

2009 Hovda Lectures

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Sing to the Lord and the Treasury of Sacred Music

BY KEVIN VOGT

This is the third of five Hovda lectures exploring *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, a welcome set of pastoral guidelines on liturgical music issued in 2007 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. As Anthony Ruff noted in his presentation, these guidelines do not carry the weight of particular law, but they nonetheless embody the pastoral wisdom of our apostolic leaders and therefore call for obedient embrace.

Sing to the Lord supersedes the previous documents of the national conference—*Music in Catholic Worship* and *Liturgical Music Today*—taking into account several developments during the preceding twenty-five years: intervening Roman documents, practical experience, recent scholarship, and escalating polarization within the Church pertaining especially to liturgy and music. According to Father Ruff, who was a member of the drafting committee for the document, the purpose of this document is threefold: to calm controversy, to clarify Church teaching, and to stake out a “high middle ground.”¹ It is that high middle ground that I will explore in this lecture, considering the ways that *Sing to the Lord* seeks to harmonize the conciliar notion of a “treasury of sacred music” with the ritual requirements of the reformed liturgy and the receptive culture in which the liturgy is celebrated.

The words “treasury” and “sacred music” provide convenient touchstones for our reflection. I will first consider “tradition and treasury,” and then will examine the understanding of music as “sacred” expressed in *Sing to the Lord*. Finally, I will consider some implications of the practical guidelines offered in the document from the perspective of:

- (1) traditional musical philosophy, which may illuminate and contribute to an understanding of opposing and critical points of view on repertoire, and

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(2) the performing art of making music, which may provide practical pathways to the cultivation of a radically receptive liturgical participation, both active and contemplative.

But first a word about disposition. If Gregorian chant has been used as a political weapon in the so-called “liturgy wars,” the “treasury of sacred music” has been a virtual armory, providing an arsenal of ecclesiological litmus tests to those who are more certain than the institutional Church itself about what everyone ought to sing in the sacred liturgy. Alternatively, everything that might be included in a “canon” of traditional music—particularly music that we have inherited from our European ancestors in the faith—is regarded by others as a still-potent remnant of now-defunct European empires.

It should be obvious to everyone that defensive posturing at either pole will be at best unproductive and at worst damaging to one’s soul and to the unity of the Church. A more productive, healthy, and charitable disposition will entertain the views of others willingly without fear of losing our grip on objective Truth and slipping into a relativism. Literary critic Stanley Fish has observed that “while relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy.”² In our efforts to communicate, however, we sometimes are presented with an opportunity to modify our positions and to arrive at that high middle ground that is perhaps a little closer to that objective Truth that we so ardently seek to know.

Tradition and Treasure

As we find our way into a discussion about “tradition and treasure,” it might help you to know something about me. I am currently the music director for a growing parish in suburban Kansas City. I have served rural, urban, suburban, and university churches as well as two metropolitan cathedrals. My bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees are all in organ performance and literature, which means most of my higher education has been focused on interpreting and performing inherited musical repertoire—not “making” music *per se* but adapting historical music to contemporary liturgical celebrations. In fact, finding authentic ways to incorporate the Church’s inherited musical treasures has been a preoccupation for me. This has been especially true during my tenures in cathedral churches, which are charged by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy with a special role of diligently developing choirs.

I have to confess to you that the sheer effort—amassing human and capital resources, persuading the powers that be to support such rigorous vision, and fostering a communal culture that is receptive to anything older than most recent memory—has been exhausting. I must admit that as much as I love the fullness of the Church’s musical tradition, I have found it to be an enormous burden. I wonder about the motives behind my attachment to old music. I sometimes find it hard to hang on to what feels like an authentic and healthy reverence for tradition.

The meaning of musical tradition came home to me five years ago, when my daughter was born. At age thirty-eight, I had forgotten most the nursery rhymes and children’s songs I had learned as a child, and I spent the last

weeks of my wife's pregnancy applying my musicological skills, researching the correct and authentic versions of those poems and songs. After all, it was my job to convey to my infant daughter the cultural treasures of childhood. Somehow, the possession of these treasures would help her to have a good and happy life.

When she finally arrived and we began the round of feedings, burpings, diaper changes, and all-too-short periods of sleep, I forgot about all of my research, and I just *lived* the mystery of new parenthood. In order for her to sleep at night, I had to walk with her in my arms . . . and walk . . . and walk . . . and walk. And I sang:

Moon river, wider than a mile,
I'm crossing you in style someday.
O dream-maker, you heart-breaker,
Wherever you're going, I'm going your way.

