

2009 Hovda Lectures

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Sing to the Lord: Gifts and Challenges

BY ANTHONY RUFF, OSB

Sing to the Lord: *Music in Divine Worship* offers us, as the description of my Hovda lecture in the NPM national convention booklet put it, “many gifts and not a few challenges.” In this article, I hope to put the document *Sing to the Lord* (hereafter STL) in context and introduce its major themes.

Gifts and challenges in STL: One readily sees why the two really cannot be separated from each other. Every gift presents us a challenge, and every challenge may be a gift. Is the increased emphasis on singing the liturgy in STL, on singing the dialogues and responses, a gift, or is it a challenge? Is the increased emphasis on Gregorian chant a gift or a challenge?

After placing STL in context, including some comments about how and why the document came into being, I will discuss five emphases in STL which seem significant to me. All of them are both gifts and challenges.

Context:

Where Did the Document Come From and Why?

Sing to the Lord is a document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved by more than eighty-eight percent of the U.S. Catholic bishops at their meeting in November 2007. For those interested in canonical and legal distinctions, STL has the status not of “particular law” but of “guidelines.” However, even if STL is not particular law, it is important to state that STL is the teaching of our bishops and, as such, it calls for our respect and compliance.

STL supersedes two earlier documents of the U.S. bishops’ conference: *Music in Catholic Worship* (MCW, 1972, revised 1983), and *Liturgical Music Today* (LMT, 1982). Those two documents are now obsolete, but of course

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much of their content and teaching is brought forward into STL.¹ STL was drafted by a Music Committee of the bishops' conference consisting of Bishop Edward Grosz, Monsignor James Moroney, Mr. Bob Batastini, Dr. Leo Nestor, Father John Foley, SJ, Dr. J. Michael McMahon, and myself.

There are several reasons why STL came into being. First, many other documents had been issued since 1982. The bishops' musical directives had to be updated to account for the new *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, the new edition of the *Roman Missal* itself, Roman documents such as *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, and also documents on Sunday worship in the absence of a priest.

Second, much practical experience had been gained in the decades since MCW and LMT came out. I think here of issues such as the importance of acoustics for live music or the appropriate and proper use of microphones and sound systems.

Third, scholars and theologians had continued to advance the conversation, and it made sense to draw on their new insights. I think here of two private, unofficial documents prepared by musicians and liturgists: *Milwaukee Symposium for Church Composers. A Ten-Year Report* (known as the *Milwaukee Report*) of 1992 and the *Snowbird Statement on Catholic Liturgical Music* of 1995.

Fourth, the Catholic Church in the United States has become increasingly diverse culturally and ethnically, and questions of multiculturalism and cultural diversity have become more pressing. There has been great development in this discussion among scholars and theologians in recent decades.

Fifth, STL came into being because, throughout the 1990s, the so-called "liturgy wars" became increasingly strident. New organizations such as Adoremus and the Society for Catholic Liturgy were founded which were, each in its own way, critical of the direction of liturgical renewal since Vatican II. Increasingly, sharp criticism was heard from a more "conservative" or "traditionalist" perspective. It was claimed that Catholic worship had lost its "sacred" dimension; that traditional art, architecture, and music had wrongly been abandoned since Vatican II; that the U.S. Church, including the U.S. bishops and their teaching documents, were not sufficiently loyal to the Holy See; that priests and liturgical ministers did not always obey official norms and rubrics in the liturgical books; and that the implementation of Vatican II had not been faithful to what the council actually called for. Some decisions of the Holy See in the 1990s were changing the liturgical landscape, such as the withdrawal of permission to employ the NRSV translation in the *Lectionary for Mass*, the rejection of the revised NAB translation of the Psalter in the lectionary, and the withdrawal of approval for the ICEL Psalter. Then the Holy See dramatically revised the guidelines for translation of the liturgy from Latin to vernacular in 2001,² and in 2007 Pope Benedict readmitted the use of the pre-Vatican II liturgy without restrictions.³

In the midst of all this evolution, ferment, controversy, and confusion, the U.S. bishops came to the judgment that it was time to offer clear guidance for the U.S. Church on how music is to be employed in the postconciliar liturgy. The bishops hoped to calm the controversies, clarify the Church's teachings, and stake out a middle ground—not a mere lowest common denominator but a high middle ground.

