

Allocation and the Utilisation of the Liturgical Music Form of Hymn in the Mass Liturgy

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Abstract. There are different opinions on how to employ hymns in the liturgy especially in the mass. When we look at some national songbooks we might get an impression that this chant form is relatively strongly represented in the mass liturgy. Nevertheless, the documents on music state that it is the responsorial form which is especially appropriate for processional chants in the mass liturgy. The genre of hymn is only then suitable when the chanting such as the chanting after the Holy Communion is the only activity that is taking place. On the other hand, hymns are not suited to accompany processions at the beginning of the mass, during the bringing of the sacrificial offerings, or during the Communion because music should not last longer than the rite itself. When we choose a hymn with more verses, we have to respect also its form. In other words, we cannot freely put an end to a hymn at the end of a procession. Protestants have more different attitude towards this matter. Hymns very often form the basis for liturgical chants in the protestant churches. "Hymns are a small corpus of practical theology",¹ which means they help to express the truths of the Christian faith in our life.

Die Allokation und Verwendung der liturgisch-musikalischen Form der Hymne in der Messeliturgie.

Zusammenfassung. Es gibt viele Ansichten wie die Hymne in der Liturgie insbesondere in der Messe verwendet werden sollte. Wenn wir uns einige ausgewählte Beispiele von Gesangbüchern genauer ansehen, können wir den Eindruck gewinnen, dass wir diese Gesangsform in der Messeliturgie ziemlich oft verwenden. Trotzdem steht in den Musikkdokumenten, dass die responsoriale Form für die Prozessionsgesänge besonders geeignet ist. Das Hymnengenre ist nur dann angemessen, wenn der Gesang z.B. der Gesang nach dem Abendmahl

¹ Compare SALIERS D. E., *Proclamation: Hymn and Song of God's People*, Valparaiso, 1992, p. 9.

die einzige Tätigkeit ist, die in dem gegebenen Moment durchgeführt wird. Andererseits ist das Hymnengenre nicht geeignet für die Begleitung der Prozession am Anfang der Messe, während der Zeit, wenn die Opfergaben gebracht werden oder während der Mahlgemeinschaft, weil die Musik nicht länger als der Ritus allein dauern sollte. Wenn wir ein Ritus mit mehreren Versen auswählen, müssen wir auch seine Form respektieren. In anderen Worten, wir können nicht die Hymne nach Willkür am Ende der Prozession beenden. Die Protestanten haben unterschiedliche Einstellung zu dieser Sache. In den protestantischen Kirchen schaffen die Hymnen eine Basis der liturgischen Gesänge. „Die Hymnen sind ein kleines Korpus der praktischen Theologie.“¹ Dass heißt, sie helfen uns die Wahrheiten des christlichen Glaubens in unserem Leben auszudrücken.

Alokácia a využitie liturgicko-hudobnej formy hymnu v omšovej liturgii

Abstrakt. Existujú rôzne názory na používanie hymnov v liturgii, hlavne v omši. Pri pohľade na niektoré národné spevníky môžeme mať dojem, že táto forma spevu je v omšovej liturgii pomerne silno zastúpená. Napriek tomu dokumenty o hudbe tvrdia, že v omšovej liturgii je na procesiové spevy zvlášť vhodná responsoriálna forma. Žáner hymnu je vhodný iba vtedy, ak je spev jedinou činnosťou, okrem ktorej sa nič nekoná: príkladom je spev po sv. prijímaní. Naopak je nevhodný pre sprevádzanie procesie na úvod omše, počas prinášania obetných darov alebo prijímania z dôvodu, že hudba by nemala trvať dlhšie ako trvá samotný rítus. Ak sa zvolí hymnus s viacerými veršami, potom sa musí rešpektovať aj jeho forma. Inými slovami, hymnus nemožno ukončiť podľa ľubovôle na konci procesie. Viac odlišný postoj nachádzame u protestantov. V protestantských cirkviach často hymny tvoria základ liturgických spevov. „Hymny sú malým korpusom praktickej teológie.“¹ To znamená, že pomáhajú vyjadriť pravdy kresťanskej viery v našom živote.

