LAST WORD

The Adoremus Hymnal — Its Origin

by Kurt Poterack

I would have to check my files (if any still exist), but I think that it was around 1994–95 that I put forward a proposal to Ignatius Press for a new hymnal. I must have at least heard through the grapevine that they were open to such a thing. Apparently they had already had someone working on such a project, but it went nowhere. (So much of this is lost in the mists of time.) At any rate, I drew up a proposal and submitted it to Fr. Fessio and he liked it.

What I think he liked about it was that it wasn't just a proposal for a "hymnal," but for a music book based on the church's theology of sacred music as expressed in documents such as *Musicam Sacram*. Thus, the book was to be divided into three parts: 1) the order of the Mass (in Latin and English) with music for such parts integrated within it, 2) various Mass Ordinaries in Latin and English, including some of the chant Masses and, finally 3) hymns.

Next, I assembled an editorial committee. It was made up of me, Prof. Susan Treacy, and the late Calvert Shenk who, at that time, was organist/choir master at the cathedral in Birmingham, Alabama. There was supposed to be a fourth member of the committee, but he backed out. I seem to remember that he objected to the inclusion of hymns—as these are substitutes for the propers. In a sense I agreed with him, but felt it was too soon to promote sung propers in such a publication. Our duty was to move people in the right direction, stressing that music at Mass shouldn't consist *only* of hymns, but to give them good hymns as well.

Publications promoting sung propers were to emerge in the next ten to twenty years, however in the 1990's (the 1980's, as well) the big desire among most orthodox Catholics was for more traditional hymns without inclusive language. Remember, this was still the time when Catholic hymnals that had any sort of influence were pretty exclusively published through the big "acronym" publishers: OCP (Oregon Catholic Press), GIA (formerly the Gregorian Institute of America), and WLP (World Library Publications).

Not only did this situation constitute a monopoly, there was also a strong financial incentive to promote new music, as old music—much of it in the public domain—didn't bring in much of a profit. Also, the self-publishing which computers make possible (as well as internet distribution) with which we are so familiar today, had not yet really gotten off the ground—at least in this realm. It was very important to work through a big, established, sympathetic publisher, like Ignatius Press.

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Our committee, which represented the Church Music Association of America (CMAA), met for several days in St. Paul, Minnesota at the parish of St. Agnes where we were hosted by the pastor, Msgr. Richard Schuler—a former long-time president of the CMAA. Msgr. Schuler had a wonderful music program at his parish and the most fascinating array of table guests. I remember, among others, a priest from Pakistan, a consecrated virgin who was a heart surgeon, two Coptic-rite priests from Ethiopia, and, I think, an auxiliary bishop. Had we stayed a week longer, I am sure that we would have dined with a cardinal!

In the course of three days, we chose the bulk of the hymns and Mass Ordinaries and decided not to deal with responsorial psalms—as that would have made the project too big. We decided to group hymns by liturgical season rather than alphabetically by title. Ultimately, there were to be two hymnals: a big and a small one. That is the reason for the gaps in the numbering of hymns. The hymnal that we put out first was to be the "small hymnal." The bigger hymnal was to add more hymns in the "gaps." This way, the hymns that were shared in common between the two books would have the same identifying numbers. The "big hymnal" was never published, so these gaps in the hymn numbers continue to puzzle people to the present day.

I should stress that there were three entities involved in the production of this hymnal: the editorial committee (which represented the Church Music Association of America), Ignatius Press (the publisher), and the Adoremus organization that was styled the "author." There was also an executive committee consisting of Fr. Pokorsky, Helen Hull Hitchcock, and Fr. Fessio, and a board of consulters.

I cannot remember the details, but the editorial committee didn't have total say-so on the contents of the book. There was some sort of a procedure by which the consulters and the executive committee voted on all of our selections. However, I think that we were given the benefit of the doubt and that a music choice of ours would have to be overturned by a two-thirds vote—I think—my memory may not be exactly right. Consulters and executive committee members could also propose additional hymns, but these were subject to the same voting procedures.

In the end, though there were some disagreements, they were settled amicably and by a broad consensus. There was a lot of work in between the first editorial committee meeting and the final publication. I remember having to type up pretty much the entire Order of Mass and insert the musical parts on my computer in my little apartment in East Lansing, Michigan. I also remember having to track down copyright information and lots and lots of proofreading. This was the most tedious, non-glamorous part of the job. It was pretty much just Susan, Cal, and I doing all of the proofreading—finding time to do this outside of our regular employment. It gave me an enormous respect for proofreaders—and a realization that the more pairs of eyes you can put to work, the better.

The Adoremus Hymnal came out in late 1997, the first of many such liturgical-music publications that were to give American Catholics a greater access to their own tradition. It also served as an early, concrete embodiment of that "New Liturgical Movement" which Cardinal Ratzinger had called for—something that is still bearing much fruit. I am proud that I was able to be a part of it! ✇