All these were the reasons why STL came to be. It is perhaps too early to assess whether STL has succeeded in its goal of calming liturgical contro-

versies and uniting the Church. But one can take an initial assessment of the immediate reception of STL, based at least on anecdotal evidence. I have the impression that, even though STL emphasizes traditional themes such as interior participation and Gregorian chant and the use of Latin much more than previous U.S. documents, it seems that moderates and progressives are the ones welcoming STL most warmly, more so than conservatives or traditionalists.

This is counterintuitive. Why the unexpected reception of STL in various quarters? I suspect this is because STL allays progressives' worst fears about official backpedaling. It was already expected on all sides that any new document of the bishops would be brought in line with Roman directives and articulate traditional liturgical themes, but STL does this in a way which clearly preserves the best insights of liturgical scholars and previous US documents. The liberals are relieved.

But ironically, even as STL emphasizes traditional themes and practices more than any previous U.S. music document, it is seemingly being received least positively by some of those who argue for greater traditionalism in the liturgy. For example, in the *Adoremus Bulletin*, Helen Hull Hitchcock has written, "Despite improvements, however, the guidelines are still inherently contradictory. . . . The result of this apparent attempt to cover all bases makes this long document (87 pages) essentially incoherent." This writer openly suggests disobedience: "Perhaps the best news about 'Sing to the Lord' in its final amended form may actually be that it is merely a guideline of the conference without real authority. Thus the problematic principles carried over from the earlier documents cannot be considered in any way binding."⁴ Or consider Father Gerald Dennis Gill's recently published book *Music in Catholic Liturgy: A Pastoral and Theological Companion to Sing to the Lord* (Chicago/Mundelein, Illinois: Hillebrand Books, Liturgy Training Publications, 2009), which in fact is part companion to STL, part commentary, and part critique. The last four chapters of this book compare STL to Roman documents and the official liturgical rites, apparently to show that STL is not sufficiently faithful to Roman documents.

Meanwhile, STL is being read, studied, and implemented in dioceses and parishes and communities across the United States. Already there have been innumerable talks, presentations, and workshops on the document, and innumerable articles on the document have been written. STL was a major theme and the topic of many breakouts at the 2009 NPM Convention in Chicago.

The Gifts and Challenges of *Sing to the Lord*

Having placed STL in context, I turn now to the gifts and challenges in STL. I have selected five themes (or what we could call "gift/challenges"): a God-centered theology of worship, the sacred-secular question, Gregorian chant, sung liturgy with chanted dialogues, and the question of hymns in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Gift/Challenge 1: A God-Centered Theology of Worship

Sing to the Lord begins thus: "God has bestowed upon his people the gift

of song. God dwells within each human person God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises." STL places the priority on God's initiative. J. Peter Nixon has perceptively pointed out the contrast between STL and the 1972 document *Music in Catholic Worship*⁵: In STL, the word "God" appears nine times in the first three articles, but in the first three paragraphs of MCW of 1972, the word "we" appeared eleven times (with one mention of God, two of Jesus Christ, and two of the Holy Spirit). Many pastoral musicians will recall the opening words and phrases of MCW: "We are Christians because through the Christian community we have met Jesus Christ We gather at Mass We come together to acknowledge the love of God We are celebrating when we involve ourselves meaningfully"

Nixon speaks of an overwhelming "anthropological emphasis" in MCW, and STL clearly seeks a better balance. It was important here not to over-react, to over-correct MCW and replace an anthropological emphasis with a theocentrism which downplays or denigrates the importance of humanity. Humans are part of God's creation, and creation is fundamentally good. In worship, as in the entire drama of salvation, humans are agents and active participants. If I may put it this way, the goal of STL was to be both pro-God and pro-human. I think STL succeeds in striking the right balance between God's initiative and our importance as a graced community. STL begins, at number one, in a tone which is representative of the introductory section: "God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source. Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises." At number ten, STL says: "Through grace, the liturgical assembly partakes in the life of the Blessed Trinity, which is itself a communion of love. In a perfect way, the Persons of the Trinity remain themselves even as they share all that they are."

