



Singing the Mass Antiphons: At Home and in Rome

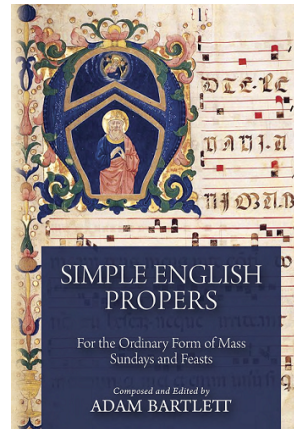
Posted by Adam Bartlett

If you have been around the conversations within the Church Music Association of America for any length of time have, you have surely encountered discussion of an issue that manifests itself most often in the following question:

Why don't the antiphons in Simple English Propers match the antiphons in our missalettes in the pews, and the ones in the Roman Missal?

(If I had a nickel for every time I have answered this question, I surely could be enjoying a comfortable retirement on a distant tropical island right now!)

The simple answer to the question is this: Simple English Propers sets to music the antiphons of the *Graduale Romanum* in English translation, while most popular publications (such as Magnificat, various hand missals, the ubiquitous disposable pew missals, etc.) usually print the antiphons of the *Roman Missal*. The antiphons of the Roman Missal and Graduale Romanum, while they are often the same, are in various cases different sets of proper texts. A neutral translation of the Graduale Romanum (from the Solesmes Gregorian Missal) was used in SEP, which could be freely shared online without copyright restriction, and as an unfortunate result, the Roman Missal translations were not used where the Missal and Graduale are in fact the same.



There are numerous further explanations and speculative analyses of the phenomenon of Roman Missal vs. Graduale Romanum propers, all of which can easily be found through a quick web search, and most of which are beyond the grasp, care or interest of those who are working in real-world, parish settings.

The conventional answer, common practice, and liturgical law

The conventional conclusion that the CMAA has maintained at for many years now is that when the 1969 Roman Missal was promulgated, the antiphons of the Roman Missal (including only the Entrance and Communion Antiphons, not the Offertory Antiphon) were intended to be *spoken* when the antiphon of the Graduale Romanum or Graduale Simplex was not *sung*. This distinction is clear in the rubrics of the *universal law* of the GIRM to this day.

The same rubrics, however, stated that "another suitable song" could be sung in place of the antiphons of the Graduale Romanum or Graduale Simplex, and we all know that this is the source of the proliferation of singing just about any kind of hymn or song at the Entrance, Offertory and Communion processions of the Mass in place of the antiphons that are appointed by the Church to be sung at these times.

Since we have never been given official, approved English translations of the Graduale Romanum, in practice, those who wished to sing proper antiphons in English defaulted to singing the approved translations found in the Roman Missal, and this practice has gone on for more than 40 years in certain locales in the English speaking world. In no way was this ever illicit, since the antiphons of the Roman Missal are perhaps among the best "other suitable songs" that can be imagined!

Because of the success of this practice, the Bishops of the United States of America voted to include the singing of the Roman Missal antiphons as part of the first option in the Roman Missal, Third Edition (see GIRM 48 and 87).

Thus, in *particular law* (which canonically trumps universal law) in the United States of America today, the antiphons of the Roman Missal form a part of the *first option* for the sung texts of the Entrance, Offertory and Communion processions, along side the antiphons and psalms of the Graduale Romanum, as set to music there or in another musical setting.

This is *binding liturgical law* for all faithful and obedient Catholics in the United States of America.

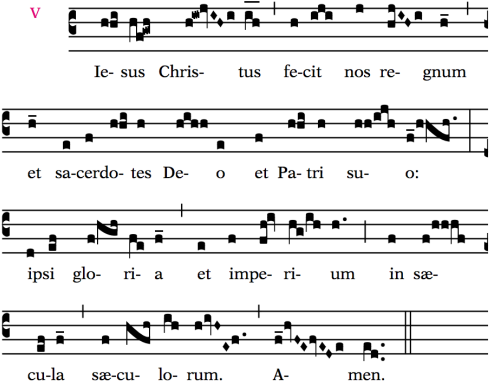
Roman Missal antiphons in Rome

It is striking to observe an unconventional but illustrative development in the papal liturgies in Rome this year: The Entrance Antiphon that is being sung in this year's **Chrism Mass** in St. Peter's Basilica is not the antiphon prescribed in the Graduale Romanum (which is *Dilexisti iustitiam*), but is the antiphon of the Roman Missal! Further, it appears to be in a newly composed, "neo-Gregorian" musical setting:

Antiphona ad introitum

La schola e l'assemblea: Ap 1, 6

V



Ie- sus Chris- tus fe- cit nos re- gnum
et sa- cerdo- tes De- o et Pa- tri su- o:
ipsi glo- ri- a et impe- ri- um in sæ-
cu- la sæ- cu- lo- rum. A- men.