Two drifters off to see the world,
There's such a lot of world to see
We're after the same rainbow's end,
Waitin' round the bend,
My huckleberry friend,
Moon River and me.³

Night after night for weeks I crooned this lullaby, until I stopped to wonder: "Where in the world did this come from?" I eventually realized that this was a song my own mother had sung to me when I was a child. It was indeed a treasure, a gift of a winsome melody and wispy poetry to lull my little girl to sleep but also a trove of deep affections, night after night teaching my heart the language of love for a child, of hope, imagining, and blessing for her life ahead. I understood for the first time how musical tradition works, how song resonates through time and space with a little help of ritual remembering and the quickening of the Holy Spirit.⁴

Robert Taft says: "Tradition is not the past; it is the Church's self-consciousness *now* of that which has been handed on to her not as an inert treasure but as a dynamic inner life. . . . Tradition is not the past, but present understood genetically, in continuity with that which produced it."⁵ This is not simply a matter of precedent, but rather of "faithfulness in handing on something that is ever developing."⁶

With this sense of tradition in mind, let us consider the historical background of the "treasury of sacred music" as a term identifying a comprehensive body of inherited liturgical music. In his encyclopedic study of this topic, *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform: Treasures and Transformations*, Anthony Ruff convincingly asserts that the notion of "treasury" (*thesaurus*) is not established as an all-embracing concept until the Second Vatican Council and that the term "sacred music" is similarly too unstable to be of assistance in determining a musical "canon" for Catholic worship.⁷ While the seeds of historical musical consciousness and the veneration of an inherited repertoire can be found in the Carolingian era with respect to liturgical chant,⁸ and while old music has sometimes served as a model for historically-inspired new music,⁹ historical musical consciousness did not come into full bloom until the twentieth century.¹⁰ In other words, concern for the conservation of inherited music is

a relatively recent phenomenon, even if it can be considered in some sense traditional.

The clear concept of a *thesaurus musicae sacrae* or “treasury of sacred music” begins to take shape only at the Second Vatican Council, first applying broadly to “tradition” and preeminent in its integral relationship to the liturgy:

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this preeminence is that, as sacred song closely bound to the text, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.¹¹

A more specific reference to a body of inherited music appears next to a concern for the development of choirs, with a caveat favoring one of the principal values of the Constitution: participation of the whole assembly.

The treasure [*thesaurus*, treasury] of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently developed, especially in cathedral churches; but bishops and other pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that whenever a liturgical service is to be celebrated with song, the whole assembly of the faithful is enabled, in keeping with art. 28 and 30, to contribute the active participation that rightly belongs to it.¹²

Article 116 acknowledges Gregorian chant to be “distinctive of the Roman liturgy,” and, “other things being equal,” it “should be given pride of place in liturgical services.”¹³ However, “other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony, are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations.” Furthermore, composers, “filled with the Christian spirit,” are urged to “feel that their vocation is to develop sacred music and to increase its store of treasures.”¹⁴ Finally, composers are nudged toward developing new genres: “Let them produce compositions having the qualities proper to genuine sacred music, not confining themselves to works that can be sung only by large choirs, but providing also for the needs of small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful.”¹⁵

While the terms and values articulated in the Constitution can be traced to seeds sown in Pius X’s *motu proprio* of 1903, *Tra le sollecitudini*, they coalesce into a clearer form by the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. The treasury seems to include music that is both old and new. It includes Gregorian chant, polyphony, and other forms of sacred music. It includes music for the choir, for instruments, and, with special emphasis, for the whole assembly.

The instruction *Musicam Sacram* of 1967 affirms the existence of a treasury of sacred music, in ways similar to the Constitution, but also sustains and even intensifies the ambiguity in the scope of that treasury, suggesting that parts of the treasury may not be able to be integrated into the reformed liturgy (which was being developed at the time that *Musicam Sacram* was published). In any case, the treasury of sacred music remains a central theme in *Musicam Sacram*. In contrast, *Music in Catholic Worship* (1972) barely mentions the musical patrimony, except in relation to its limited use:

Musicians must search for and create music of quality for worship, especially the new musical settings for the new liturgical texts. They must also do the

research to find new uses for the best of the old music. They must explore the repertory of good music in other communions. They must find practical means of preserving and using our rich heritage of Latin chants and motets.¹⁶

Liturgical Music Today (LMT, 1982) significantly redresses the lacunae of its predecessor, acknowledging the profound impact of the use of vernacular language in the liturgy:

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy sets forth the principles for the recent reform of the liturgy. At the same time it called the heritage of sacred music "a treasure of inestimable value." These purposes, while not opposed to each other, do exist in a certain tension. The restoration of active participation in the liturgy, the simplification of the rites, and the use of the vernacular have meant a massive change in the theory and practice of church music, a shift already detailed in *Music in Catholic Worship* and the present statement.¹⁷

LMT acknowledged the negative assessment of the reforms in some quarters but held firmly to the path of reform, urging both creative adaptation and surrender of parts of the inherited repertoire that can no longer be integrated in to the liturgy:

Some have viewed this situation with profound regret. For some, the setting aside of the Latin repertoire of past centuries has been a painful experience, and a cause of bitter alienation. "Now is the time for healing" [quoting a 1978 statement by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy]. It is also the time to make realistic assessments of what place the music of the past can have in the liturgies of today.¹⁸

On the eve of the Council few parishes were performing the authentic repertoire recommended by Saint Pius X in his famous *motu proprio* on music. Rather, most parishes generally used only a few of the simple chant Masses along with imitations of Renaissance motets and Masses. Moreover, the great music of the past was seldom the music of the ordinary parish church. Most often it was a product of the cathedrals and court chapels.¹⁹

However, singing and playing the music of the past is a way for Catholics to stay in touch with and preserve their rich heritage. A place can be found for this music, a place which does not conflict with the assembly's role and the other demands of the rite. Such a practice no longer envisions the performance of "Masses" as set pieces, but looks more to the repertoire of motets, antiphons, and anthems which can be harmonized more easily with the nature of the renewed liturgy and with its pastoral celebration.²⁰

At Mass that place will typically include the time during the preparation of the gifts and the period after communion. A skillful director will also be able to find suitable choral repertoire for use as prelude to the Mass, at the end of it, and at the Glory to God. *Jubilate Deo*, the basic collection of simple Gregorian chants, should also be employed as a source for the assembly's participation.²¹

Finally, LMT considered musical expressions of cultural diversity along with treasures of inherited music from the past:

Just as the great liturgical music of the past is to be remembered, cherished and used, so also the rich diversity of the cultural heritage of the many peoples of our country today must be recognized, fostered, and celebrated. The United

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States is a nation of nations, a country in which people speak many tongues, live their lives in diverse ways, [and] celebrate events in song and music in the folkways of their cultural, ethnic, and racial roots.²²

Twenty-five years after *Liturgical Music Today*, *Sing to the Lord* (STL) affirmed both the trans-historical and trans-cultural elements in the treasury of sacred music as well as affirming the ministerial role of the choir:

At times, the choir performs its ministry by singing alone. The choir may draw on the treasury of sacred music, singing compositions by composers of various periods and in various musical styles, as well as music that expresses the faith of the various cultures that enrich the Church.²³

Though not explicitly contained in the concept of *thesaurus*, the breadth of the Church's musical tradition is implicitly expanded to include not only the *ars artefacta*—the music made, but also the *ars artefaciens*—the art of making music:²⁴

Catholic educational institutions have a special obligation toward music and the Sacred Liturgy. Catholic schools are called to foster the *joy of singing and making music* [emphasis mine], to cultivate the repertoire of sacred music inherited from the past, to engage the creative efforts of contemporary composers and the diverse repertoires of various cultures, and to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy worthily.²⁵

Beginning in article 72, STL attempts to temper zeal for the privileged place of Gregorian chant while spelling out in some detail opportunities and universal goals for first steps in revitalizing the tradition of Gregorian chant in the liturgy. It acknowledges with a broad sweep the inspiration of historical repertoires, noting that “throughout history, God has continued to breathe forth his creative Spirit, making noble the work of musicians’ hearts and hands” in forms that have been “many and varied.”²⁶ The guidelines further echo preceding Roman documents in suggesting a canon that is not closed: “The Church joyfully urges composers and text writers to draw upon their special genius so that she can continue to augment the treasure house of sacred musical art.”²⁷

Finally, STL urges that instrumental music be employed “from the treasury of sacred music by composers of various eras and cultures”²⁸ and that the tradition of liturgical improvisation be encouraged to continue.²⁹

In summary, *Sing to the Lord* heartily affirms and encourages the use of traditional sacred music—old music, new music, and music of various styles and cultures. While STL is more explicit than its American predecessors in outlining the scope of the Church's musical treasury, and while it offers new layers of specificity as to how these repertoires might be employed, it remains faithful to the Roman conciliar documents in not defining a closed canon but offering “a set of convictions regarding the employment of traditional music in the renewed liturgy.”³⁰

Characteristics of the Sacred in Music

The issue of sacrality is the other major area of dispute in the so-called “liturgy wars,” for it not only impinges on the perceived reverence of the

liturgical act but also cuts to the core of the controversy. There is no doubt that the proponents who influenced the inclusion of the “treasury” language in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy held strongly the categories proposed by Pius X in his 1903 *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini*. The sainted pope outlined three defining characteristics of sacred music: holiness, goodness of form, and universality.³¹

The first characteristic draws a classical distinction between the “sacred” and the “profane.” The term “sacred” refers not to God, as God cannot be defined, but rather to that which is excluded from ordinary reality, related in some way to the “proximity” or “density” of the divine presence.³² “Profane” (meaning “outside the temple door”) is not necessarily “unholy,” but is rather in the “realm of the commonplace.”³³ “Goodness of form” refers to the necessity that sacred music be “true art,” and “universality” means that the “general, universal characteristics of sacred music take precedence over any forms or styles particular to local cultures,” although these are allowed in limited ways.³⁴