Keywords: hymn, music genres, liturgical music, liturgical reform, interpretation, mass

Hymns are musical compositions by means of which folk chant, Gregorian chant and measured music became part of the liturgy. They are mentioned in the Holy Scripture, the Church fathers talk about them. They were used in the Judaism, they are mentioned in the Old as well as in the New Testament and also the first Christians knew them. In the 4th century St. Ephrem was fighting against heretics with the help of hymns. Similarly, St. Ambrose closed himself together with the faithful in the Portian basilica in Milan at Easter in the year 386 to prevent Arians from celebrating the cult; he was composing and teaching the faithful to sing hymns which were later introduced into the liturgy.²

² CORBIN S., *La musica Cristiana dalla origini al gregoriano*, Milano, 1983, p. 99-101.

Hymn

What actually are hymns? This term denotes a music form that contains a certain number of strophes which are sung to the same melody. Most of the time strophes rhyme among themselves and consists of four verses. In the narrow sense of the word the term hymn relates more to text than to melody. The word hymn also refers to compositions which are composed not only by metrical or strophic chants. The Holy Scripture talks about psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). In this context hymns most probably represent strophic chants.³ It seems that this term is also adequate for any lyrical forms which occur in the New Testament. To these lyrical forms belong Gospel canticles such as *Benedictus*, *Magnifikat*, *Nunc dimittis* as well as some Old Testament psalms. The so called *psalmoi idiotikoi* – also belong to hymns. These psalms are personal, not inspired psalms like *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, *Te Deum*.

The shift of the church from a simple – family way of worship celebration to a more complex way of celebration in basilicas was followed by the restructuralisation of the liturgy. In the first centuries the west in contrast to the east did not accept a free, non-biblical hymn as a part of its liturgy.⁴ As far as the Roman liturgy is concerned, hymns remained to be a peripheral element, changeable chants which had been taken over from literary works. St. Ambrose (340 – 397) was the main representative of the hymnody of the primal church. His hymns were influenced by Jewish chants, Greek music and folk music of the period. We may consider St. Ambrose to be the one who has opened the door to the employment of hymns in the west. St. Benedict was a continuator and propagator of this endeavour, he has created a precise system of liturgical offices for monastic communities.

In the course of time three categories of Latin hymns have been specified:

1. The oldest influence on the employment of hymn in the church is found in the Liturgy of the hours within the Roman Breviary. This liturgy used to serve as a great source of hymnody throughout the church history. The hymns of the office consisted of specific texts with a reference to an hour of liturgical time or to the sanctoral. Most of the time metrical hymns became part of the Liturgy of the hours. *Gloria in excelsis Deo* was the only hymn in prose which remained in the mass liturgy as an essential part of the Eucharistic celebration. Its text known as “the Greater doxology” was incorporated in the celebration of the rite after *Kyrie eleison* in the 6th century.

³ FOLEY E., *Foundations of Christian Music: The Music of Pre –Constantinian Christianity*, Grove, Bramcote, 1992, p. 55. According to Foley it is any celebration of God or Christ that is a noble language.

⁴ PERDUE-DAVIS V., *A Primer of Ancient Hymnody*, Boston, 1968, p. 31.

2. *The sequence* is another type of hymn which emerges in the 9th century. The texts of this hymn were metrical or free, with or without rhyme. Sequences were the only occasion when poetical texts were sung at the mass.
3. Apart from sequences there was a repertoire of a metrical hymnody which has never managed to become part of the celebration of the Eucharist. The reason was that other forms, which were more suitable for processions and individual parts of the mass celebration, were preferred to a strophic hymn. Apart from the Liturgy of the hours metrical hymns were only rarely used in the official liturgy, which does not mean that various types of metrical chants were not sung on other occasions. On the contrary, since the Middle Ages hymns were used during folk worships and other para-liturgical celebrations of the church but not during the liturgy. These occasions for a prayer created a bigger space for the expression of sentiment from the side of the faithful than the official liturgy. It was here where the strophic hymns played their significant role.⁵

In the year 506 the council in Agda (southern France) paid attention mainly to disciplinary questions. It issued a decree according to which hymns were sung in the morning, in the evening and at the end of matins, vespers and mass.⁶ The employment of hymns in the liturgy remained to be a subject of controversy within the church. In the year 563 the council in Braga issued a decree which did not allow singing poetical compositions – that is hymns⁷ during the liturgy. Psalms and other biblical composition were an exception. The need of such a legislation in general draws attention to the fact that hymnody was gaining great popularity which was getting out of control and which was necessary to watch.

