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Liturgy and Music alive in the Church today

Non clamor sed amor cantat in aure Dei
Not shouting but love sings in God's ear

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[Crux Fidelis?](#)

by [HallamPhil](#) » Thu Mar 15, 2012 7:01 pm

Continuing the line of quandries related to Triduum, Good Friday in the Missal (and the Processional) has the hymn Crux Fidelis (Faithful Cross) laid out in a manner somewhat confusing. Have a look at it and notice the trad 6-line verse (given to Cantors) and a refrain alternating 4 or 2 lines with a text from the first verse.

Do you pick a tune which fits the 6-line stanza and use the appropriate bits for the refrain? Or use different tunes?

Has anyone out there conceived of a way of setting this so that it does not sound as contrived as it appears?

[HallamPhil](#)

Posts: 389

Joined: Mon Dec 24, 2007 8:57 pm

Location: Sheffield

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣ by [alan29](#) » Thu Mar 15, 2012 7:23 pm

In English isn't it generally sung as a straight hymn to one of the Tantum Ergo tunes?

[alan29](#)

Posts: 750

Joined: Fri May 27, 2005 8:04 pm

Location: Wirral

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣ by [Peter Jones](#) » Thu Mar 15, 2012 8:03 pm

*HallamPhil wrote:*Has anyone out there conceived of a way of setting this so that it does not sound as contrived as it appears?

I've had a go.

Any opinions expressed are my own, not those of the Archdiocese of Birmingham Liturgy Commission, Church Music Committee.

[Website](#)

[Peter Jones](#)

Posts: 604

Joined: Thu Sep 01, 2011 8:46 am

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣ by [Southern Comfort](#) » Thu Mar 15, 2012 9:05 pm

I can't believe that anyone is seriously contemplating using the dreadful Missal version. (And yes, I do happen to know who was responsible for it, and I still thinks it's dreadful.)

This is not a mandatory text, and there are far better translations available.

[Southern Comfort](#)

Posts: 1550

Joined: Sat Feb 23, 2008 12:31 pm

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [HallamPhil](#) » Thu Mar 15, 2012 9:11 pm

I agree that it is not a mandatory text and it is a dreadful version ... but I do I like to start with the set text. Perhaps if I knew the culprit I'd think of him (her?) just to add some authenticity!

Peter, I'm interested and I'm hoping this will be congregation friendly.

Alan, my experience last year of trying it with a trad tantum ergo tune was confusing ... we put a brave face on it so as to give folk the notion that it was quite OK but honestly it didn't work!

[HallamPhil](#)

Posts: 389

Joined: Mon Dec 24, 2007 8:57 pm

Location: Sheffield

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [FrGareth](#) » Thu Mar 15, 2012 10:37 pm

My tentative parish plan is to use selected 6-line verses, sung by the whole choir, to the *Tantum Ergo* tune. (I made a bid for *Picardy* instead but choirmaster was not to be persuaded.)

><

Revd Gareth Leyshon - Priest of the Archdiocese of Cardiff (views are my own)

Personal website: <http://www.garethleyshon.info>

Parish website: <http://www.sphilpevans.co.uk/>



[FrGareth](#)

Posts: 186

Joined: Wed Jun 03, 2009 1:01 am

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [NorthernTenor](#) » Sat Mar 17, 2012 11:57 pm

Forgive me for breaking in on the critical unanimity, but I see nothing dreadful about the Missal "Faithful Cross", particularly in the context of a Catholic musical culture that trots out nauseatingly mawkish and incompetent doggerel week in, week out (I speak both of words & music). Actually, it's not half bad.

Ian Williams

[Alium Music](#)

[NorthernTenor](#)

Posts: 794

Joined: Sat Sep 13, 2008 7:26 pm

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [HallamPhil](#) » Sun Mar 18, 2012 5:25 pm

But NT I was not asking about the poetry ... my question related to the structure as revised by the Missal. Perhaps you had not noticed the refrains which at one time are 4 line of the six and at other times only 2. It is this re-structuring of the text by the Missal revisers that some may reasonably consider dreadful. But if, NT, you have a sensible musical solution to this problem I for one may be interested.

