

SCHOLA ESSAYS IN LITURGICAL MUSIC

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAYS

and

Topic No.1

A MUSICAL INVITATORY TO MASS

INTRODUCTION

Great Music contains Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Great Liturgical Music embodies the ageless wisdom and wonderment of the Catholic Faith experience.

We of The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific®, in our fiftieth year, wish to celebrate our Golden Jubilee by sharing Liturgical Music principles and practicalities we have learned. Our motto comes from Psalm 67: “May the Peoples Praise You, O Lord, May All the Peoples Praise You.”

May these short essays in some way help young Music Ministers and all devotees of great Liturgical Music successfully accomplish their goals in years to come.

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About the Author

Father Theodore C. (Ted) Ley, SM, of the Society of Mary, the Marianists, won in 1963, the national Choir Master conducting prize of the American Guild of Organists. In 1978 he became Professor of Music at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California. In 1981, he earned the degree, Doctor of Musical Arts, from the USC Thornton School of Music. His dissertation in Music Education is available online from the USC Music Library: "A Practical Proposal for the Renewal of the Pueri Cantores Tradition in American Parochial Education." Its volume one summarizes the history of child chorister education in the Catholic Church; its volume two proposes a new curriculum based on the principles summarized. In 1976, with associates of similar interest, he founded The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific®. Today, Chairman of its Foundation, he advises the Escolanía curriculum advancement and provides compositions and arrangements. He has been succeeded as Director and Choirmaster by lifetime Schola member, Mr. Vicente Bastidas-Elizondo. The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific® sings, "From Gregorian to Gospel." The adult Schola Cantorum of the Pacific® and its Escolanía Pacífica choir school program, have been the "proving ground" for these Essays.

Celebrent Te Populi, Deus (Ps. 67)
MAY THE PEOPLES PRAISE YOU, O LORD,
MAY ALL THE PEOPLES PRAISE YOU
Motto of The Schola Cantorum of the Pacific®

Essay No.1

A MUSICAL INVITATORY

When we enter a church or chapel our first impression is visual. Then, some auditory experience may well accompany it.

In many churches today, laudable effort goes into that visual: banners, lighting, altar preparation, décor. What is heard can also contribute significantly to the arriving congregation's preparatory "sense of the sacred."

The fifteen minutes before Mass are "Invitatory" time. That traditional name for the psalmody recited immediately before the Church's morning prayer (Lauds), is now also given to music in the church immediately before Liturgy, music which literally invites the Congregation to worship.

In the Church's musical "treasure of inestimable worth (*Vatican II*)," there is considerable music for this purpose. Here are some suggestions, Catholic and ecumenical, starting with the most readily available.

Initially, the parish Organist can create a set of invitatory preludes, soft, flute-like, evenly paced, easily adding sound to the congregation's entry.

Much organ music composed for the Tridentine Liturgy has the meditational quality. And from ecumenical sources, primarily Lutheran and Anglican, there are many organ preludes, some on hymn tunes now also found in Catholic worship books.

Johann Sebastian Bach's "Little Organ Book," his *Orgelbüchlein*, includes short meditational preludes for one keyboard without pedal, such as the easy-to-play "Blessed Jesus, We Are Here" - *Liebster Jesu*. Nearly all the hymn tune harmonizations of Bach compiled in the Riemenschneider edition, played slowly and softly, also work effectively on single keyboard without pedal.

A number of composers have tried their hand at such short works. Johannes Brahms was particularly successful with his chorale prelude on the carol, "A Rose E'er Blooming" (*Es Ist Ein' Ros' Entschprungen*), an outstanding Invitatory for Christmastide.

Many parishes have in their Music libraries folios of excellent organ preludes. A personal favorite is the two-volume *Armonie Classiche nei Toni Facili* (Classical Harmony in Easily-Played Keys), an Italian collection of short works for one keyboard without pedal, by baroque and classical composers including Handel, J.S.Bach, Domenico Scarlatti and Henry Purcell.