In the opening section (nos. 8–9), STL nicely connects worship to daily life and to the needs of Church and society. "The Paschal hymn, of course, does not cease when a liturgical celebration ends. Christ . . . remains with us and leads us through church doors to the whole world, with its joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties Charity, justice, and evangelization are thus the normal consequences of liturgical celebration." One notes the felicitous reference to the world's "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties"—a direct quotation from the opening of the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*.

The gift of STL is that it reaffirms the primacy of God and the truth that the initiative in worship is always with God—and it does this much better than MCW did. The challenge to us is to recall that everything we do, as a graced community, is a *response* to God. Our further challenge is remember that worship equips us for our daily lives as Christians, as we seek to renew and transform all of society and build up the Kingdom of God on earth.

Gift/Challenge 2: The Sacred/Secular Problem

As I noted earlier, one of the critiques raised in the "liturgy wars" from some quarters is that the reformed liturgy has lost its "sacred" character.

Concerning liturgical music, some have criticized the admission of allegedly secular styles and genres of music into Catholic liturgy, including allegedly secular instruments. Some folks, in a throwback to the nineteenth century Cecilian reform movement and the 1903 *motu proprio* of Pope St. Pius X, now try to distinguish sacred music from secular music so as to “purify” Catholic worship. I think they are on thin ice philosophically, historically, and musicologically.

As I argue in my book *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform*, a clear sacred/secular distinction does not hold up very well on any grounds:

In Franko-Flemish polyphony of the fifteenth century, there is the same vocal style throughout and the same musical technique of cantus firmus development, with no difference in style between church music and secular music. Similarly, one is unable to find any clear stylistic difference between Palestrina’s Masses and his secular madrigals . . . Monteverdi borrowed the orchestral music from the prologue to his secular opera “Orfeo” for the “*Deus in adiutorium*” of his Vespers. One is unable to establish a clear stylistic difference between Mozart’s chamber music and his sacred music.⁶

One aspect of the drive to restore “the sacred” to worship and music has been the privileging of some styles and genres as the highest models of truly sacred music. This move is actually rather recent in church history, dating only to the nineteenth century Cecilians and then to the 1903 *motu proprio* of Pius X, which took over many aspects of Cecilian thought. Although the papal documents from 1903 to Vatican II show significant developments in their listing of the genres of sacred music, with shifts of emphasis and outright contradictions, Gregorian chant is consistently upheld as the highest model of sacred music, followed by polyphony of the Roman school.

As Father Edward Foley has pointed out, the Vatican II liturgy constitution introduces a shift from the position found in Roman documents before Vatican II.⁷ Instead of treating holiness as an *intrinsic* quality of particular musical styles or genres, article 112 of “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*” (SC) locates holiness in its connection to ritual and its engagement of worshipers. Article 112 states, “Therefore sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites.” In its section on “Music for the Sacred Liturgy” (STL, 67–71), *Sing to the Lord* follows SC and does not consider some styles or genres to be holier than others. STL speaks instead of the *ritual* and the *spiritual* dimensions which make music holy—the first referring to liturgical propriety, the second referring to the community’s union with Christ and with each other. The question is not whether a particular piece sounds like chant or Palestrina or whether it sounds “Catholic.” Rather, the question is whether the piece fits the ritual action and engages a particular community in this ritual action. Both of these dimensions—connection to ritual and engagement of the community—are to be considered within a *cultural* context, according to STL 67 and 70. There, STL does not assume that chant and polyphony are absolutely the highest models of sacred and Catholic music in all cultures, as if there were no need to take into account whether one is in the Midwest of the United States, or Africa, or Japan, or whether the assembly is predominantly European or Hispanic or Native American.

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It follows, then, that many instruments, even strings and percussion, are potentially usable in the liturgy, which is explicitly stated in STL 90.

To be sure, traditional music such as chant and polyphony is advocated with new vigor in STL. But these repertoires are not ontologized into greater sacrality. The end result is that STL advocates both traditional repertoire⁸ and the stylistic diversity of all the various contemporary cultures,⁹ without attempting to define definitively the relationship between all these styles or the parameters of their liturgical usage in every situation.

The gift of STL is that it reminds us what truly makes music holy: its connection to ritual and its ability to engage the community gathered for worship. Significantly, STL reminds us that we must take the cultural context seriously as we think about ritual and the people who celebrate the ritual. We need to know the ritual, we need to know our people, we need to know their cultural setting. The challenge is to open ourselves to traditional Catholic repertoires to see how they can fit our ritual and engage our people—not because they are privileged repertoires a priori, but because we discover that they do meet the demands of the liturgy.