Through development in several Roman documents over the subsequent sixty years, Pius X’s definition of sacred music was gradually transformed into one that was functional. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) reads: “Sacred music will be the more holy the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite, whether by adding delight to prayer, fostering oneness of spirit, or investing the rites with greater solemnity.”³⁵ The sacredness of music appears now to be on a continuum consisting of the “more” and “less” sacred. SC immediately qualifies this statement: “But the Church approves of all forms of genuine art possessing the qualities required and admits them into divine worship.” Does this imply a persistent sacred/profane distinction, and is the profane now admitted into worship?

Subsequent documents seem increasingly to de-emphasize any distinction between the sacred and profane (or secular) in music, adhering closely to the equation of holiness with integral relationship to the rites. This is, in fact, a traditional position. Philosopher Josef Pieper notes that “within the realm of the sacred the ‘sacred *action*’ clearly holds primacy and is more representative of the sacred than are other sacred phenomena.”³⁶ He bolsters this assertion by quoting Thomas Aquinas: “A thing is called sacred [*sacrum*] by virtue of its relation to divine worship [*ad cultum divinum*].”³⁷

There are plenty of precedent assertions to support the case on either side of the argument for or against the inclusion of “profane” or “secular” music, but Richard Schuler acknowledges that at various times in history there has been “little concern for a distinction between the sacred and the secular”³⁸ and that “in times of great Christian strength and influence, secular music has been absorbed into the Church’s worship without fear of secularization or profanation, but when the Faith declines in influence great concern is shown for the dangers involved in such a process.”³⁹ Schuler acknowledges that there is nothing inherently sacred in any style of music or its characteristics. Music is considered sacred rather through connotation, the result of associations made between some aspect of the music and extra-musical experience.⁴⁰

Because of the recent vintage of the term “sacred music,” the inability to distinguish in music itself characteristics of the sacred and secular, and because the demarcation of certain styles has historically had harmful ef-

fects on artistic excellence, Anthony Ruff concludes that he cannot support the notion of “sacred music” as a banner over all music appropriate to the Catholic liturgy:

The term does not necessarily express the imperative that worship music share in the purposes of liturgy: the term says both too little and too much. It is too narrow, insofar as it intends to eliminate styles and repertoires that might well be mediatory of God’s holiness in some cultural contexts. It is too broad, in that it is appropriately applied to music used both within and outside of worship.⁴¹

Ruff concedes, however, that “sacred music” is “one useful term among many for describing worship music,” and that while “liturgical music has a sacramental dimension . . . this sacramentality should not be understood in terms of an alleged sacred characteristic that can or should be distinguished from secular or profane characteristics.”

Schuler’s situational analysis of attitudes toward secular music in the liturgy is transparent enough, and one can see that if one fears that Christian faith and culture will be overwhelmed by secular culture, drawing a distinction through historical and culturally-specific connotation could be a useful tactic of conservation. Indeed, the restoration of all things to Christ from the grip of secularism and modernism was a central “program” behind the *motu proprio* of Pius X. There is certainly room—and doubtless widespread support throughout the Church—for a continuing critique of secular mass culture in the developed West, and such critique may provide helpful insights for locating and appreciating signs of a renewed vitality of traditional Christianity in the North and West as well as in the burgeoning Christian churches of the so-called “two-thirds” world.⁴² The universal Church continues to refrain from hitting the panic button, however, because of the hopeful and hospitable witness of its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.

We can say with confidence that *Sing to the Lord* affirms the traditional insight of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* that music is sacred insofar as it is connected with the liturgical action. STL makes a considerable contribution, however, in developing this principle to include a “ritual dimension” corresponding to the outward enactment of the rite and a “spiritual dimension” corresponding to the aspects of receptive participation by the worshiper.⁴³ In addition, STL directs attentiveness to the *cultural context* in which the ritual and spiritual dimensions of sacred music come into play.⁴⁴

Perhaps one regrettable omission in STL is that the question of beauty is not really addressed at all. I am referring not to the excellence of craft, which the document certainly encourages, or to the attractiveness of music within a given cultural context, but to the classical marks of the objectively beautiful, namely wholeness, harmony, and radiance (*claritas*).⁴⁵ Perhaps unconcealed philosophy has no place in a pastoral document, but I think this is one currently submerged piece of tradition that could bear acknowledgement. Perhaps such recognition is veiled in the reference in article sixty-nine to the “inner qualities” of sacred music “that enable it to add greater depth to prayer, unity to the assembly, or dignity to the ritual,” to mediate the holiness of God and to form “the Holy People of God more fully into communion

with him and with each other in Christ.⁴⁶

I suggest that more work could be done in this area to affirm and entertain the philosophical dimensions of the Church's musical tradition in a way that doesn't endanger the core values of the conciliar reform of the liturgy. I recognize that this is a philosophical concern and not necessarily a pastoral one, except for the possibility of reaching out to those who hold what may appear to some to be a hopelessly outdated worldview.