One of the best collections in modern tonality would be, "Fifty Elevations for Organ on Modal Themes," by the late Dom Paul Benoit of the Clairvaux Monastery in Luxembourg. His Elevations make ideal Invitatories. Intended originally for the Canon of a Tridentine Low Mass or at Eucharistic Benediction, these become effective invitatories, quietly communicating the sense of the sacramental moment about to begin. These were composed for two manual organ and pedals, but they move quite slowly so they are readily accessible works and some can be personally re-arranged for single keyboard.

A considerable amount of similar, easily readable keyboard music is available in single-manual harmonium collections, for example those of César Franck and Louis Vierne. A modern feel can be attained with works

not initially intended for this purpose but having the right tone and mood, including the *Ludus Tonalis* of Paul Hindemith and the *Book of Preludes and Fugues* by Dmitri Shostakovich. The parish organist will no doubt start with favorite shorter works and gradually build a repertoire.

The next step will be choral. Immediately accessible as choral invitatories will be the easier Gregorian chants of the Church Year, found in modern notation in standard parish hymnals. Because these are rarely sung by congregations, they can be reserved as choral works for Invitatory purpose. Having both English and Latin text underlay, they communicate the meaning of their use through the English. Some of these chants, though important, are not heard enough, including the Vesper hymn of Advent, “Creator of the Stars of Night” (*Conditor Alme Siderum*); at Christmastide, “Jesus, Redeemer of the World” (*Jesu Redemptor Omnium*); throughout Lent, *Parce Domine* (“Spare, O Lord, Your People”); in late Lent, the great *Vexilla Regis* (“The Royal Banners Forward Go”); in Eastertide, the *Regina Caeli* (“O Queen of Heaven, Rejoice”); at Pentecost, the Vesper Hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus* (“Come Creator Spirit”); and during Ordinary Time, one that is regularly sung but would still work fine as an Invitatory, the *Salve Regina* (“Hail, Holy Queen”). These can be sung *a cappella* or accompanied, and will rehearse with relative ease.

The music ministry library may still have the parish’s old choir set of the St. Gregory Hymnal which is replete with easily-prepared Gregorian Chant in modern notation. As to current publications specifically of chant, there is only one practical collection available in modern notation, the short, “*Jubilate Deo*” published in the 1970s for congregational use and still in print. This edition has chants that would serve as choir invitatories.

From then on, the collections are only in Gregorian “square” notation, but they are excellent editions. With the right guidance any choir director should be able to teach the rudiments of Chant reading and interpretation. There are the two editions that fulfill any choir’s need for Gregorian Chant for any occasion.

The very practical *Liber Cantualis* is for choir and congregation. Some of the chants are more befitting a choir. A choir set of this inexpensive book would be of lasting value in the choir library. Its newest edition, from the monks of Solesmes in France, has the current

international English translations of the Mass appended to the chants, and excellent English translations footnoted for all the hymns, psalms, Mass parts, and antiphons. Readily available internationally, it is a thin book, octavo size. Every chant pertains to a time in the Liturgical Year or particular devotional use. Some of the most beautiful of the better-known Gregorian melodies are included in this *Liber Cantualis* (“The Book of the Singable”).

In the *Liber Cantualis* these chants really call for a choir: *Te Deum Laudamus*, the Church’s historic hymn of thanksgiving; *Christus Vincit*, a dynamic prayer for persons in all walks of life; and *Victimae Paschali Laudes*, perfect for Easter Sunday if the same Sequence is then reprised with the people in English during the Easter Mass of the Day.

The second current chant book intended for the English-speaking, is called the *Gregorian Missal*. It contains all the chants for Mass throughout the Liturgical Year. It does not include devotional chants and hymns. What it does have is elaborate “melismatic” chant that when sung correctly in a sufficiently “live” acoustic, sounds truly symphonic. This edition, octavo size, is over twice as thick as the *Liber Cantualis*.

Some parish music libraries may still have copies of the *Liber Usualis*. The 1962 edition is correct for today’s Mass according to the Extraordinary Form, where permitted. It is useful otherwise only as a reference. While its music for Mass is found in correct order and current usage in today’s *Gregorian Missal*, the “old *Liber*” also contains hymns and antiphons that would make great invitatories, but most of these are now in the more broadly-based *Liber Cantualis*, which shows just how valuable the economical “new *Liber*” is.

Gregorian Chant is easier to learn to read and sing than often supposed and once learned, is easily retained and becomes very practical.

