

A Call to Action: Take Up Thy Cross in Proper Style!

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In late March, a young woman attends Mass at her local parish. The header of the bulletin she picks up on arriving reads, “Fourth Sunday of Lent: *Laetare* Sunday.” The whole cover is printed in large, salmon-colored text. After stepping into her usual pew on the Blessed Mother side, she kneels down on the well-worn kneeler for a moment of personal prayer. She opens to the back cover of the “missalette” and silently recites the “Prayer Before a Crucifix.” Right on time, the cantor goes to the podium, welcomes everyone to Mass, and asks them to join in singing the entrance hymn, *Take Up Your Cross*.

Is there anything wrong with this very typical scene from American parochial life? Perhaps the use of a missalette, or the color of the bulletin text, or the welcome of the cantor? While there may be legitimate debate about various details of the scene, perhaps the most significant issue is a practice that has become so ubiquitous as not even to register in the consciousness of many weekly congregants.

The bulletin proclaims that the celebration of the day is *Laetare* Sunday, but to what does that term refer? One would hardly know, on account of the entrance hymn, that the proper introit for the Fourth Sunday of Lent begins with the incipit, *Laetare*. Not even the sentiment of muted rejoicing comes through in the text of *Take Up Your Cross*. This example illustrates how the omni-present replacement of proper texts with popular hymnody threatens to deprive Mass-goers of a great richness.

It must be conceded that the quality of sacred music cannot possibly be everywhere equal, on account of the varying abilities and resources present in local communities of faith. Singing

the Gregorian propers from the *Graduale Romanum* at every Mass in every situation, for instance, would be an impossible endeavor. In every situation, however, goals can be set, new ideas can be tried, and ideals can become the benchmark for which musicians strive. Indeed, “music for worship should be the best that is possible in any given milieu.”¹ Placing this foundational belief in the context of contemporary America, an action first proposed by Professor László Dobszay seems relevant at this historical juncture: “the formula *alius cantus congruus* as a substitution for the Roman Gradual or the Simple Gradual must be removed from the normative text of the *General Introduction to the Roman Missal*.”²

First issued in 1969, the *General Introduction to the Roman Missal* (GIRM) ratified the permission given in *Musicam Sacram* (1967), which referred to “substituting other songs for the songs given in the *Graduale* for the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion” as a “custom legitimately in use.”³ According to the GIRM, “there are four options for the Entrance Chant” in the dioceses of the United States of America: the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the psalm from the Roman Gradual, the seasonal antiphon from the Simple Gradual, a song from an approved collection of psalms and antiphons, or “a suitable liturgical song [*alius cantus congruus*] similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.”⁴ The same four options are understood of the offertory chant and clearly stated of the communion chant.⁵ No norm is given to regulate the meaning of *congruus*, and, judging from the typical experience of the Eucharistic

1. Francis P. Schmitt, “Leaning Right?” in *Crisis in Church Music?: Proceedings of a Meeting on Church Music Conducted by The Liturgical Conference and the Church Music Association of America* (Washington, DC: The Liturgical Conference, 1967), 53.

2. László Dobszay, “The *Proprium Missae* of the Roman Rite,” in *The Genius of the Roman Rite: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives on Catholic Liturgy*, ed. Uwe Michael Lang (Mundelein, IL: Hillenbrand Books, 2010), 100.

3. Sacra Congregatio Rituum, *Musicam Sacram* 32, 5 March 1967, *AAS* 59 (1967): 309. ET from www.vatican.va.

4. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003), 48. Hereafter, abbreviated GIRM.

5. GIRM, 74 and 87.

liturgy in contemporary America, this fourth option has eclipsed the first three options on a grand scale. Perhaps great good would be accomplished, as Dobszay suggests, by the wholesale elimination of the option for “another appropriate song.”

This action, were it to be taken, would still admit of variety and the necessary inequality of the musical-liturgical experience in different setting. The propers could be sung by a cantor, a choir, or the whole congregation; they could be sung accompanied or unaccompanied; they could be sung in English, Latin, Spanish, Igbo, Tagalog, or any other tongue. This action would not necessarily eliminate the possibility of singing something in addition to the propers, either, but it would certainly help to restore the traditional structure of the *Proprium Missae*—a hallmark of the Roman Rite.