Some Thoughts on Repertoire

In addition to affirming and guiding the use of Gregorian chant, STL makes a considerable contribution to the vision of a sung reformed liturgy, proposed in *Musicam Sacram* but more clearly and realistically articulated in the current *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Part V of the *Instruction*, "The Musical Structure of Catholic Worship," outlines article by article, element by element, how the sung liturgy might be enacted.⁴⁷ There appears to be a growing number of people who support this vision.

During the 2007 Hovda Lecture Series on *Musicam Sacram*, Edward Schaefer opined that "for the musical treasure of the Church to find a home again in the liturgy, I think it will be critical to restore the sung Mass."⁴⁸ Schaefer was speaking specifically of "polyphonic" music. It is not clear to me whether he was referring to multi-voice music in general or the Renaissance polyphony idealized by the nineteenth century Cecilian Movement (which I would venture to say that most Catholics in the United States have never heard or experienced in the liturgy). In any case, my own experience bears out Dr. Schaefer's thesis.

When I was serving the Cathedral of Saint Paul in St. Paul, Minnesota, in the mid-1990s, I struggled with the pressure to foster an excellent practice of choral singing in the liturgy. No matter what we did, the offerings and contributions of the choir never seemed to form an integral part of the liturgy, and the choir was not perceived by others in the assembly as having any more than a decorative role. Those who didn't appreciate the musicians' offerings had less charitable ways of describing it. Moreover, the contrast was stark—and even jarring—between the well-rehearsed liturgical art-music and all that was going on in the rest of the liturgy, which tended to be a little too free-form and unpredictable in the sanctuary to be considered "musical" in even the broadest sense and barely perceivable from and among the folks in the pews of the cathedral's vast nave.

So, after long, thoughtful conversations with our visionary rector and a pretty sophisticated parish liturgy team, we embarked on an experiment—not at the mid-morning Mass with the choir but at the 7:30 AM "silent" Mass—adopting the gradual implementation of a modified version of the pastoral plan in *Musicam Sacram* for fostering sung participation by "degrees." One Sunday, the priest intoned the simple Mode VI Alleluia before the Gospel. The people responded without cue or explicit invitation. A few weeks later, the priest started the Our Father using the Robert Snow chant adaptation. Instant participation! A few weeks later we added the *Sanctus* from David Hurd's *New Plainsong Mass*, which participants in the other Masses had been singing for some time. The collects followed, *recto tono*—or as one of

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our cantors liked to call it, the “Johnny-One-Note setting.” Over the course of the year, the “silent” *Missa lecta* became a *Missa cantata*.

We finally decided to solicit opinions about the new “music at Mass.” Almost all of the respondents replied, “What music? We don’t have music at the 7:30 AM Mass.” Aha! Now we were on to something. I had always assumed those who went to the “silent” Mass were those who wanted to get out onto the links to golf on Sunday morning. It turns out that they were very devout people who really knew how to pray liturgically. Many of these folks chose the 7:30 Mass because they could pray better in a liturgical celebration that was not loaded with the extremes of personality-dependent, conversationally-toned chatter of a recited Mass and the exaggerated outbursts of emotionally-charged music (which could have been in any style). The pervasive cantillation at the 7:30 Mass was judged by almost everyone as reverent and prayerful, and several people described experiences of the “numinous.” Sacred music, indeed!

Anyway, our liturgy team discerned that the reason the experiment worked is that the music at this early morning Mass was intimately wedded to the words of the liturgy; it was “logogenic,” or “word bearing.” In contrast, the various musical expressions at the other Masses tended to be highly “pathogenic,” aimed at expressing or arousing feeling or emotion. This is not to suggest that there is no place for the pathogenic in liturgy, for Jesus’ own passion was a result of his sharing in our human condition. But he is also the Divine Word, the *Logos*, and so Christian liturgical prayer has been at its core logogenic, even as lyrical expression continually erupts out of the human spirit and experience.

It is for this reason, I think, that ritual chanting is basic and normative to Catholic liturgy, even if it is not very common. Likewise, since it is at once lyrical in its vocalization and highly ordered in its bearing of words, chanting becomes a plane of reference against which all other pathogenic and complex logogenic forms can be judged. Furthermore, the cultivation of the chanted liturgy as a liturgical-musical genre may someday go the furthest in calming the tensions of the liturgy wars, may prove key to revealing the true scope of the Church’s treasury of sacred music, and may collectively sensitize us to the inner qualities of sacred music that mediate the holiness of God and bind us in deeper communion with Christ and one another.

