

**By Prof. Laszlo Dobszay. For 'The New Liturgical Movement' website.**

**The Mass Psalmody:** a theme we had to confront also here in Hungary some 30 years ago. Our experiences might perhaps be useful also for other regions. (I excuse myself because of the linguistic failures: my obligations do not allow me to revise it carefully!)

#### **A) The text: Graduale Romanum or Lectionarium?**

The Introduction of the Missale permits a choice: Graduale Romanum, Graduale Simplex, Lectionary. Let us make, however, a distinction between repertories and genres.

1. Repertory: The series of the Lectionary is based on an thesis current some 100 years ago, but refuted in scholarship for a time. This thought, that the psalm is a response to the reading, and should reflect its ideas. This hypothesis emerged as a commentary to the liturgy, and when it was found that is not conform with the facts, facts should be changed. (The sequence was: fact 1 – commentary – conflict between commentary and facts – change of fact 1 to fact 2.)

Therefore the interlectionary psalms of the Graduale Romanum has been replaced during the reform by a new series composed following to the axiom of „reflective psalm”. But the Mass psalm (Graduale) is, in fact, an independent entity, having its own meaning. It is response in another sense: the reading presents many word with few music (speaks to the intellectual and not the emotional part of the mind); the psalm presents few word in rich music. Therefore the relationship is of psychological nature (what does not exclude, of course, that also the Graduale has its own intellectual message). Graduale Romanum is a cycle of texts which adds a lot to the understanding of the season or to the manifestation of Christian existence, but in a way different from the readings. Consequently there is no need to accomodate it to the words of the reading.

2. Genre: Another question is the way of performance, i.e. the genre. There are scholars who suppose that Graduale was in old time a responsorial psalm, which developed later to a highly melismatic music. Other scholars deny this and think impossible to deduce the second from the first. They suppose, that the psalm was originally performed by a solo singer on an ornate melody, and later, when the choir took it over, became shorter and fixed to a proper melodic formulary. At any rate, the melismatic Graduale is more suitable to the psychological „string” of the Mass. In the avarage churches, however (regarding the skill of their musicians and congregations) the responsorial psalmody seems to be much realistic form.

When the new Missal and Lectionary was introduced in Hungary, the bishops let the Lectionary psalm sung in simple psalm tones. But the editors of the new Hymnal („Ecclesia Cantans”) obtained – with not few difficulty – the permission of the bishops to introduce the texts of the Graduale Romanum. What is the argument in its favour? The huge text-material of the Lectionary cannot be assimilated by the faithful. I am sure, nobody in the congregation actually follows the relationship between reading and psalm. The psalms functions as a set „some pious words” (*quaedam sanctissima verba*), with no use, but producing much technical difficulties. On the other hand, the Graduale impresses in the minds the main themes of Catholic thinking and emotions. Moreover, with its one-year series it works like a thread (unfortunately, the only one) guiding the congregation through the church year. This is the ultimate relics of the precious Roman „anni circulus”... We will see later, that this choice has advantage also in musical respect.

In a respect, however, we took the Lectionary psalm in consideration. When the Graduale text was too long, a part of it has been transferred to the sequence of verses. And if the text was too short, one or at least two verses has been added taken from the psalm itself, those

verses which pertain the best to the feast, season, thought. This way the new „congregational Graduale” is a responsorial psalm, consists, however, not not of 6-8 verses, but only 2-3 verses. (This collection does not touch, of course, the 2-part structure of the original Graduale, provided that it can be sung by good singers on the proper tune.)

As an **example** let us take one text from one of the post-Pentecost Sundays (Dominica septima):

*Graduale Romanum*: Venite fili, audite me, timorem Domini docebo vos. V) Accedite ad eum, et illuminamini, et facies vestrae non confundentur.

*Ecclesia Cantans*: Venite fili, audite me, \* timorem Domini docebo vos. V/1 Accedite ad eum, et illuminamini, et facies vestrae non confundentur. \* Timorem. V/2. Diverte a malo, et fac bonum, inquire pacem et persequere eam. \* Timorem. Venite fili...

### **B/ Music: psalm tone or responsorium breve?**

Since the repertory has been reduced into one third of the Lectionary, it was easier to manage it also musically. With about 3-400 pieces there would be no other way than two read it in prose or recite on a psalm tone.

But what is the trouble with the psalm tone? The first is, that it is an „open” form, a repetition of the same formula, which remains unclosed, since the antiphon leading it to the right tonal end is missing. Take e.g. the fifth psalm tone. It recitates in C, all verses end on A, and the finalis F must arrive at the end of the antiphon.

The second trouble is, that if the responsorial psalm is sung on the psalm tone, there is no difference between the melody of the solo and the assembly, i.e. between the verse and the refrain. The piece is formless and contrary to the logic of the Chant.

Having no singers for the melismatic Graduale the Gregorian chant offers one genre for the performance of such textual structures, and it is the responsorium breve (short responsory). This genre is the remnant of wide-spread custom of singing psalm by the ancient Christians. We read in St. Augustin’s Confession, that when St. Monica died, Augustin’s friend took the Psalter in hand, intoned: „Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo”, all presents repeated this as a refrain, and lead in this way a large part of the psalm.

The responsorium breve is a simple recitative tone, easy to adapt to any text (even in vernacular). It is easy for learning by the congregation (as it was, in fact, sung by the congregation also in old times). The role of solo singer (psalmista) and the assembly is clearly distinguished – and related. It is more melodious, than the psalm tone, and makes good contrast to the reading (even if not so sharply than the melismatic singing does).