Along with the growing number of poetical and music forms and the less frequent use of Latin from the side of the faithful, the nature of Latin hymn was also changing. A hymn used to be a folk means of expression and in the course of time it changed to something which was exclusively designed for monastic communities and cathedral churches.⁸ The full latinisation of the mass caused that the majority of the faithful were no longer able to participate in the psalmody to which scholae had a growing preference right. Hymns did not belong to the category of formal chants but they were designed for non-liturgical celebrations. The use of hymn outside the church because of missions, pilgrimages, processions was the only occasion when people could participate in chanting.⁹ Thanks to these categories which are part of hymn development we can clearly see the task of culture in the development of liturgical music, because hymns embody the poetical spirit and lyrical nature of a nation.

⁵ PERDUE-DAVIS V., *A Primer of Ancient Hymnody*, Boston, 1968, p. 33.

⁶ DUFFIELD S. W., *The Latin Hymn-Writers and their Hymn*, New York, 1889, p. 47.

⁷ CHUPUNGO A. J., *Worship: Progress and Tradition*, Beltsville, 1995, p. 82-83.

⁸ SCHALK, *Key Words*, p. 193.

⁹ MESSENGER, *Latin Hymn*, p. 26.

1. The Tridentine Council

The Tridentine council has clearly specified the way how music genres have to be employed in the church. It did not pay attention directly to the details of musical and stylistic problems but rather to essential attitudes of their employment in the liturgy. The council have taken the attitude to two matters which have influenced the task of hymnody in the liturgy: firstly, it was reduction of liturgical texts and secondly, incorporation of non-church chants in the liturgy.

The result of the Tridentine council was that the number of sequences was reduced to four. Although hymns continued to be an important part of the holy office, the hymnody did not find place within the celebration of the Eucharist of the post-Tridentine church.

The majority of official declarations by Catholic Church on liturgical music issued before the Second Vatican Council insist on a double attitude towards people's participation in the liturgy. The first one was to support the faithful to sing hymns; and the second to replace the chanting of hymns in the vernacular with Gregorian melodies in Latin.

The popes including Pius X. but mainly Pius XII, began more and more committing themselves to folk chanting. This kind of chanting was utilized in the read mass (*missa lecta*) where apart from folk chanting also folk language could be used in contrast to sung mass (*missa cantata*) where only liturgical music in Latin was ringing out. Thanks to this process, to get the faithful involved in the celebration of the so called silent mass (*missa bassa*) by means of folk chants, metrical hymns are becoming part of the celebration of the Eucharist of the Roman rite and they are sung during processions at the Introit, Offertory, Communion and in the concluding part of the mass.

2. The Second Vatican Council

Since the SVC¹⁰, the folk chanting has become official. In contrast to hymns which were designed for *the Liturgy of the hours* and which served to express the characteristics of the day hours, feast or liturgical season, hymns for the celebration of the Eucharist were rather emotional and they paid little attention to the nature of the liturgy. They were dedicated to a saint of the day and their purpose was to evoke emotions. A lot of them were in the vernacular and their theological content was reduced to a minimum. Therefore, after the SVC there were only few compositions which could be used for a congregation with a desire to get the faithful involved in the chanting.

¹⁰ SVC = Second Vatican Council.