The logogenic-pathogenic dialectic should not be used arbitrarily (although it could be) to exclude genres and styles of music that someone intuitively feels to be undesirable for worship. In STL, the leaders of the Church in the United States have affirmed the open and hospitable stance of Christians in the modern world that “nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.”⁴⁹ Through their practical suggestions for implementing a truly sung liturgy, they have also opened the door for rediscovery of an elemental genre of worship music and recovery of a basic modality of Christian prayer.

At a deeper spiritual level, the embrace of liturgical chant may be good for the souls of Americans of all backgrounds and cultural heritages. Don Saliers worries that “North American mass culture makes it increasingly difficult to know the difference between *immediacy of feeling and depth of emotion*.”⁵⁰ In contrast, he reminds us that “the liturgy seeks to form the dispositions and affections of gratitude in season and out, of hope even in tribulation, of compassion over time, of awe and wonder at the created order of things.”⁵¹

Saliers urges that “our way forward is to discern what the relation between restraint and exuberance requires of our music, our celebrants, and all the other liturgical ministries within the assembly itself.”⁵²

Some Thoughts on Participation

I have saved one of the most important topics for the end of this lecture, but it is one with which you are perhaps quite familiar: participation. “Full and active participation by all the people” is one of the primary tenets of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, “the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.”⁵³

STL affirms this tenet with great clarity and force, but it also recovers important insights from earlier Roman documents, specifically the recognition that participation in the liturgy must be “internal, in the sense that by it the faithful join their mind to what they pronounce or hear, and cooperate with heavenly grace.”⁵⁴

The notion of interior participation has often been used as an interpretation of *participatio actuosa* that allows an unmodified use of inherited choral literature in the reformed liturgy. STL does not advance the employment of an historical-musical repertoire as its purpose for re-emphasizing interior participation. Rather, interior participation is aimed at the union of heart and mind with the words, songs, or actions of the ministers or the choir, so that “by listening to them they may raise their minds to God.”⁵⁵ The document quotes Pope John Paul II in acknowledging that the art of interior listening is not easily learned in a culture that “neither favors nor fosters meditative quiet.”⁵⁶ The late pontiff points out that though “liturgy must always be properly inculturated,” it “must also be counter-cultural.”⁵⁷ External participation must be cultivated so that “internal participation can be expressed and reinforced by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes.”⁵⁸

What does participation have to do with the tradition of sacred music? Yes, the use of certain inherited repertoires depends on deciding who sings what. But my aim is to get at an aspect of participation that is inextricably bound to the traditional art of *making music*, in contrast to what we have been mostly talking about: the *artifacts of music*. My experience has borne out this observation: The cultivation of the performing art of music contributes to the capacity not only for exterior participation, which is obvious, but also for interior participation.

As an initial approach to this ephemeral topic, I would like to recall Pope John Paul II’s final letter to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments regarding a topic on the agenda of the Congregation’s plenary assembly: the art of celebrating or *ars celebrandi*.

The effectiveness of [Christ’s] action [in the Eucharist] is a fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit but also requires a human response. The *ars celebrandi* precisely expresses the capacity of ordained ministers and of the entire assembly, gathered together for celebration, to bring about and live the meaning of each liturgical action. This “art” is one with the commitment to contemplation and Christian consistency. Through rites and prayers, we must let the Mystery reach and permeate us.⁵⁹

What does participation have to do with the tradition of sacred music?

The late Holy Father strongly implies that the art of celebrating is *a priori* an interior, receptive act. This corresponds to Pieper's notion of leisure and festivity as a radically receptive, wherein effortless knowing, and even complex—though effortless— activity aimed at no secondary end, leads to—of all things— worship.⁶⁰ The equation of celebration and radical receptivity can be illustrated by the following experiences from my own music ministry.

I was giving a workshop to cantors, and I wanted them to experience radical receptivity while singing. I first gave them the text of an unfamiliar hymn and asked them to sing along with me, which they did eagerly. As most people can, they were able to sing the unfamiliar melody a split second or so behind me, but we made it over the finish line at the same time. Then I asked them to reflect upon their experience of singing the hymn. After a few initial superficial answers, some volunteered that they had felt anxious, that it was hard work, that they felt self-conscious and worried that their ignorance of this supposed well-known, excellent hymn would be exposed. After everyone had acknowledged that the experience was unanimously negative, I suggested that this may in fact be the sort of experience many people in their own liturgical assemblies were having every time they came to Mass!