Gift/Challenge 3: Gregorian Chant

This gift/challenge is closely related to everything I stated about the sacred/secular question, and its use raises very similar questions. It is worth treating Gregorian chant separately, though, because it is a topic so laden with strong feelings, misunderstandings, and pastoral challenges.

The fact is, Gregorian chant has become something of a political football in the Catholic liturgy wars. Some individuals and organizations seemingly use chant as a weapon to advance their agenda and judge others. Sometimes it sounds all too simple: the more Latin chant, the better.

Meanwhile, to be honest, most of the U.S. Catholic Church does not sing much Latin chant. Most Catholics have heard very little chant in worship. I state this without rancor or judgment but simply as an observation. Some—or, perhaps, many—Catholics do not like Gregorian chant much. They find it to be in the wrong language, or too difficult, or irrelevant, or just plain boring. But perhaps some or many of us have experienced chant as beautiful, or calmly soothing, or deeply spiritual, or truly holy as it calls us to prayer. Experiences and practices vary widely.

The magisterium's statements on Gregorian chant are very strong. Given how little that chant is actually sung in Catholic worship, one is struck (and, perhaps, surprised) by such strong statements. Depending on your point of view, the magisterium's statements are either out of touch with pastoral reality or prophetic as they stand in judgment on the postconciliar Church. Gregorian chant is to have pride of place in the reformed liturgy, we read in SC 116. The faithful are to be able to sing the Mass ordinary in Latin, we read in SC 54. This means that everyone is to know in Latin "*Pater noster*," "*Credo*," and many other such chants.

STL steps into the subject of Gregorian chant keenly aware of two facts which stand in tension with each other: The official documents advocate chant strongly, and the use of chant in the U.S. Church is, with some important exceptions, rather minimal. STL strives for an intelligent obedience to the Roman documents with a pastoral sensitivity to the actual situation.

The judgment of Father Edward Foley on STL should be noted: “[STL] contains one of the best reflections on Gregorian chant in the liturgy that I have read.”¹⁰

There is high praise for chant at STL 72: “Gregorian chant is uniquely the Church’s own music. Chant is a living connection with our forebears in the faith, the traditional music of the Roman rite, a sign of communion with the universal Church, a bond of unity across cultures, a means for diverse communities to participate together in song, and a summons to contemplative participation in the Liturgy.” But STL immediately sounds some important cautions in the next article (STL, 73):

The “pride of place” given to Gregorian chant by the Second Vatican Council is modified by the important phrase “other things being equal.” These “other things” are the important liturgical and pastoral concerns facing every bishop, pastor, and liturgical musician. In considering the use of the treasures of chant, pastors and liturgical musicians should take care that the congregation is able to participate in the Liturgy with song. They should be sensitive to the cultural and spiritual milieu of their communities, in order to build up the Church in unity and peace.

One could say that STL is counseling us not to use chant as a weapon.

In articles 74 and 75, STL follows SC in advocating elements of the Latin chant ordinary (Order of Mass), first by admitting that most communities do not do this, and then by giving very specific and practical directives on where to start: “Each worshipping community in the United States, including all age groups and all ethnic groups, should, at a minimum, learn *Kyrie XVI*, *Sanctus XVIII*, and *Agnus Dei XVIII*, all of which are typically included in congregational worship aids. More difficult chants, such as *Gloria VIII* and settings of the *Credo* and *Pater Noster*, might be learned after the easier chants have been mastered.”

Some individuals act as if the goal is to have the entire proper (introit, gradual, *alleluia*, offertory, *communio*) sung in Latin by the choir. It may take a while to reach this goal, it is conceded, and progress probably must be gradual, but the goal must remain firmly in place. STL 76 tempers such misguided zeal as it cites number 33 of *Musicam Sacram*, the 1967 Roman instruction: “The assembly of the faithful should participate in singing the Proper of the Mass as much as possible, especially through simple responses and other suitable settings.” STL then mentions the Latin propers as an option—not as the highest ideal—for choirs with sufficient ability: “When the congregation does not sing an antiphon or hymn, proper chants from the *Graduale Romanum* might be sung by a choir that is able to render these challenging pieces well.”