H/T Steven van Roode, musicasacra.com/forum

It is interesting to note that the GIRM in force in Rome, and in every other diocese of the world outside of the US, does not list the antiphons of the Roman Missal—strictly speaking—as sung texts, but as spoken texts when the antiphons of the Graduale Romanum are not sung. It seems that Msgr. Guido Marini and Fr. Pierre Paul, among the other planners of papal liturgies, agree that the most suitable alternative to the antiphons of the Graduale Romanum and Graduale Simplex are the antiphons of the Roman Missal.

This raises another question for us to consider: Is it within the Church's mind and within the bounds of the authentic spirit of the liturgy for additional proper antiphons to be added to the Church's corpus of Gregorian chant?

"Neo-Gregorian" chant propers have been composed throughout the centuries, and many exist in the Graduale Romanum today (such as the chants for the more recent feasts of Christ the King, Corpus Christi, the Immaculate Conception, among others). This idea was heavily frowned upon around the time of the council, when the work and research of Dom Eugene Cardine and the Semiological school was coming to an end, which brought the 100-year chant restoration project of Solesmes to point of near completion.

Today, however, chant scholarship is in a place of stability and scholars are in virtual agreement across the globe on what constitutes the authentic Gregorian chant tradition. Is the time right for a slow, gradual and organic development of the chant tradition, as we are perhaps seeing happen in St. Peter's Basilica this year—one that would in no way supplant the authentic Gregorian chant corpus, but would enrich and expand it, taking its secrets and genius and applying it to new compositions both in Latin and in various vernaculars?

I think that the answer is yes. And I am not alone in thinking this.

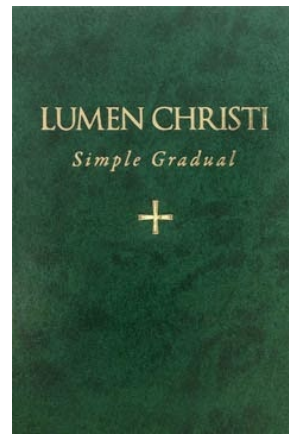
The successor to Simple English Propers

In fact, in a particular way, this effort is taking form in a brand new English chant resource that will begin [shipping in two weeks](#).

It is the *Lumen Christi Simple Gradual*, edited by myself, and published by Illuminare Publications ([learn more here](#)). This resource is the true successor and fulfillment of its predecessor, Simple English Propers (which also composed and edited by myself).

There is no other resource like this. It will be available in both Assembly and Choir editions, and it contains the fully sung Order of Mass in English, eighteen Mass Ordinaries in English and Latin chant, and a complete repertoire of simple English chant settings with texts that are drawn from the Church's primary sources for the sung liturgy—the Graduale Romanum, Roman Missal, and Graduale Simplex—and arranged for successful parish use, according to prescripts of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, Musicam Sacram, and Sacrosanctum Concilium.

The source translation that is used is the Roman Missal, Third Edition, and new translations have been made where they are needed (e.g. the Offertory Antiphons, among others), and approved for liturgical use by the USCCB Secretariat for Divine Worship and by episcopal imprimatur. This assures the greatest textual continuity between the texts of the Missal and Graduale, and accords with the requirements of Liturgiam Authenticam.



It is arranged with the needs of today's parishes in mind, and it builds not only upon the experience of the past 5 years, but also upon the wisdom of the past 50 years. The musical settings that the *Lumen Christi Simple Gradual* contains already form a part of the core repertoire of numerous parishes across the English-speaking world, and early online releases have helped hone and perfect the chant settings and their arrangement over the course of the past three years.

Accompaniment editions are currently in preparation, and pre-publication digital editions are **now available online** every week for free download.

This is the next installment of the ever-developing *Lumen Christi Series*, which is a complete parish sacred music program. Be sure to sign up for updates and future announcements [here](#).