Gregorian melodies are “diatonic” – that is, almost completely without “sharps and flats.” They are written in the C clef and nearly all sound to the modern ear as if in that “key” or its relative, A Minor. Some chants are in effect in D minor or like F major; then there is one flat easily added, which looks to the modern reader like Bb.

There are two principal notes in chant. A lower note is called the “tonic,” and a higher note, the “dominant. A chant starts at or near the

tonic, goes up to the dominant and returns to the tonic by the end of the piece. Some chant is written in the tenor F clef, but follows the same rules as the C clef. A chant melody is said to be in one of eight “modes” rather than scales and keys. These modes are determined by which note is the tonic and which one the dominant. In comparison with the complex modern systems of keys and tonal structures, Gregorian Chant is quite a bit simpler, yet lastingly beautiful.

One of the advantages of the Gregorian notation is that the design and shape of the combinations of notes in the chant – called “neumes” – tell you not only what notes to sing but also how they should be phrased and accented. It will be noticed that there are really two rhythms going on which interplay, that of the text and that of the melody. Together they create an “agogic” rhythm that gives the chant its own proper rhythmic vitality. All in all, to include Gregorian Chant in an invitational repertoire is practical and gratifying.

The next step will be to add choral music. For starters, almost any four-part hymn will sound quite appealing as an invitational if sung *a cappella*. Sometimes a hymn tune invitational will become familiar enough in time, that if then introduced to the congregation, it will be more readily and correctly learned. So these choral invitatories can eventually enter the congregational repertoire.

Some examples immediately come to mind: In Advent, the Lutheran hymn “Awake for Night Is Flying” (*Wachet Auf*), found in many Catholic hymnals, but rarely sung congregationally since it has a very wide vocal range. It makes an excellent Advent choral invitational. There are similarly difficult Christmas carols including recent ones that have “stayed choral” rather than become congregational, including the Alfred Burt carol, “Caroling Caroling, Christmas Bells Are Ringing.” A very good Lenten invitational would be the Appalachian spiritual, “There Is a Balm in Gilead.” At Eastertide, the “Palestrina Alleluia,” also called, “The Strife Is Over,” an excellent arrangement of which is in the four-part edition of the St. Gregory Hymnal. Also in the St. Gregory is W.A. Mozart’s, “Ave Verum Corpus,” an outstanding invitational to Mass. And for Pentecost and Ordinary Time, a lesser-known hymn of the feastday, “O Holy Spirit Come to Us” will serve well.

As to solo singing, the Schola has had some success with quiet but definitely-not-theatrical performances of well known soprano arias as, “He Shall Feed His Flock” and “I Know that My Redeemer Liveth,” from George Frideric Handel’s, “Messiah.” Their melodies clothe the words well, and they can be presented in a very meditational manner.

Another choral form of Invitatory would be to chant in English a psalm either to a classic Gregorian psalm tone or by a harmonized “pointed” Anglican-type “psalm tune.” The psalm chanted as Invitatory might actually be the Responsorial Psalm of the Mass rendering the congregation’s reprise of the psalm particularly effective.

For the invitatory music to be authentically pastoral it must be appropriate for the season of the Liturgical Year, even the particular stage of that season. Initial Lenten music, for example, will bespeak personal spiritual renewal – perhaps *Attende Domine et Miserere*, while the Invitatory in Paschaltide will refer to Jesus’ Suffering, Death and Resurrection. A classic example of the latter would be the *Vexilla Regis* and its verse, *O Crux Ave* (Hail, O Holy Cross). The musical settings should always “sound prayerful,” even in joyful feasts. They must signal the profundity of the *Mysterium* to be entered liturgically.

Let us close these thoughts with the Eastern Rite term, *Mystagogy*, the deepening of personal spirituality and virtue attained in and from a lifetime devotion to the Sacraments. From the Invitatory to the Postlude, the Music, congregational, choral and instrumental, plays an instructional and expressive participational role in the sacramental environment, even the simplest Invitatory preceding a liturgical service.

Laus Deo

Essay No. 2, appearing here in February, 2026 is entitled,
“WHEN THE PEOPLE OF GOD SING THE INTROIT”