

**Dialogues**  
**By Paul Turner**

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I didn't hear the music I was hoping for when I got to the Basilica of Ste-Clotilde one Sunday last summer. I heard something more.

I was visiting Paris with my brother John's family. After several days hoofing it up the Eiffel Tower, staring at the Mona Lisa, rejoicing at the view from Montmartre, and—all right I admit it—breakfasting at McDonald's on the Champs-Élysée, we wanted to go to Mass. "Where do you recommend?" they asked.

"Ste-Clotilde," I said, "but you may not like it."

I love Ste-Clotilde because that is where the charismatic composer Jean Langlais served as organist from 1945 until his death in 2007. On a few occasions from 1979 to 1985, Langlais welcomed me to the organ loft to watch him in action at the console of the mighty Cavallé-Coll—and to wait for him after Mass while he fed the pigeons on the balcony. César Franck and Charles Tournemire held the same position before Langlais—as organist, that is, not as pigeon-feeder. The instrument has undergone some modifications over the years, but it is responsible for all these organists' enchanting music.

I like to worship at Ste-Clotilde so I can hear that organ. It helps me register the music written over there when I play it on organs over here. When I suggested to my family that we go to Ste-Clotilde, I didn't expect to hear much congregational singing there. I was just hoping to hear the beast in the loft.

"This could be a bust," I warned them. "It's August. Musicians may be on vacation. But we have nothing to lose."

They agreed to humor me, and we settled on a Sunday evening Mass.

Ste. Clotilde was open, but no congregation was in there. A priest on his way out of the basilica caught my eye. I asked if the scheduled Mass was going to happen. (My French pronunciation is so bad that Parisians actually wince when they hear it.)

"Yes," he said. "At the chapel down the street." He took me out in front of the church, pointed to my left at a cluttered narrow lane about a block away and said, "See the black car? And the gate? It's there." So much for the music I was hoping to hear.

We entered a much smaller church together with about fifty worshipers, and the same priest led us in a sincere celebration of Sunday Mass.

There was no organ. But there was something more. We sang without accompaniment, and we primarily sang the dialogues of the Mass. The greeting, the amens that concluded the presidential prayers, the conclusion to the readings, the announcement of the gospel, and the preface dialogue, as well as other staples such as the Holy Holy, the memorial acclamation, the great amen, the Lord's Prayer, and the Lamb of God. It was music I had heard many times on visits to France over the past thirty years. This basic repertoire had not changed. The chants were very simple. Everyone knew how to sing them. And everyone did sing them. Nothing fancy. The music accompanied the liturgy the way breath accompanies your resting.

This isn't happening in the United States. We have no common repertoire for dialogues. We don't even have a common

way of singing the preface dialogue. Variations exist from diocese to diocese and from priest to priest. We have a few commonly known settings of acclamations for the eucharistic prayer, but that's about it. We have the blessed advantage of multiple publishers of sacred music, but the remarkable disadvantage of no commonly shared musical repertoire of the basic dialogues for Mass, a repertoire that should transcend the boundaries of copyright.

We should do better than this. We can. The forthcoming publication of the third edition of the Roman Missal may just make it happen. We will still have a wide variety of diversely published acclamations and hymns, but the book will come with a set of chant settings for the dialogues. They will give us our best chance yet of establishing a common musical language for English speakers, not just in the United States but in other countries around the world.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) says "the dialogues between the priest and the faithful gathered together and the acclamations are of great significance" (no. 34). This paragraph is addressing the communitarian nature of the Mass. It says that the way we foster active participation among the people is through these acclamations and responses of the faithful (35). This is a distinctive feature of the *Novus Ordo*, something that separated it from the 1962 missal. The Second Vatican Council called for the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 14), and this is one significant way in which the liturgy strives to achieve it.

When it comes to music at Mass, the GIRM stresses the importance of these responses and acclamations. This is nothing new; this paragraph has been in

the GIRM for forty years. But we have spent so much time learning beautiful new hymnody in English that we may have overlooked this remarkable statement: "In the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, however, preference should be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those to be sung by the priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the priest and people together" (40).

When you stop to think that the GIRM is promoting the singing of dialogues at Mass, the very next statement makes more sense: "All other things being equal, Gregorian chant holds pride of place because it is proper to the Roman liturgy" (41). People may never learn how to sing a chant introit or gradual, but they can surely learn the simple chant that accompanies dialogues at Mass.

The idiom of chant has proven especially successful in the most repeated parts of the liturgy. Chant simply yet effectively clothes these texts, and the music bears repetition without inducing boredom. It is designed to be sung over and over again, not drawing attention to itself, but embellishing simply the text it supports. "The Lord be with you" need not sound different every time a priest or deacon sings or says it. The power of the words comes in their repetition, not in their novelty. A simple sequence of chant notes sends the same message. It keeps the greeting basic, and it sustains the variety of moods and motives that arise from a gathered assembly.

The new edition of the Roman Missal will have some musical notation built right into the book. The order of Mass will carry more notation than it does presently. So you will find music for dialogues such as the sign of the cross, the greeting, the conclusion to the readings, the preface, the *Orate fratres*, the embolism and doxology

for the Lord's Prayer, and even "Behold the Lamb of God" and "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you." That notation will appear in the order of Mass because the singing of dialogues is encouraged.

We've all experienced the challenge of knowing when to respond "Amen" to the threefold solemn blessing that may conclude the Mass. If the words are sung, the musical cue more clearly signals the response.

There will also be formulas for singing the presidential prayers. All the prefaces are being prepared with music. The translators have worked hard on the rhythms and sounds of the words to be sung. This should be a more musical translation than the one we have used so far.

The eucharistic prayer acclamations will continue to be sung, but it should become clearer that the memorial acclamation and the great amen are parts of dialogues, not just acclamations. Today the priest says, "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith." But the Latin is much more sparse. "*Mysterium fidei*." That's all it says. "The mystery of faith." Like "The body of Christ" or "The word of the Lord." The announcement evokes a response—in this case, the memorial acclamation. The priest does not make the acclamation; he simply announces the mystery of faith. Today most priests sing the acclamation because the words they just said ("Let us proclaim") presume that they will join with everyone else. However, that's not the design. The acclamation belongs to the people.

The same is true of the great amen. Just as all the presidential prayers conclude with the "amen" of the people, so does the eucharistic prayer. The priest should not "amen" what he himself has just said. That's for someone else to do. These are small points, but the extent of

them shows the importance of dialogues throughout the Mass. Once the priest has cued the response, his silence will let the voice of the faithful be heard.

There will be opportunities for new music. The texts of the Glory to God and the Creed are changing. These will need new musical settings. We will all need patience while we learn new repertoire. Composers have matured over the past forty years, so we can expect a better quality of music than what first appeared when the Mass went into the vernacular. Still, we'll need time to learn.

There will also be new translations for the entrance and communion antiphons of each Mass. It remains to be seen if these will become popular, but the new texts will give composers a reason to write new music. Some of it will be quite good, and the repertoire of sung music just might change over time to include more of the texts that the missal provides for these parts of the Mass. You may still sing the repertoire you know at times like these, but you may find renewed attention being given to the texts the missal supplies.

If strangers from a foreign country walk into your parish church some Sunday, there's no telling what music they are expecting to hear. They should at least be pleased to find music sung by a faithful community with sincerity. It will be an added bonus if some of the music is known so well that it will be sung in parishes from country to country, from one generation to the next. We should never lose our desire to compose and sing new music. But some parts of the Mass will hold up better with melodies as familiar as the birthday song and the national anthem. They become a part of our identity, and they help us praise the One who makes us one.

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