I'm very excited to be able to present this new resource to the Church, in addition to the growing, organized effort that is developing behind it, to the parishes of the English speaking world. More information will soon follow on other exciting developments and initiatives. For now, let us look forward with hopeful anticipation of the future of liturgical renewal that lies ahead!

at 10:33 AM



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Charles Culbreth · 4 weeks ago

-1

Adam, I'm feeling a bit like Denzel Washington's attorney character in the film "Philadelphia,""Could you explain this to me like I'm a four year old?"

Are the SEP's technically still a fourth option?
Will the IM propers be a first option?

Reply

Report



adambartlett 62p · 4 weeks ago

+4

It all can get very confusing, can't it Charles? This is why I've tended to not get into the details that are mostly unnecessary for most people who are working in real life situations, yet confusion continues to be proliferated in various ways.

Here's my cliffsnotes version of the above:

–Is SEP part of the first options? Yes.

–Does SEP use the Roman Missal translation where it could have? No.

–Is this unnecessarily confusing for people? Yes, I think that often it is.

–Is the Lumen Christi Simple Gradual part of the first option? Yes.

–Does it employ official translations wherever possible? Yes.

–Can Roman Missal antiphons be sung? Yes.

–Is this part of the first option? Yes, in the US.

–Can Roman Missal antiphons be licitly sung outside of the US? Of course, under the last option. Additionally, the planners of Papal Masses in Rome seem to think that this is a good idea!

Reply

Report



Matthew J. Meloche · 4 weeks ago

+5

These propers, from the Lumen Christi Simple Gradual, are used every weekend at the Cathedral of SS Simon and Jude in Phoenix, AZ. I personally attest to their quality and beauty. Each week, I am amazed at how well the melody matches the text of every chant. At a previous parish I made use of the SEP and found that by the end of the 4th or 5th Mass of the weekend, I was tired of the chants. The melody didn't beautifully accentuate the text in many cases, and didn't inspire the awe that is found in the Gregorian repertoire. However, with the Lumen Christi Gradual chants, I find that by the end of the last Mass of the weekend, I still enjoy singing these propers and am still moved to prayer to the same degree I was at the first Mass. This is a testimony to the quality of musicianship put forth by Mr. Bartlett.

Reply

Report



Matthew J. Meloche · 4 weeks ago

+5

We typically sing the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion chants from this collection at the 9am televised Mass, the Offertory and Communion at the Saturday anticipated Mass, and the Introit and Communion at the Sunday evening "youth Mass." We also sing Gregorian propers at the 11am Solemn Mass, and we often find that our experience singing the Gregorian propers (after having sung these English propers) is deeper than it would be otherwise. Singing the text to the same mode and a simpler melody in English can help us to better articulate the fine points of the text to a more complex melody in the Gregorian proper.

This collection is a true blessing to the church and anyone with a choir set of SEPs should consider putting those up on a high shelf and moving forward to something much better. Any choir that can sing the SEPs presently could tomorrow switch to this collection with no problem - and they would be singing better propers. The future is here - take the plunge.

Reply

Report



OLCOrganist 53p · 4 weeks ago

+2

If I may be permitted to ask a stupid question: What do the circles and asterisks signify in the heading for each chant after the citation?

Reply

Report



adambartlett 62p · 4 weeks ago

+2

A very good question, actually:

A white dot means that the text is whole, as found in the liturgical books.

A half circle means that the text has been carefully shortened in order to form a more singable refrain for the congregation (the removed text is then transferred to the first verse of the Psalm).

A black dot means that the antiphon is recommended for seasonal use (See Ordo Cantus Missae Praenotanda) when seasonal antiphons are desired.

Reply

Report



Fr. Jim Chepponis · 4 weeks ago

+2

A few questions & comments:

Why does it matter that sung antiphons from the Roman Missal are considered part of the "first option" (in the United States) rather than the "fourth option"? All four options are valid. Is there official documentation somewhere that says the first option is to be preferred over the fourth option?

I'm not sure what the statement that "This is binding liturgical law for all faithful and obedient Catholics in the United States of America" adds to this discussion. I'm not aware of any official documentation that ever actually PROHIBITED the missal antiphons from being sung.