[HallamPhil](#)

Posts: 389

Joined: Mon Dec 24, 2007 8:57 pm

Location: Sheffield

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [VML](#) » Sun Mar 18, 2012 7:05 pm

Me too..

I would be very grateful for a solution on how to use these words with a moderately well known tune.



[VML](#)

Posts: 531

Joined: Thu Feb 12, 2004 12:57 am

Location: Glos

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [NorthernTenor](#) » Sun Mar 18, 2012 10:23 pm

Please accept my apologies, Phil - SC's original criticism was certain, damning and notably unspecific. Yours wasn't and I should have given it the attention it deserved. There is, as you note, a structural issue. I've managed Part I of the Reproaches and it's nip and tuck on Part II. I think I have a solution for the Crux Fidelis, but the demands of the day job and music making mean it will have to be a solution for next year. I will be happy to keep you and VML posted (and equally happy to receive criticism of it).

Ian Williams

[Alium Music](#)

[NorthernTenor](#)

Posts: 794

Joined: Sat Sep 13, 2008 7:26 pm

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [HallamPhil](#) » Sun Mar 18, 2012 10:28 pm

I'd be happy to hear more on this forum or by PM and hopefully before next year!

[HallamPhil](#)

Posts: 389

Joined: Mon Dec 24, 2007 8:57 pm

Location: Sheffield

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣by [Southern Comfort](#) » Mon Mar 19, 2012 8:42 am

I have been asked to add specifics to my opinion about this translation. At the risk of this becoming burdensome, here are some.

The original Latin has no rhyming scheme whatsoever. However, this English translation attempts an A-B-A-B-A-B rhyme structure for each stanza. The result is contrived, and, as NT pointed out, comes very close to doggerel. Indeed, in my opinion, it does more than come close. If the translator had not given himself the constraints of rhyme, the result would be quite different. James Quinn realised this long ago in *New Hymns*

for All Seasons which frequently does not use rhyme at all.

The rhyming constraint will also give rise to inaccuracy, padding, incomprehension and even hilarity.

The very opening refrain is a good example.

Faithful Cross the Saints rely on,
Noble tree beyond compare!
Never was there such a scion,
Never leaf or flower so rare.
Sweet the timber, sweet the iron,
Sweet the burden that they bear!

The A-rhyme is the problem here. Everything is dependent on the choice of the word "iron" to translate the Latin *clavos* which actually means "nails". Once you have decided to adopt "iron", rhymes must be found to go with it. I suggest that the word "scion" is not part of ordinary people's vocabulary, and should not have been used. Many will not know what it means. The phrase "the Saints rely on" has similarly been inserted both to pad out the rhythm of the line and to rhyme with "iron", and yet it does not appear anywhere in the Latin text. The whole refrain has been skewed by the decision to adopt "iron". Abandon this, or abandon a rhyming scheme altogether, and the problem goes away.

The translation which begins "Faithful Cross above all others, one and only noble tree" is a more faithful translation of the Latin, but was presumably rejected because it contains archaic language ("thee" at the end of line 6, for example, rhyming with "tree" in line 2)

The same sort of thing happens in the first stanza:

Sing, my tongue, in exultation
Of our banner and device!
Make a solemn proclamation
Of a triumph and its price:
How the Saviour of creation
Conquered by his sacrifice!

This time the B-rhyme is the problem. The majority of people will not be familiar with the use of the word "device" to mean a heraldic design on a shield. The Collins English dictionary has eight different meanings for the word, the heraldic one being number 6. Probably only those familiar with the old drawing room song *Excelsior* will be comfortable with the use of this word.

So, already by the end of the refrain and stanza 1, two words have been used which are incomprehensible to the majority of people. I strongly suggest that this is problematic, even if the remainder of the text were easily understandable and lacking in artifice (it is not, however). To lose people so early on seems foolish.