It is relevant to this third gift/challenge to note what STL says at number 64: “Whenever the Latin language poses an obstacle to singers, even after sufficient training has been provided—for example, in pronunciation, understanding of the text, or confident rendition of a piece—it would be more prudent to employ a vernacular language in the Liturgy.”

The gift of STL is its invitation to use Gregorian chant in the liturgy wisely and with discretion. The challenge for some will be to learn more about this repertoire and to take the first steps in doing it well in the liturgy. The challenge for others will be to temper their zeal and realize the full range

of options recommended by the Church and permitted by the official documents.

There is another large challenge on the theoretical level regarding Gregorian chant. One could state two distinct views about chant. The first view is that it is the primary repertoire of the Church and should have pride of place. The second view is that it is a good resource which can have some place in the whole mix of musical styles and genres. We might term the two views “chant as ideal” and “chant as good option.” If one looks at the full range of Roman teachings, including statements about inculturation and appropriate relationship to modern cultures, one cannot simply state that the Holy See takes the first view. Although there are statements to that effect, and the official documents certainly tend in that direction, the Roman magisterium’s teaching is more nuanced. One may fairly ask whether STL follows the full force of the Roman magisterium’s teachings and directives on chant, even when these are understood with proper nuance. It seems that, in comparison to the Roman documents, STL downplays, however slightly, the “chant as ideal” view, and emphasizes, however slightly, the “chant as good option” view. At the same time it must be admitted that many pastoral musicians, if they do not reject chant outright, can probably only bring themselves to support the “chant as good option” position.

Other challenging theoretical questions could be raised. Both the Roman documents and STL encourage the use of Gregorian chant in worship, however one interprets the relative weight of their statements. At the same time, it is the teaching of SC that music in worship should be able to engage the community and bring spiritual enrichment. What is the Church asking us to do in those concrete situations—the question is by no means merely hypothetical—in which Gregorian chant does not seem to be able to do that?

Gift/Challenge 4: Sung Liturgy

The 1967 Roman instruction *Musicam Sacram* [MS] advocates the model of a sung liturgy in which the responses and dialogues between ministers and people—such as “The Lord be with you” and “The Word of the Lord” and “The Mass is ended”—are chanted as well as the presidential prayers and even the readings. In contrast, the 1972 document MCW primarily emphasized the singing of acclamations, the responsorial psalm, and hymns at Mass—which probably was a good place to start in the early stages of the vernacular liturgy—without giving any emphasis to singing the dialogues. Some have criticized MCW sharply for not following MS on this point. In recent years, there has been increased discussion of this issue, and the practice of singing the dialogues and orations has increased in some places.

STL follows MS by giving strong encouragement to the practice. Of “the parts to be sung,” the first category is “dialogues and acclamations” (STL, 115). I suppose strict adherence to *Musicam Sacram* could have meant that dialogues are the first category of importance, as their own separate category. But we have made great progress in the United States at singing the acclamations, and it has become virtually universal practice to sing the *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, *Memorial Acclamation*, *Agnus Dei*, and similar parts of the ordinary at Sunday Mass. If the first category listed were “dialogues,” this could

mean that, if the dialogues are not sung for whatever reason, then things of a lower priority such as acclamations should not be sung. That would be most unfortunate. Hence the interesting decision to call the first category of STL 115 “dialogues and acclamations.”

Other sections of STL consistently call for *sung* liturgy as it treats various aspects of the liturgy. STL 19 encourages priests to sing the presidential orations and dialogues; STL 20 calls for training priests and seminarians to be able to sing the liturgy; STL 23 calls for deacons to be trained to sing their parts of the liturgy; STL 153–154 recommends singing the responses after the Scripture readings and, with appropriate cautions, even the readings themselves. The singing of presidential prayers is treated in the various parts of the section “Music and the Structure of the Mass.”¹¹

There is some variety of opinion on whether it is desirable to chant the dialogues and responses. One senses that support for the practice is growing, and increasing numbers of leaders in the mainstream are calling for the practice. The goal is to make the liturgy more spirited, more engaging and participatory, more solemn and reverent, and more prayerful. Some traditionalist voices support the practice also, but there one gets the impression that the goal is to revive the High Mass/Low Mass distinction, with one High Mass per Sunday as the highest aspiration of Catholic church music. Some respected figures frankly question the practice, it is important to note. Father Ed Foley, for example, has written that STL has a “misplaced emphasis on singing the ‘dialogues’ in the liturgy (e.g., no. 115a, repeating an emphasis found in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (no. 41), which inappropriately relies on the 1967 document *Musicam Sacram*.”¹²