Am I right in deducing from this post that the entrance antiphon from the Missal that is sung at the Vatican's Chrism Mass this year would be considered in the fourth option category in Italy? If this is the case, and if one believes that the first option is preferred, then why would the Vatican choose the last of the options?

Reply 4 replies · active 4 weeks ago

Report



adambartlett 62p · 4 weeks ago

+1

Many of these points are in response to those who believe that the Roman Missal antiphons should not be sung.

Reply

Report



Fr. Jim Chepponis · 4 weeks ago

+2

Adam,

OK, that could explain your enthusiasm!

Of course I agree with you that the Roman Missal antiphons can be sung. In fact, I even tried my hand at composing a set of Roman Missal entrance antiphons for the Sundays of the Advent season: <http://www.morningstarmusic.com/viewitem.cfm/item...>

It was challenging for me to try to make them accessible for the congregation. Another challenge was the choice of psalm verses.

God's blessings on your efforts.

Reply

Report



adambartlett 62p · 4 weeks ago

+1

Fr. Chepponis—

Thank you for the kind words. Your settings look very interesting. I haven't seen this sort of multiple-call-and-response (for lack of a better term) method used before. Have you had much of an opportunity to try these settings out before publication? If so, how did it work in practice? It certainly is one way to try to overcome the issue of long antiphon texts.

It is very exciting to see so many composers taking up the processional antiphons in recent years. I would venture to guess that the US Roman Missal's rubrics (discussed above) have encouraged many to take up the task who, for whatever reason, may not have been very interested in composing or singing propers before. This definitely seems to be a good thing!

Blessings on your work also.

Reply

Report



John · 4 weeks ago

0

It's a general principle of statutory construction. Of course, the problem arises of how to express a list of options without a preference. In this case, the preference seems more obvious. Graduale Romanum, Graduale Simplex, Psalms, other. Had there been no preference, the first three options would be superfluous. But a preference is merely that. Papal Masses regularly resort to the latter options.

Reply

Report



Jared Ostermann · 4 weeks ago

+2

Adam,

Maybe it's just Holy Week brain, but I'm confused as to how the simple gradual and the gradual interact (both upcoming from Lumen Christi). We do at least the SEP communio every week at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Sioux Falls, and the choir enjoys them. Would the logical 'upgrade' from SEP for a choir be the LC Gradual, rather than simple gradual? And the Simple Gradual is intended more for congregational singing? And as part of this question, are you saying that the simple gradual includes both the Roman Missal antiphon and the Graduale Romanum antiphon when they are different? Or does it choose one or the other, in which case does it always defer to the Roman Missal antiphon?

Reply

Report



adambartlett 62p · 4 weeks ago

+4

Jared, good questions, and I see that I need to write a bit more on the difference between these two books.

Firstly, the Lumen Christi Gradual is still some time off, because of its size. The Lumen Christi Simple Gradual was able to hit the press first because of its abbreviated nature.

Here's the difference:

The Gradual will contain the full proper of the Mass—Graduale and Roman Missal antiphons, Responsorial Psalms, Gospel Verses, etc. The Simple Gradual contains a smaller, simplified repertoire taken from the Proper of the Mass. It covers the entire liturgical year, including a selection of chants for the Commons, Votive Masses, Ritual Masses, etc.

The Simple Gradual has carefully arranged a subset of the Proper which, yes, is aimed at congregational singing. It is expected that these will be introduced on a seasonal basis when needed, which will probably be the case in most parishes who desire the people in the pews to sing antiphons from the Mass Proper.

The Gradual, on the other hand, will contain these simple antiphons (also found in the Simple Gradual), but will expand upon it with full, extended chant settings that in most cases will be more suitable to a choir or schola, plus the full array of Responsorial Psalms and Gospel Verses for the entire year.

One of the brilliant features of the Simple Gradual is its flexibility. Every antiphon is numbered, and the mode is retained from the Gregorian parent, where applicable. Many parishes, cathedrals, seminaries, etc., are using a hybrid approach where the full proper will be sung first (either Graduale Romanum, a choral setting, a more elaborate English setting, even a psalm tone setting, etc.), and then the simple antiphon from the LC Simple Gradual is intoned, and the faithful take it up thereafter. This could even be a seasonal antiphon (e.g. "To you I lift up my soul" as an Entrance Antiphon throughout Advent, and so forth) while the true proper text is sung by the choir or a cantor prior to it.