Because the form can easily adapted to the different length and structure of the text, and because of its melodious character, it sounds always new in the moment it is combined with a new text, without causing, however, any difficulty to the singers. We could take one single tone for the full year, which got a functional role: belongs to a fixed point of the liturgy. But, on the other hand, one don’t feel the repetition boring because of the changing structure and the combined words.

The tone selected for the Hymnal is the following:

CCC D C CF F + FFF D EF G \* FFF D C DF F.

Verse: F G AAA AC’ A + AAA GA F \* FFF D EF G: \* R) FFF D C DF F.

The rules of adaptation and the marks in the text (if printed without music):

Refrain:

- If the intonation is shorter it starts with the CF pes (in the text / before the note D and underline at the pes)

- In the second member: / before the note D, underline to the pes

- In the third member („repetenda“): / before the note D, underline to the pes.

- If the refrain has only two member: start after + (! marks before the text)

- If (exceptionally) it has only one member: start after \* (!! marks before the text)

Verse:

- If the second syllable is accented, the initium (F G) is tied, (in this case the first syllable is underlined)

- In the first and second member: the place of the pes underlined in the text

- In the third member: / before the note D and underline to the pes

- If the verse has only two members: skip over the first clausula and connect to the initium the second clausula (marked with ! before the text)

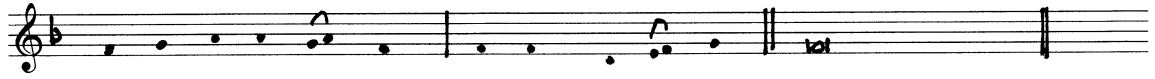
- If (exceptionally) the verse has only one member: start after the \* (marked with !! before the text)

As an illustration, I print here the Gradualia of Advent Sundays in English. (Since I don't know which kind of notation can go through on the homepage, and the note-letter + text combination is also problematic, I print it line by line and mark the coordination by / in both music and text. If you are interested, please, transcribe these samples into normal notation.):

### Sunday 1

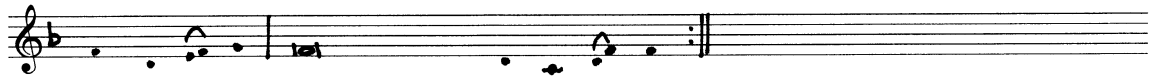


R. ! All they that /hope in thee \* shall not /be con-found-ed.

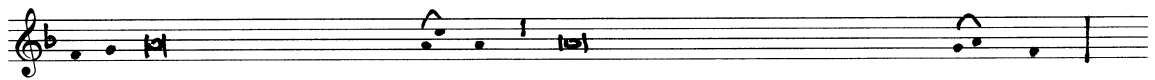


V. ! Show me they way O LORD \* and teach /me thy paths. R. All they that hope...

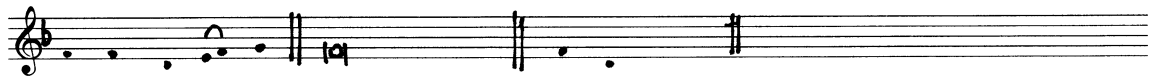
### Sunday 2



R. !! Out /of Si- on, \* God appears in /per-fect beau-ty.

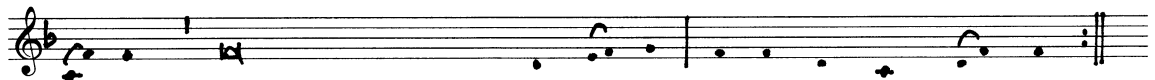


V. Ga-ther His saints together un-to Him; + those that have made a covenant with Him \*

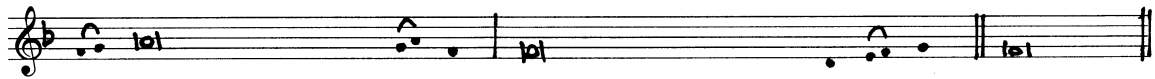


by sa- / cri-fi- ces. GOD APPEARS... OUT OF SION.

### Sunday 3



R. O Lord, + thou that sittest upon the /Che- ru- bim \* stir up /thy strength and come.

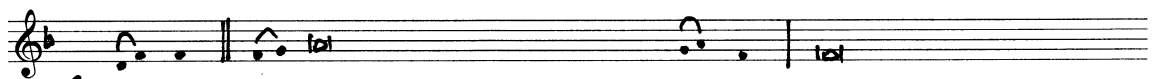


V. ! Give ear, O Shepherd of Is-ra- el, \* thou that ledest Joseph /like a flock.  
STIR UP... O LORD...

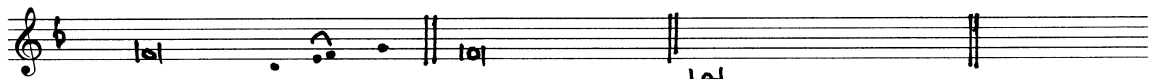
### Sunday 4



R. The Lord is nigh /un-to all them + that call /u- pon him, \* yea, all such as call upon/him



faith-ful- ly. V. ! My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, \* and let all flesh give thanks



unto his /ho- ly Name. YEA ALL, SUCH... THE LORD IS NIGH...