Thanks to the dedication of many selfless Church musicians, a lack of sufficient resources (in Latin or in the vernacular) is finally no longer a legitimate excuse for the replacement of propers with hymnody (or anything else). Choices among Latin and vernacular propers are now widely available, and many of them are available at no cost. The Church, herself, provides the *Graduale Simplex*⁶ as a simpler alternative to the *Graduale Romanum*.⁷ The *Communio*⁸ chants, published by the Church Music Association of America (CMAA), are another wonderful option in Latin. Among the English-language options, the *Lumen Christi Missal*⁹ and *Lumen Christi Simple Gradual*¹⁰ of Adam Bartlett are noteworthy resources. Bartlett is also responsible for the *Simple*

6. *Graduale Simplex: In usum minorum ecclesiarum*, edition typica altera (Vatican: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1975).

7. Solesmes, *Graduale Romanum* (Tournai, Belgium: Desclée & Co., 1974).

8. Richard Rice, *Communio: Communion Antiphons with Psalm Verses for Sundays and Solemnities* (Richmond, VA: CMAA, 2008).

9. Adam Bartlett, *Lumen Christi Missal* (Illuminare Publications, 2012).

10. Adam Bartlett, *Lumen Christi Simple Gradual* (Illuminare Publications, 2014).

*English Propers*¹¹ and an online score library of free resources.¹² Additional English-language resources include the *Simple Choral Gradual*¹³ and *English Chant for the Modern Roman Rite*,¹⁴ both from Richard Rice, and *The Proper of the Mass*,¹⁵ by Father Samuel Weber, OSB. Dr. Jon Naples has produced an excellent collection in his *Offertory*,¹⁶ and Gary Penkala has published numerous settings of propers through his CanticaNOVA Publications.¹⁷ In parishes seeking to introduce propers-based music gradually, resources such as *Introit Hymns of the Church Year*¹⁸ by Christoph Tietze remain useful as an intermediate step. A full analysis and comparison of each of these collections is not necessary here, but Catholic musicians must become aware that such resources exist and are easily accessible.

It is worth noting that the movement towards propers is finding traction even in unlikely places, including many of the major liturgical music publishers in the United States. One can find collections that draw from the antiphons of the Roman Missal, for example, in the catalogs of GIA Publications, Oregon Catholic Press, and International Library Publications. While not all of these resources reflect the same musical quality or suitability for liturgical use, the growing presence of materials related to proper texts is evidence that this is a developing market. Publishers would not, after all, be producing new settings of propers if they did not expect them to sell. This means that what presently remains a largely grassroots effort has a future.

11. Adam Bartlett, *Simple English Propers for the Ordinary Form of Mass, Sundays and Feasts* (Richmond, VA: CMAA, 2011).

12. Available at: <https://www.illuminairepublications.com/scores>.

13. Richard Rice, *Simple Choral Gradual: Settings for Mixed Choir of the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion Antiphons for Sundays and Solemnities of the Church Year* (Richmond, VA: CMAA, 2011).

14. Richard Rice, *English Chant for the Modern Roman Rite*, 2 vol. (Lulu, 2016).

15. Samuel F. Weber, *The Proper of the Mass: Entrance, Offertory, and Communion Antiphons for Sundays and Solemnities* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014).

16. Jon Naples, *Offertory: Chant Propers in 3 Parts, Sundays and Feasts Complete* (Lulu, 2015).

17. Online catalog available here: <http://www.canticanova.com>.

18. Christoph Tietze, *Introit Hymns for the Church Year* (Franklin Park, IL: World Library Publications, 2006).

A return to propers-based liturgy is not an impossible goal. It is the onus of our present generation to see that the Second Vatican Council's "original vision of a musical renaissance consistent with tradition is achieved."¹⁹ Professor Dobszay has, himself, testified to the real viability of this call to action, speaking of the current liturgical life of his native Hungary. There, "despite very adverse conditions," the chanting of the propers "has in fact been achieved."²⁰ In both urban and rural parishes, the voice of the Church is heard through the sung propers of the Mass as presented in the 2007 volume, *Graduale Hungaricum*.²¹ Similar success is possible in the American milieu.

Whether or not the repeal of the permissive phrase legitimizing "another suitable song" is effected officially within the Church, Catholic musicians today have the freedom to make the option extraneous. Choices can be made in favor of the propers even now, and the fruits of such action could be extraordinary for the Church and for the faithful. It is the charge of the present generation of Catholic musicians in America to initiate this movement, participate in it, and bring it to a happy completion.

For the sake of the people in the pews, we must take up this cross.

19. Jeffrey A. Tucker, *Sing Like a Catholic* (Richmond, VA: Church Music Association of America, 2009), 20.

20. Dobszay, 103.

21. *Graduale Hungaricum* (Gödöllő: A Premonterei rend Gödöllői Kanóniája, 2007).