The Constitution of the sacred liturgy has brought about the change of the official view on liturgical music. Despite great opposition, the paragraph 113 of the sixth chapter of the SC speaks about the importance of everything which forms the rite: "*Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when the divine offices are celebrated solemnly in song, with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people.*"¹¹

Although various paragraphs do not stop speaking about the need to preserve the treasure of the sacred music (114,116), its preservation is subordinate to the need of active participation of the people: to promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes.¹²

The paragraph 118 brings to light a problem which already Pius XII. was trying to solve in his instruction on music in the liturgy¹³: "*Religious singing by the people is to be intelligently fostered so that in devotions and sacred exercises, as also during liturgical services, the voices of the faithful may ring out according to the norms and requirements of the rubrics.*"¹⁴ Owing to this paragraph, the religious singing by the people, which includes metrical hymns, has become not only the liturgical music but also it was elevated to the level of the treasure of the sacred music. These two main targets were the main reason for this radical innovation:

- introduction of the folk language into the liturgy
- regulation on the people's active participation in the worship celebration

The documents do not say anything about metrical hymns. There is only one explicit reference to metrical hymns in *the General instruction of the Roman missal*. It is a recommendation to sing the hymn after the Communion: "*When the distribution of Communion is finished, as circumstances suggest, the priest and faithful spend some time praying privately. If desired, a psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the entire congregation.*"¹⁵ The analysis of the contemporary practice of the Slovak liturgical singing draws attention to the fact that the form of hymn in the mass liturgy, for example for *gratiarum actio*, is only rarely used. The small number of compositions of this form available in our songbooks only proves this fact.

The elevation of this chanting to liturgical chanting encouraged church communities to use hymns more frequently and to sing them also during the processions at the

¹¹ *Druhý vatikánsky koncil*, Konšt. o posv. liturgii *Sacrosanctum Concilium*[*The Second Vatican Council, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*]n. 116, Trnava 1993.

¹² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 30.

¹³ Sacra Congregazione dei Riti, *Istruzione Musicam sacram*, 1967.

¹⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 118.

¹⁵ GIRM, n. 88, Editio III. Typica, Città del Vaticano, 2002.

Introit, during administration of sacraments, etc. Almost 40 years after the council the new generation of composers created a rich production of repertoire which also consisted of a certain number of valuable metrical hymns. The publication of these hymns suggests that there was much more attention paid to the evaluation of the text and melody.

Hymn is a community chant from a viewpoint of its character (nature). Throughout the 20th century the Catholic Church was constantly emphasising that the participation of people is essential for the liturgy. However, we have still not solved the problem which music can contribute to the active participation. The answer to this question could be the form of hymn because of the following reasons:

- The form of hymn does not represent “me” but “us” more than any other form.
- From an ecclesiological viewpoint, the music of hymn defines the singing congregation as a subject of the liturgy.
- This music is not intended for trained singers but for common people.¹⁶

Incorporation of liturgical music form of hymn into the liturgy according to the reform of the SVC

The reform of the SVC requested an active participation of the people in the liturgy. The instruction *Musicam Sacram* from the 5th March 1967 specified the criteria for the employment of music in the liturgy and at the same time it determined three progressive degrees of the celebration.

- To the first stage belong the chants of priest, dialogues, orations, prefaces, the replies of the people to the greeting of the priest, acclamations at readings and at the Gospel, the Sanctus and the Lord’s Prayer.
- The chants of the Ordinary of the mass are added to the second decree: the Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, and Agnus Dei.
- The third degree consists of the chants of the Proper: the chant at the Entrance, responsorial psalm, Alleluia, chant for the Offertory and the Communion.¹⁷ It is obvious that the sacred liturgy did not count yet with hymnody.

¹⁶ FOLEY E., *Ritual Music: Studies in Liturgical Musicology*, Beltsville, 1995, n. 165.

¹⁷ *Musicam Sacram*, Enchiridion Vaticanum 2, Documenti ufficiali della Santa Sede, 1963-1967, Bologna, 1981, p. 830-667.

Unfortunately, the SVC in its beginnings did not include the music of hymnody in a folk language in the reform although there was an existing practice of the employment of hymns in the liturgy (more precisely of listening to hymns which were performed by the choir during the mass.) The existing repertoire of the hymnody was composed of religious songs which were related to an office or to a liturgical season and it was not really suitable for the celebration of the Eucharist. The majority of hymns were taken over from Protestant Churches where the singing of hymns was a very successful and long-lasting tradition. However, the Catholics perceived this material very suspiciously and considered it to be old-fashioned.

