

A ZENIT DAILY DISPATCH

Antiphons and the Graduale Romanum

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Answered by Legionary of Christ Father Edward McNamara, professor of liturgy at the Regina Apostolorum university.

Q: I am completing a project of translating into English and transcribing into modern notation the introit and communion antiphons of the Mass. My hope is to enable any singer, even one unfamiliar with the theory and tradition of monophony, to discover the musical truth and spiritual power of these beautiful treasures. In this effort I have noticed many discrepancies between the texts given in the missal currently used in the United States and those that are prescribed in the Graduale Romanum. For example, the communion antiphon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter in the Graduale for Year A is: "Non vos relinquam órphanos" (I will not leave you orphans), but in the U.S. missal it is: "Si diligitis me ..." (If you love me, keep my commandments). The missal uses this text for all three years. Now in this instance both texts are found in the Year A Gospel for the Sixth Sunday of Easter (John 14:15-21), but this is not the case for Years B and C where the Graduale texts are Gospel referent, but "Si diligitis me" is not. The Graduale texts are almost always more related to the Scripture and themes of a particular Mass than are those in the missal. There are many other examples I could cite. I am very curious as to why and how this is. Does the new missal correct this? — E.L., Chicago

A: The new translation also has "If you love me" for this Sunday which corresponds to the original Latin of the Roman Missal. The Latin missal traditionally has only one communion antiphon normally related to the theme of the Gospel.

The Graduale Romanum, or Roman Gradual, is an official liturgical book containing chants for use at Mass. The Gradual is not limited to the texts provided in the missal but offers a wider choice of musical possibilities.

The discrepancy between the two, if it can be called that, is probably due to the chronology of publication. The Gradual was published in 1974, four years after the missal and the lectionary which introduced the new, three-year cycle of readings. The compilers of the Gradual therefore had sufficient time to propose new chants adapted to each cycle of readings, whereas the missal text was confined to cycle A.

The options are outlined in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), Nos. 48 and 87:

"No. 48 The singing at this time is done either alternately by the choir and the people or in a similar way by the cantor and the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone. In the dioceses of the United States of America there are four options for the Entrance Chant: (1) the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the Psalm from the Roman Gradual as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the seasonal antiphon and Psalm of the Simple Gradual; (3) a song from another collection of psalms and antiphons, approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) a suitable liturgical song similarly approved by the Conference of Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop.

"If there is no singing at the entrance, the antiphon in the Missal is recited either by the faithful, or by some of them, or by a lector; otherwise, it is recited by the priest himself, who

may even adapt it as an introductory explanation (cf. above, no. 31).

"No. 87 In the dioceses of the United States of America there are four options for the Communion chant: (1) the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the Psalm from the Roman Gradual as set to music there or in another musical setting; (2) the seasonal antiphon and Psalm of the Simple Gradual; (3) a song from another collection of psalms and antiphons, approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops or the Diocesan Bishop, including psalms arranged in responsorial or metrical forms; (4) a suitable liturgical song chosen in accordance with no. 86 above. This is sung either by the choir alone or by the choir or cantor with the people.

"If there is no singing, however, the Communion antiphon found in the Missal may be recited either by the faithful, or by some of them, or by a lector. Otherwise the priest himself says it after he has received Communion and before he distributes Communion to the faithful."

As can be observed, the liturgical norms allow several choices for the communion song, including using either the Gradual or the missal. Given this possibility it was probably considered unnecessary to provide alternative antiphons in the missal itself. Some vernacular translations, however, have provided these alternatives based on the three-year cycle.

I am very happy to see musicians give priority to the official liturgical texts rather than go the easy way of introducing tunes from other sources. In this way the assembly can aspire to sing the Mass and not just sing at Mass.

An excellent study of the history of the entrance antiphons, as well as a proposal to combine them with metrical psalms for use at Mass, can be found in a 2005 work by Christoph Tietze, "Hymn Introits for the Liturgical Year," Hillenbrand Books, Chicago.

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Follow-up: Antiphons and the Graduale Romanum [8-16-2011]

In line with our article on the use of the Roman Gradual (see July 19), several readers had asked about the approval process for musical settings and songs to be used in the liturgy. One Canadian reader wrote: "Do hymns used during the Mass need to be approved before they may be put into use, and if so, what is the approval process? Or, can those who lead the music select and determine for themselves what hymns are to be sung during the Mass? The hymnal used by the band (guitars and drums) at our parish's Sunday 'family Mass' was developed by a member of the congregation."

The bishops' conference of each country may legislate regarding the use of music in church. Some countries have produced national repertoires so that everybody in the country is familiar with at least a nucleus of liturgical songs. Others have published detailed norms while others have yet to engage in this task. Individual bishops may also issue some norms for their dioceses.

There is usually a distinction made between settings for the Mass texts themselves and other songs. Music for the Mass texts (for example, the Gloria, the Holy Holy Holy, and the Lamb of God) usually falls upon the bishops' conference. These texts may not be altered or substituted by others. The approval of other songs (offertory, communion, etc.) falls upon the bishop of the place they are published although any bishop may approve or forbid the use of any particular song.