gregorian melody supplies an effective medium for contemplating the tranquil anticipation that Christ's Ascension produced in his disciples. A different atmosphere however emerges in the commonly sung "Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise."

Hail The Day That Sees Him Rise

Wesley

Hail the day that sees him rise Al - - - le - lu - ia!

To his throne a - bove the skies; Al - - - le - lu - ia!

Christ, a - while to mor - tals giv'n, Al - - - le - lu - ia!

Re - as - cends his na - tive heav'n. Al - - - le lu - ia!

The Welsh hymn tune Llanfair was written by Robert Williams (1781–1821) who named it after his parish church in Angelesey.²⁹ This Ascensiontide hymn tune also occurs commonly throughout the Easter season. Its simple AABA structure is typical of nineteenth-century Welsh tunes. It makes the hymn accessible to congregational singing. So it is not surprising that Charles Wesley included it in the approximately six thousand hymns that he collected for his evangelical revival movement. The lyrical nature of the tune and the recurring "alleluias" create, without being overstated, a dazzling sense of grandeur. The tune infuses the text with themes of triumphal ascent and eager hope in the One who, as the original text puts it, "re-ascends his native heaven." Text and tune create an atmosphere of majestic awe. The stately meter and colorful lines create a musical texture that bespeaks of a joyous celebration. Whereas this stately hymn achieves excitement and delight, its Gregorian equivalent

²⁹ The name of the Angelesey Church provides one of the longest words in any known language: Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch. A recognized translation runs: "Church of St Mary in the hollow of white hazel near the rapid whirlpool of the Church of St Tysillio by the red cave."

conduces toward a tranquil spirit of contemplation in which the worshiper can ponder the mystery of a world where, in the absence of the visible Lord, all are left to meet Christ in the sacraments. Although these sign-actions are expressive of what they cause, only the one who beholds them in the darkness of faith receives an uplifted heart.

Because it cultivates faith-filled reflection on the mysteries of Christ, Gregorian chant ensures the spiritual nourishment of worshipers. No wonder popes have signaled their preference for this ancient musical form. During the period after the Second Vatican Council, chant suffered eclipse in most liturgical settings. Many people no longer considered Gregorian chant a feasible option for the renewed liturgy. Today, there is reason to question this decision. However some persons effectively resisted the postconciliar marginalization of chant. These church musicians preserved the ancient Gregorian chants and, at the same time, created new forms of liturgical music that complement the traditional repertoire. The present authors would like to acknowledge especially the contributions of the Boston Church musician, Theodore Marier (1912–2001), whose heritage and accomplishments are carried on by the Boston Archdiocesan Choir School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This essay, however, also honors the efforts of all those Church musicians who have worked to demonstrate how Gregorian chant influences for the better contemporary liturgical compositions. These artists have realized the axiom of Pope Saint Pius X: “The more closely a composition for Church approaches in its movement, inspiration, and savor the Gregorian form, the more sacred and liturgical it is.”³⁰ **NV**

³⁰ *Tra le sollecitudini*, no. 3. Special thanks to Leo Abbott of Boston for having read a draft of this essay.