When the reforms were already instituted by the SVC, the entire attention aimed at the parts of the liturgy which needed their own musical arrangement. There were already sung acclamations, the psalms were performed in a responsorial way and some priest sung prayers even in the form of a dialogue with the faithful. Only little attention was paid to hymns, they were considered to be an additive element and people thought the liturgy could do without them.

One part of this problem may be explained by the nature of the hymnody.

- Texts contain many strophes and they appear to be longer than it is needed. Therefore hymns are used at the places where the parts require short antiphons which are repeatable.
- The form of hymns does not accord with the form of liturgical activity. Therefore can we at all talk about the possibilities of the employment of the hymn in the liturgy taking into consideration this contradiction of forms?

The procession at the beginning of the Holy Mass is too short and therefore the hymn cannot be sung at this place. Analogically, the length of the rite duration has to be taken into account even more during the preparation of the gifts for the offering. It is also very difficult to sing a hymn during the Holy Communion. After all, what is the sense of singing the hymn at the end of the Holy Mass after the priest dismisses the congregation? If the celebrant does not stay at the altar to sing with the faithful, then the concluding song has no sense and it is a contradiction: the one who presides over the congregation leaves the presbytery while the faithful who have been dismissed stay and are still singing.

We cannot just order or forbid the singing of hymns at certain times. That would not be a solution. We should rather become aware of the task which music has in the liturgy and in its nature as an integrating part of the ritual activity:

- The different functions of the sung prayer should be distinguished in the context of individual rites. Sometimes the task of the chant is to accompany the rite, in other cases the chant is not independent but it serves to emphasise the prayer rather than the course of the rite which lasts very long. At such moments music helps and prevents rituals from becoming boring.
- In other cases of the liturgy the chant on its own is a constitutive element of the rite. During the time when it is being sung, no other activity is taking place (the chants before Gospel, the Gloria).
- It is not enough to determine when the chant should be sung but it is also important to choose a music form suitable for the given liturgical activity.

The liturgical music should adapt itself to the ritual activity in the first place. To do that, it is necessary to fully understand what the rite is.¹⁸ However, there is a danger that the chanting of the congregation will be perceived as a simple purpose-built accompaniment of the ritual activity. The chanting should be a constitutive element of the rite and not only its supplement.

4. Re-evaluation of the employment of hymns in the contemporary mass liturgy

Hymns have not been accepted with pleasure in the contemporary liturgy. This fact suggests that the aim and nature of music related to the rite have not been adequately understood. When we want to reconsider *the entrance chant* we need to specify the nature of the ritual act. If the hymn which is sung at the Introit is perceived as a chant that accompanies the arrival of the ministers at the altar, then the liturgical act is aimed at the procession of several persons. On the other hand, if the entrance hymn will be perceived from a viewpoint of its target – to gather and unify the faithful, then the entire congregation which has gathered at the celebration will be in the spotlight of the attention. In this case not only the procession that is approaching the altar but also the music becomes ritual. Therefore it is not necessary to finish the singing right after the arrival of the priest at the altar. On the contrary, the opening part of the mass should express the act of praise from the side of the whole congregation of which the priest and other ministers make part. If the music and ritual act do not have the same target, it is not possible to achieve the same result.

The nature of the responsorial chanting, which is based on the dialogue, is characterised by the pronouns “me” and “you”. On the other hand, the pronoun “us” is

¹⁸ FUNK V. C., *Sung Liturgy*, Washington, D. C., 1991, n. 71.

characteristic for hymns. The chanting of hymns is an activity which can unify and it is an ideal activity when we want to unify the congregation. The chant at the Introit accompanies processions, which is one of the reasons why it is so boring and superficial. There is no prolonged space for collective praise-giving in the contemporary liturgy. Hymns of praise have become subordinate to relative unessential activities which they accompany. If hymns were perceived as a ritual act, they could gain a deserving status and also their length would not be a problem.