The gift of STL is that it presents a model and genre of liturgical music which, however ancient and venerable it is, remains to be discovered by many U.S. Catholic communities. STL invites and encourages us to consider singing the liturgy in its dialogues and responses. The challenges to sung liturgy are many:¹³

1. We are no longer a singing culture. Recorded and electronic music have made us into listeners rather than singers.
2. Liturgical ministers (priests, deacons, lectors) have not grown up in a Church where sung liturgy is the norm.
3. Many liturgical ministers are not comfortable singing in public.
4. Despite the stated goal, singing the liturgy can in fact make it seem heavier rather than more spirited. The liturgy becomes slow and dull, and consequently, less prayerful.
5. Acoustics in many of our churches impede chanting the liturgy because one needs a resonant space for the practice of chanted liturgy to work well.

For all these reasons and more, some people are skeptical whether it is desirable or possible for clergy and ministers along with the people to chant more of the liturgy. STL 19 (following MS, 8) recommends that priests who do not possess a suitable voice for singing instead recite in a loud and distinct voice, while adding that this is not to be done for mere convenience. Let us hope that we do not settle for mere convenience as we consider the gift and challenge of singing the liturgy.

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Gift/Challenge 5: The Question of Hymns at the Eucharistic Liturgy

There is an idea growing in some quarters that hymns at Mass are not very Catholic. The really Catholic thing is to sing the proper antiphons at Mass — preferably in Latin chant as found in the *Graduale Romanum* or at least in English in some other chant-like or polyphonic setting. I wish to counter this mistaken idea. It is based on historical misinformation, lack of concern for legitimate inculturation, insensitivity to ecumenism, and misquoting (or ignoring) the official documents in all their comprehensiveness. STL helpfully offers accurate information and prudent directives.

On this question of hymns versus antiphons, many of us are of two minds because we are drawn to both.¹⁴ This conflicted attitude is in fact in harmony with STL, which speaks positively of both proper antiphons and strophic hymns. By speaking positively of proper antiphons, STL is sounding a new theme in the U.S. documents, since MCW and LMT virtually ignored them. See especially what STL has to say about “Antiphons and Psalms” (STL, 115b): “The psalms are poems of praise that are meant, whenever possible, to be sung.” And “proper antiphons from the liturgical books are to be esteemed and used especially because they are the very voice of God speaking to us in the Scriptures” (STL, 117).

Regarding strophic hymnody at Mass, MS 32 had allowed “substituting” hymns for the proper antiphons at the entrance, offertory, and Communion. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* no longer speaks of “substitution” (GIRM, 48); it simply lists as an “option,” albeit the last option given, the use of “a suitable liturgical song.” (The proper antiphon is the first option.) Some zealous but misinformed voices in recent years, in their enthusiasm for the chant propers, have begun to attack hymnody at Mass as if it were not liturgical. It is thus significant that STL 115d states: “Because these popular hymns [at the entrance, preparation of the gifts, Communion, or recessional] are fulfilling a properly liturgical role, it is especially important that they be appropriate to the liturgical action.” And despite the Church’s strong commitment to ecumenism, some have begun to criticize the use of non-Catholic hymns at Mass, often under the mistaken impression that this is an innovation since Vatican II. STL 115d offers necessary clarification: “In accord with an uninterrupted history of nearly five centuries, nothing prevents the use of some congregational hymns coming from other Christian traditions, provided that their texts are in conformity with Catholic teaching and they are appropriate to the Catholic Liturgy.”¹⁵

Many are anxious about possible impending limitations in hymnody through the development of a U.S. directory of approved English language hymns, as called for in *Liturgiam Authenticam*, 108. It is important to separate the issue of the hymn directory from STL. When the hymn directory is developed, it might well consist of a relatively modest number of hymns and songs in a “core repertoire.” This core repertoire would be available for use alongside many other pieces not in the directory but subject to episcopal approval, as are all the hymns and songs currently in hymnals and worship aids. It seems reasonable to surmise that bishops will exercise greater vigilance over the texts of vernacular hymns in coming years, in the spirit of STL 115d.