I have given examples of inaccuracy, padding and incomprehensibility. For hilarity, if "device" did not make you smile, we need to move to a later stanza:

Lofty timber, smooth your roughness,
Flex your boughs for blossoming;
Let your fibres lose their toughness,
Gently let your tendrils cling;
Lay aside your native gruffness,
Clasp the body of your King!

Once again, the rhyming scheme is responsible for the mirth that this stanza will evoke, especially the clinging tendrils and the native gruffness.....

I maintain that these few examples (I could give plenty more) justify qualifying this particular translation as terrible, and I am sorry that my opinion was not accepted at face value to begin with. Once again, I apologise for the time and space that demonstrating this has taken up.

However, in response to Phil's unhappiness with the form of the refrain, I would want to point out that this goes back to the earliest of times and is present in the Latin.

The entire refrain consists of six lines:

1
2
3
4
5
6

and is sung like that at the start. Thereafter, using a form similar to what happens in the Short Responsory in the Divine Office (except in our current English version, alas), it is divided into

1
2
3
4

and

5
6

alternating with each other. While this may be a problem for some, for others it is no more than a challenge. Anyone who uses Paul Inwood's *This is the wood of the cross* setting, where the half-refrain "Come, come, let us adore" is used at the end of each stanza, will be used to seeing this ancient part-refrain concept in action. More recently, the part-antiphon is in regular use in the *Psallite* project.

In my opinion, the use of the part-refrain adds variety and freshness to the verse—refrain form, which can

otherwise risk becoming very predictable. But in any case, I think that to criticise the translation because of the form, when that form has been with us for many centuries, is not well-founded. Good Friday is full of ancient forms. The form of the solemn intercessions and the Reproaches with their bilingual refrains both go back into the mists of time and the early centuries of the Church. We should embrace them all joyfully as part of our tradition.

[Southern Comfort](#)

Posts: 1550

Joined: Sat Feb 23, 2008 12:31 pm

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣ by [HallamPhil](#) » Mon Mar 19, 2012 11:06 am

Thanks for your clear analysis, SC. We share a criticism of the translation which is dreadful and you make the point really well. It's all about what drives the choice of words.

Your reference to Paul Inwood's setting of 'This is the wood of the cross' is interesting. In this case the composer has managed to create a final couplet which has the air of a refrain whether it is 'stand alone' or preceded by another couplet or a verse. I suspect this might be easier to bring off with a 4-line structure than a 6-line. I'm away from my office so unable to check against the score.

Perhaps composers in the light of this discussion may search for a better (or existing) translation but look to answer the challenges of the ancient structure re-visited by the Missal.

[HallamPhil](#)

Posts: 389

Joined: Mon Dec 24, 2007 8:57 pm

Location: Sheffield

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

▣ by [quaeritor](#) » Mon Mar 19, 2012 11:25 am

*Southern Comfort wrote:*In my opinion, the use of the part-refrain adds variety and freshness to the verse—refrain form, which can otherwise risk becoming very predictable.

I refer the honourable members to [the thread I started earlier](#) about the Responsory. The precise point I was exploring was singing only part of what is a long "refrain" ("response", "antiphon") with special relevance to the Communion procession where one objective is to avoid the need for the congregation to carry papers.

It seems there is a good pedigree for the approach in principle, but does it work in practice when the assembly has nothing printed to refer to? (I can't see why it shouldn't, given a strong lead by cantor or

choir).

(btw, I agree with all SC's comments about the translation - Upidee I do!)

Q

[quaeritor](#)

Posts: 279

Joined: Sun Jan 29, 2006 11:33 pm

Location: oxfordshire

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[Re: Crux Fidelis?](#)

by [kerrezza](#) » Mon Mar 19, 2012 8:48 pm

The translation in the Anglican Use Gradual is much truer to the Latin

[kerrezza](#)

Posts: 41

Joined: Mon Oct 03, 2011 9:13 pm

Location: Kent

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