Then I intoned the good old Mode VI *Alleluia*, with which most were already familiar. Then we played around with it. I asked them to sing the first two syllables lightly, as if running briskly up some stairs. Then I asked them to “bloom” or “lift” the voice on the high note. We did that a few times, listening for the most pure, “blue” *ōō* vowel they could imagine. Then I asked them to close their eyes and I intoned the *Alleluia* again. After a slight hesitation, they sang beautifully, artfully, confidently, but sensitively, coming to a crisp consensus at the start and end of each “*alleluia*.” No visual cue, no obligatory arm waving, no vocal dominance (no microphone), no autocratic stick beating—just a gentle consensus. I ask them to reflect on and verbalize their response to this exercise. One man was amazed that he had become aware of the collective breathing of the group (after a couple of repetitions). Then one woman, emerging out of an ecstatic vision, exclaimed, “I think I *became* an *Alleluia*!” *Ars celebrandi*, indeed!

Another window into the mystery of radical receptivity occurred in the middle of an organ lesson with a male pediatrician named Bob. Bob is an excellent pianist but coordinating all of his limbs at the organ was still a challenge. In fact, Bob had hit a wall. He tried very hard but couldn't make it through a single piece of music without something falling apart. I finally tried a technique involving distraction and affirmations encouraging the player to let go of control, to give up all effort. This time Bob played the entire slow movement of the Mendelssohn *Fourth Sonata for Organ* perfectly, fluently, and elegantly. I asked Bob what the experience of playing that way was like for him. He replied that it was as if he wasn't even playing the piece but as if he was just listening, drinking it all in.

The final vignette in my set of stories occurred at a diocesan clergy conference. One of the priests, whom I knew quite well and who had at one time been a Benedictine monk, had an epiphany during morning prayer on the third day of the conference, at which we were trying out our new *Mundelein Psalter*. After prayer, he approached me looking stunned, and said, “After all of these years of praying the Divine Office, something happened to me

during the antiphonal chanting of the psalm-verse couplets. Somewhere in the middle of the second psalm I stopped waiting for my turn to sing and started waiting for the Word of God to be sung to me.” Of course, the next step would be for him to have a receptive experience *while* chanting his verses.

In each of these stories, someone had an experience of an altered state in which they experienced themselves to be radically open and receptive, in some cases while doing something very difficult and complex. As ministers concerned with fostering the *ars celebrandi* in ourselves and in others, how do we do formation for this kind of internal participation in the liturgy that is congruent with our outward expressions?

I propose first that simply doing the performing art of music engenders this capacity. But I’d also like to suggest another avenue for continued inquiry and reflection drawn from contemporary psychology, namely, the clinical work in treating the seemingly common attention deficit disorder and the theoretical work by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on “flow,” the mental state or process experienced by the folks in the preceding stories. In his book, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness*, Dr. Edward Hallowell uses Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of “flow,” identifying a five-part cyclic process by which joy is discovered (created) and sustained:

1. **Connection** (experienced as love of life, basic trust, security, courage, optimism, and the ability to deal with adversity);
2. **Play** (in which one learns to create and sustain joy and experience “flow,” to learn how to fail, to build imagination and confidence, to feel ease in chaos, and to learn cooperation);
3. **Practice** (in which one learns control, discipline, persistence, and the ability to seek and receive help);
4. **Mastery** (the root of self-esteem);
5. **Recognition** (resulting in a sense of belonging, in moral behavior, motivation, and healthy self-esteem).⁶¹

It is easy to imagine applications of this model in music pedagogy, but in the context of liturgical music formation, I wonder if such a model might be helpful in devising pedagogy for the cultivation of—and not simply the description of—the *ars celebrandi*. In any case, the re-emphasis of *Sing to the Lord* on the “Christian consistency” between outward activity and interior disposition and receptivity is replete with potential to encourage the vigorous cultivation of the traditional art of music making that is also sacred in its unity with the sacred rites enacted and lived by God’s Holy People.

Conclusion

Sing to the Lord is our pastoral guide for now in light of what has been handed on to us, a tradition of inestimable value. It is affirmative of inherited repertoires—the appropriation of which may itself be considered an act of adaptation and inculturation—and of a storehouse open for deposits of new treasures. The spirit of this approach seems to intend that the treasury of sacred music not be a burden but a source of delight and joy.

The spirit of *Sing to the Lord* might be summarized in Anthony Ruff’s sur-

prising and disarming peroration at the conclusion of his book *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform*:

For those of us who cherish inherited musical treasures, the task since the liturgical reform is not to see how much we can “get away with,” despite the liturgical reform. This has it upside down. It even borders on an idolatrous attachment to the music we cherish.

A certain spiritual detachment, even a kenotic self-emptying, might be called for. Then, the treasury of sacred music is for us not a burden, something which places demands on us because of its intrinsic worth, but a gift and a grace. Then, our inward letting go of the treasury is an act of faith that the treasury will take care of itself, and God will take care of inspiring wise use of the treasury. Then, from our position of spiritual openness, we will employ inherited musical treasures not for their own sake, but precisely because they correspond to the nature of the reformed liturgy in exemplary fashion. Music of the past will be employed precisely because it glorifies God and sanctifies the faithful, fosters festivity, enhances kerygmatic proclamation, strengthens bonds of community, promotes participation, and fosters cultural goods.⁶²

Kenosis—letting go—is always hard to approach, but once we pour ourselves out we find freedom to re-connect, to play, to practice, to master, to belong. “There’s such a lot of world to see,” so many songs to sing, so many gifts to treasure, so many reasons to celebrate, so many provisions from our God to sustain us on our pilgrim way.

