

From Seeds to Roots: The Transformation of the Sacred Liturgy

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The National Association of Pastoral Musicians came to birth in 1976 amid an exciting time in the history of the Catholic Church. Eleven years after the close of the Second Vatican Council, several of the newly revised ritual books were available to us, already translated into English. The Sacramentary, the Rite of Baptism for Children and the Rite of Marriage were in hand by 1970. The Rite of Funerals followed the next year, along with a single-volumed book called *The Prayer of Christians* - a provisional translation for what would eventually become the Liturgy of the Hours. When NPM was formed, the 1975 Sacramentary had already replaced the 1970 version. We were still waiting on other books; for example, we did not yet have even the provisional English translation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults nor the rites pertaining to the Pastoral Care of the Sick. NPM was founded, then, as these ritual books were first planting seeds. People were excited, but they also needed directions.

These changes were happening at the command of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Within two months of its passage on December 4, 1963, Pope Paul VI had established a consilium - or special commission - for implementing the vision of the constitution. Just to give you one example, paragraph 75 of the constitution said, "the prayers [that] belong to the rite of anointing are to be revised so as to correspond with the varying conditions of the sick who receive the sacrament." Then the consilium had to come up with those prayers. The consilium appointed subcommittees of specialists to focus on areas such as the calendar, the Order of Mass, the lectionary, the sacraments, and holy week. Those subcommittees sent their reports back to the consilium, which worked on the final details directly with Pope Paul VI. Music was integral to all these rituals, so pastoral musicians received new work.

Musicians were on the forefront of those implementing the full, conscious, active participation of the people. Congregations had already been singing, but they were typically singing four hymns (the entrance, the offertory, the communion and the recessional), two verses each. Documents such as *Musicam sacram* in 1967, however, set a different priority for the parts of the mass that should involve the prayer of the people (29). These focused first on dialogues and acclamations, showing how Gregorian chant was still practical in instances such as the preface dialogue. At the second level were the parts we sometimes call the commons of the mass: the Kyrie, the Gloria and the Agnus Dei, as well as the

Creed and the universal prayer. Of lesser importance were songs at the opening and communion, the responsorial, the gospel acclamation, the offertory and the readings of scripture.

These musical priorities did not take root, even with the birth of NPM. The four hymns held a firm grasp on parish singing, even though they fell under the third level. Dialogues received only partial implementation, even though they fell under the first. Furthermore, priests who sang the preface dialogue did not all sing it the same way. Part of the problem with implementing the first level of the vision of *Musicam sacram* was that people did not universally learn to sing the chants as they appeared in the Sacramentary. We had no uniform national practice. And, because our country values free markets, musical settings for acclamations and hymns became exemplars of external competition more than internal development. So, out of the starting blocks, there were some hits and misses. Still, looking back on NPM's birth and the mission it accepted, this organization successfully focused on helping congregations to sing and accompanists to accompany. It has exposed members to a broad range of musical repertoire, developed understanding of the liturgical rites, and forged a network of friends who share gifts and talents.

Today NPM stands at a new moment in the development of these rites. The liturgical books are undergoing revisions to their content and translation. Musicians are looking again at the council's vision of the liturgy and finding ways to apply its goals. We have several new books including the missal, a pontifical, and the Orders of Celebrating Matrimony and Confirmation. We still await a variety of revisions, including two potential blockbusters, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and The Liturgy of the Hours. Until we have these books in hand, it will be hard to know how NPM can help, but this organization will confidently rise to the occasion.

Meanwhile, we could address several areas where the musical seeds planted by the council have never fully taken root. Let me offer three examples: The Rite of Baptism for Children, the Order of Celebrating Matrimony, and the antiphons associated with the Roman Missal.

The Rite of Baptism for Children is an example of a ritual book that opened the door widely for music, but very few musicians have stepped through. Here is a list of the music recommended for the celebration of a baptism without mass: an opening psalm or hymn (35), a processional song into the church (42), a responsorial psalm (44), a song after the homily (46), music for the procession to the font (52), a song of faith after the renewal of baptismal promises (59), an acclamation after baptism (60), a song for the procession to the altar (67), and a concluding hymn on the theme of Easter or of Mary (71). These musical possibilities are not being adopted in a typical Catholic parish that celebrates baptism after mass. By the time the Sunday morning masses are over, the clergy are tired, the musicians want to go home, and the parents of infants to be baptized are more concerned about the photos and the reception than they are about singing. Pastorally, we stand a long way from implementing a change that would adopt the vision of the baptismal ceremony revised in 1969.

The challenges of providing good liturgical music in the Order of Celebrating Matrimony are well known. Even though a wedding at mass should include acclamations, dialogues and hymns, it frequently includes soloists, instrumentalists, and silence. The missal now calls for the Gloria at a wedding mass, and the Order of Celebrating Matrimony includes an acclamation after the couple's exchange of consent. Musicians, clergy, congregations and couples have not yet widely embraced these changes.

Regarding antiphons, these represent some of the historical Gregorian chants that are now largely lost. On the upside, the participation of the people has increased with an expanded musical repertoire of congregational singing that represents the widest variety of cultures and styles. Pastoral music is demonstrating the universality of the gospel message. As the seeds of the gospel have taken root in human beings of every culture, so have they taken root in the music of every culture. On the downside, a lot of fine music with an incomparable history never gets sung or heard. Although the music of those entrance, offertory and communion chants are too difficult for congregations to master, the same texts could be set to more singable tunes. The entrance and communion antiphons are hidden in plain sight in the missal; the offertories are buried inside the *Graduale Romanum* and the *Graduale Simplex*, making them nearly unlocatable for those who have even a passing interest in drawing connections between the historical antiphons and contemporary worship. The revised missal has sparked some interest in the entrance and communion antiphons, and we are slowly starting to see new compositions based on them. It may take generations for them to develop, so we must be patient. The reasons why these two antiphons never received much attention are easy to discern: The entrance antiphon lost a battle with the towering success of the revised lectionary. Most musicians, when planning the opening hymn, look first at the readings, not at the antiphon. You'll even hear people complain that the antiphon doesn't connect to the readings, even though it was never supposed to. It has its own purpose, its own history, and its own place in the liturgy. The communion antiphon lost out because of a focus on the eucharist, whether the persistent devotionism of the preconciliar liturgy or the happily frequent reception of communion that has placed appropriate attention on the rite. But if you look at the missal's communion antiphons, you'll see that very few of them have anything to do with communion. Many of them relate to the day's gospel. That practice unites the liturgy of the word with the liturgy of the eucharist and challenges those receiving communion to meditate not just on the real presence of Christ, but on the gospel of Christ, together with its demands. So whereas many liturgy planners pray over the gospel to select an opening hymn, the missal thought that the gospel would inspire the communion hymn. That hasn't happened.

So we still have lots of seeds that the council planted into the liturgical books. Some are bearing fruit. Others are late bloomers. They all will help us encounter the paschal mystery and sing about it when we do.