In short, the Simple Gradual is a comprehensive repertoire for congregational singing, while the Gradual is a truly comprehensive repertoire for the choir, cantor, or schola.

I hope this clarifies things a bit more.

Reply

Report



adambartlett 62p · 4 weeks ago

+2

"And as part of this question, are you saying that the simple gradual includes both the Roman Missal antiphon and the Graduale Romanum antiphon when they are different? Or does it choose one or the other, in which case does it always defer to the Roman Missal antiphon?"

The LC Simple Gradual uses the Graduale Romanum and Roman Missal, and in certain cases, also the Graduale Simplex as the source for antiphon texts. These three books, of course, are the primary sources for the sung texts of the liturgy of the Roman Rite, and there is a great deal of continuity and similarity between them.

The Missal and Graduale antiphons, especially the Entrance Antiphons, have a great deal of similarity to begin with. The LC Simple Gradual focused, in most cases, on the places where the books agree. In cases where a choice had to be made, the text that was best suited to singing (brevity, text style, liturgical flexibility, etc.) was chosen over other possible options. Sometimes people assume that the Roman Missal and Graduale Romanum are two different, conflicting sets of antiphons, but this is not true. I see the LC Simple Gradual as a beautiful meeting of the two sets of antiphons in a way that both honors the authentic tradition, but at the same time, opens it up to the people in the pews—a task that is no small feat.

If your desire is to have the choir sing the proper antiphons alone, the LC Gradual would be your upgrade. If you are like most parishes, who assumed that SEP was congregational music (which it is not), then the LC Simple Gradual is your upgrade.

Bear in mind also that the Simple Gradual, Assembly Edition can be placed in the pews, and fully interface with the Gradual, which will contain this base repertoire, but fill in all of the gaps that pertain to the choir and schola.

Reply

Report



Jared Ostermann · 4 weeks ago

+1

Adam,

Thanks - very helpful

Reply

Report



Bob Nardo · 4 weeks ago

0

These posts have been incredibly helpful to me in understanding the things I've been reading on your website in recent weeks, as I excitedly await these materials' availability. Our choir has been using SEP for some time and truly appreciate the resource for what it's made possible in our parish (God bless you!), while also looking forward to these improvements.

One more clarifying question. How does the Assembly edition of LC Simple Gradual compare to the what's in the LC Missal? (According to the website, the latter has "over 300 simple chant settings of antiphons for the Entrance, Offertory and Communion that can be sung by the assembly...")

What I'm trying to get at is which of the products we would need IF we were interested in congregational singing of propers (still in discussion with celebrant here). Would we in theory need the Missal + Simple Gradual Assembly Edition + eventual Hymnal? Or is the Simple Gradual meant for those who have some other Missal with lectionary readings, etc?

Reply

1 reply · active 3 weeks ago

Report



adambartlett 62p · 3 weeks ago

+1

Bob, I know that we've already discussed this on the phone, but for the record here:

"How does the Assembly edition of LC Simple Gradual compare to the what's in the LC Missal?"

The Simple Gradual is an abbreviated form of the Missal. Both contain the Order of Mass, Eighteen Mass Settings, and a full "Simple Gradual", containing over 300+ antiphons. These sections are virtually identical between the two books. The Missal has, in addition to this, Sunday Lectionary Readings and Daily Antiphons (800 pages worth!) and a section of Devotional Prayers and Various Rites.

The Lumen Christi Simple Gradual, Choir Edition, contains pointed Psalm verses for all of the antiphons of the Simple Gradual, and therefore it can be used in conjunction with both the Missal and Simple Gradual, Assembly Edition.

I hope this clarifies things!

Reply

Report



The Old Biddy. · 3 weeks ago

+1

Mr. Bartlett, a huge THANK YOU for this post and the ensuing discussion. Thank you everyone. We are not in the United States and we are using the proper texts from the CTS/Collins editions of the Missal to set simple chants. We attempted the SEP in the early days and discovered the antiphons too "difficult". There were also grumbles about the texts not being the same as the Missal we are using. Hence the use of the texts from the CTS or Collins editions. Having said that, we have also heard that at another parish not far from us, the SEP is being attempted by one of their smaller choirs, about once or twice a month. As for the forthcoming LC Gradual and Simple, it will be a tremendous help and a real step forward. Looking forward. God bless.

Reply

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