We’re after the same rainbow’s end,
Waitin’ round the bend,
My huckleberry friend,
Moon River and me.

Notes

1. See Anthony Ruff, OSB, “*Sing to the Lord: Gifts and Challenges*,” 2. (Lecture in honor of Robert W. Hovda, Thirty-Second Annual Convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 2009).

2. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 319.

3. “Moon River,” lyrics by Johnny Mercer, music by Henry Mancini.

4. “Tradition is the Holy Spirit living in the church, giving to each the faculty of hearing, receiving, and knowing.” David Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What Is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago/Mundelein, Illinois: Hillenbrand Books, 2004), 150.

5. Quoted in Fagerberg, 149–150.

6. Ruff, *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform: Treasures and Transformations* (Chicago/Mundelein, Illinois: Hillenbrand Books, 2007), 187.

7. *Ibid.*, 312–313.

8. *Ibid.*, 58.

9. *Ibid.*, 70–74, 83–87.

10. *Ibid.*, 180.

11. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, hereafter SC (December 4, 1963), 112. Official English translation online at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

12. SC, 114.

13. SC, 116.

14. SC, 121.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Catholic Conference, *Music in*

- Catholic Worship*, hereafter MCW (1972), 27.
17. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy of the United States Catholic Conference, *Liturgical Music Today*, hereafter LMT (1982), 49.
18. LMT, 50.
19. LMT, 51.
20. LMT, 52.
21. LMT, 53. *Jubilate Deo* is a collection of basic chants presented as a gift to the bishops of the world by Pope Paul VI in 1974.
22. LMT, 54.
23. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, hereafter STL (2007), 30.
24. Etienne Gilson, *The Arts of the Beautiful* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1965), 13. Gilson rejects the equation of "art" with "the things which art makes (*ars artefacta*)," and proposes that the "very essence of art conceived in its true nature" is "the art that makes things (*ars artefaciens*)."
25. STL, 55.
26. STL, 81.
27. STL, 82.
28. STL, 92.
29. STL, 43 and 92.
30. Ruff, 338.
31. Pope Pius X, *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini* (November 22, 1903), 2.
32. Josef Pieper, *Problems of Modern Faith: Essays and Addresses* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1985), 22.
33. *Ibid.*, 23.
34. Ruff, 277–278.
35. SC, 112.
36. Pieper, *Problems*, 24.
37. *Ibid.* The taxonomy of sacred music might become clearer were we to combine Aquinas' insight with that of Etienne Gilson that art (and by extension, music) is *a priori* an act of making and not a thing that is made (Gilson, 13).
38. Richard J. Schuler, "The Sacred and the Secular in Music," in *Cum angelis canere: Essays on Sacred Music and Pastoral Liturgy in Honour of Richard J. Schuler*, ed. Robert A. Skeris (St. Paul, Minnesota: Catholic Church Music Associates, 1990), 306–307.
39. *Ibid.*, 308.
40. *Ibid.*, 309.
41. Ruff, 29.
42. In particular, I recommend the following articles for further reflection: Quentin Faulkner, "Gothic Pillars and Blue Notes: Art as a Reflection of the Conflict of Religions," in *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 5:2 (Summer/Fall 1998), 18–46; and Philip Jenkins, "The Next Christianity," in *The Atlantic Online* (accessed July 3, 2009) <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200210/jenkins>.
43. STL, 67–69.
44. *Ibid.*, 70.
45. Gilson, 29–31.
46. STL, 69.
47. And see STL, 137–258.
48. Edward Schaefer, "The Heritage of Sacred Music," in *Musicam Sacram Revisited: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hovda*, Series IV (Silver Spring, Maryland: NPM Publications, 2007), 53.
49. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.
50. Don Saliers, "Liturgy and Moral Imagination: Encountering Images in a TV Culture," in *Musicians for the Churches: Reflections on Vocation and Formation*, Yale Studies in Sacred Music, ed. Margot Fassler (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Institute of Sacred Music, 2001), 48.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*, 50.
53. SC, 14.
54. Sacred Congregation of Rites, instruction *Musicam sacram* (March 5, 1967), hereafter MS, 15.
55. STL, 12.
56. Pope John Paul II, quoted in STL, 12.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*

59. Pope John Paul II, Letter to Francis Cardinal Arinze on the occasion of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 3.
60. Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), 71.
61. Edward M. Hallowell, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 61–68.
62. Ruff, 609.



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