Through Grace

STL offers us many gifts and many challenges. May we be enriched by the gifts and stretched by the challenges. Above all, may we participate ever more fruitfully in sung worship, and thereby become more closely united to Christ and each other. For, as *Sing to the Lord* states: “Through grace, the liturgical assembly partakes in the life of the Blessed Trinity, which is itself a communion of love” (STL, 10).

Notes

1. For an excellent overview of the historical development of the U.S. bishops’ directives on music, see Edward Foley, *A Lyrical Vision: The Music Documents of the U.S. Bishops* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2009).

2. The new principles for translation were presented on March 28, 2001, in *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the Fifth Instruction “for the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council.”

3. Pope Benedict issued the apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum* on July 7, 2007.

4. *Adoremus Bulletin* 13:9 (December 2007–January 2008), online at www.adoremus.org/1207USCCBNovMeeting.html.

5. In a post of December 3, 2007, at the Commonweal blog, www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=1454.

6. Anthony Ruff, *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform: Treasures and Transformations* (Chicago/Mundelein, Illinois: Hillenbrand Books, Liturgy Training Publications, 2007), 27.

7. Edward Foley, “The Ritual Function of Beauty: From Assisi to Snowbird,” *Pastoral Music* 21:3 (February–March 1997), 17–21, especially 18, available online at www.npm.org/pastoral_music/issues/PM%20Vol%2021-3.pdf.

8. On chant, see STL 72–80; on polyphony, see, e.g. STL 30: “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.”

9. STL is quite strong in affirming inculturation and cultural diversity; see especially STL 57–60, “Diverse Cultures and Languages.” STL typically moves from the affirmation of traditional sacred music to the affirmation of contemporary music of various cultures, e.g. in the move from the organ at STL 87–88 to other instruments at STL 89–90, or in the move from “the repertoire of sacred music inherited from the past” to “contemporary composers and the diverse repertoires of various cultures” in STL 54 on Catholic schools.

10. Edward Foley, “*Sing to the Lord: The U.S. Bishops & Liturgical Music*,” *Church* magazine, available online at www.churchmagazine.org/issue/0809/par_sing_to_the_lord.php.

11. The presidential orations are treated at STL 151, 175, and 197, the Eucharistic Prayer at STL 181–182, and the final blessing at STL 198.

12. Foley, *Lyrical Vision*, 73.

13. I treat this question in “Do Priests Need to Sing?” *Pastoral Music* 28:3 (February–March 2004), 41–43. In what follows I also draw on the address I gave, “Singing the Liturgy: What is the Goal, and What are the Challenges?” at the October 2006 meeting of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions.

14. I discuss this question in “Proper Chants and Improper Hymns: What Texts Shall We Sing in Worship?” *The Hymn* 56:4 (Autumn 2005), 7–13.

15. The extensive history of Protestant hymnody at Catholic Mass is reviewed in my *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform*, 576–588, esp. 585–586.

REV. ANTHONY RUFF, OSB, a monk of St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, is the founder of the National Catholic Youth Choir, an instructor in theology and liturgy at St. John’s University, a Gregorian chant director, and an organist.



Do you have a song you sing to the Lord? The most beautiful sound that can be made by the human voice is song. Birds sing to one another for various reasons – staking out their territory, affirming community, warning of danger, or seeking a mate. Some animals erupt into mournful groans when upset by pain or loss. But humans alone are capable of lifting hearts and voices to heaven to sing to the Lord. All our gifts to God should be consistent with our recognition of His greatness and character, as well as the nature of His grace-gifts to us. We love Him in return to His love for us, so our song A 1974 Hymn Called 'Sing Hallelujah to the Lord' Has Become the Anthem of the Hong Kong Protests. By Hillary Leung / Hong Kong. June 19, 2019. On a footbridge leading to the Hong Kong's Legislative Council building, about three dozen people are intoning "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord," giving barely a pause after the short, four-line verse ends before starting it again. Around the corner in Tamar Park, by the Central Government Offices, a group is singing the same hymn – and so is another down the road outside the Chief Executive's Office. The song is performed as a round. Its minor-ke