The chant for the preparation of the offerings – *the Offertory*. Since this chant accompanies the ritual act, its duration is clearly specified and limited by the completion of the offerings' preparation. If music is inadequately long, it interferes with the course of the liturgy. Moreover, if the chant accompanies the ritual act, the priest does not take part in the congregation but he isolates himself from the community that is paying attention to singing. Even in this case it is possible to sing hymns but in consideration of the mutual synchronisation of the music and the ritual. The texts of the hymn can revolve around the bread and wine, the sacrifice, an idea from the Gospel, they may be reflexions on biblical texts or they can relate to a liturgical season.

It is almost impossible to sing the hymn during the time when the people are coming for the Holy Communion. The music during the Holy Communion should be easy to remember to make it possible for the faithful to sing while they are approaching to the Holy Communion without holding books in their hands. *The hymn after the Holy Communion* is more appropriate for the singing of the whole congregation. This hymn could be an act of praise-giving. The advantage is that this part of the mass is not limited by time as it is in case of procession chants of the mass. The chant after the Holy Communion is the answer of the faithful to the receiving of the Eucharist but its attention may be aimed at the concluding blessing.

The hymn *at the end of the mass*, as it has been already mentioned, is not consistent with the concluding rite of the Holy Mass. It is a little bit strange to request the faithful to stay and sing the concluding hymn after they have been dismissed with the words: "Go in the peace of Christ". When the hymn is being sung at the end of the mass, it should be sung by the entire congregation including the celebrant who sings the hymn in the presbytery. The procession of the presbytery should start to move at the time when it is able to arrive at the sacristy at the end of the hymn.

5. The options of the practical employment of hymns

We may consider the practical employment of hymns from two levels: The first one is *allocation*. Although metrical hymns have been introduced to the official liturgy as procession chants, their place in the liturgy should be at the moments when these

“closed” forms can exist on their own as ritual subjects. Therefore the hymn *Gloria in excelsis* is listed in the opening rites: it is not performed during processions or during some act or rite because this hymn is a rite on its own. The same applies to the hymn after the Holy Communion which is described in the GIRM.¹⁹ There is no other action taking place during the performance of the hymn. Apart from these two places there are no other official options of the employment of the metrical psalm in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Apart from the mentioned places the hymn could be also used in other parts of the mass where it could be sung by the whole congregation for example at the beginning of the mass after the procession or at the end of the mass before the dismissal of the congregation. Nowadays, many hymns are very suitable for the liturgy because their text is consistent with the readings and the Gospel of the day and it even serves as the answer to the readings and the Gospel.

The second level of the practical employment of hymns is their interpretation. How are they sung and accompanied in the parishes? From the observations of other Christian Churches especially Protestant Churches we can see that the attitude of the musicians and congregation towards the singing of hymns is different compared to the attitude of the Roman liturgy. Not only is the quantitative use of these compositions different but also the more seriousness in the employment of different ways of how the chant and accompaniment are interpreted:

- the change of the accompaniment for each strophe
- the change of the accompaniment according the meaning and importance of the text
- the changing of the choir and congregation after individual strophe
- the addition of descant in soprano in the concluding strophe
- In most cases the interpretation is not recorded and specified in the score but it is carefully prepared.

In comparison to Protestant Churches the singing of hymns is much neglected in the Catholic churches, only some chosen strophes of hymn are used, the variation and diversity are missing in the singing and the result is that the chant appears to be very boring.

¹⁹ GIRM = The General instruction of the Roman Missal.

Conclusion

Hymns play an important role in the liturgical life of the Church. However, in many cases it is necessary to re-evaluate and plan their utilisation very carefully. The planned diversity in the musical selection in the liturgy should be supported. There surely is an interconnection with the celebration of the liturgy in the past. There is no empty space within the past continuity from which we preserve only memories and experience. The theology cannot ignore the historical development of the Church doctrine up to this day and also the musical life cannot build on a historical vacuum. The hymnody represents an important bond with the past which stretches from apostolic times up to the SVC.

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