

Introduction

History

Convincing evidence suggests that psalms first entered the Liturgy of the Word as lessons in their own right and not as responses to other lessons.¹ How these early lessons from the Book of Psalms evolved into the elaborate graduals of the Gregorian repertory² remains a matter of conjecture. James McKinnon speculated that because of their lyrical character the psalms were from the beginning sung to more elaborate inflections than those used for the other lessons, and that, at least on festal occasions, congregational refrains were soon added. Probably, as the music to which the psalm verses and refrains were sung grew increasingly elaborate, the psalm selections were shortened—eventually to a refrain and a single verse.

Irrespective of the process by which the form of the Gregorian graduals evolved, it bears little resemblance to that of a lesson, and the graduals came to be regarded not as lessons but as musical responses to the lessons that they followed. For several centuries, nevertheless, they continued to be *rendered* like lessons: their verses were sung by a soloist, standing at an ambo or lectern.

The reform of the Roman rite that followed the Second Vatican Council produced a new lectionary, and this included longer psalm selections to be used in the Liturgy of the Word as alternatives to the Gregorian graduals. It also included short refrains to these psalms that were to be sung by the people. The longer psalm

¹ James McKinnon, *The Advent Project: The Later-Seventh-Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper*. (Berkeley 2000), 45-58.

² Found in the *Graduale Romanum*.

selections with their simple congregational refrains were readily identifiable as lessons.

In its revision of the Prayer Book the Episcopal Church subsequently adopted a lectionary closely patterned upon the new Roman lectionary. This lectionary also provided psalm selections to be used in the Liturgy of the Word at the Eucharist; but even though the rubrics of the 1979 Prayer Book encourage the singing of psalms in responsorial style,³ its lectionary did not include psalm refrains. These were later provided in the first edition of *Gradual Psalms*,⁴ compiled by Richard Crocker and issued by the Standing Commission on Church Music.⁵

The General Convention of 2006 adopted a version of the *Revised Common Lectionary* and mandated that it be used on the First Sunday of Advent, 2007, and thereafter. This lectionary differs sufficiently from the 1979 Prayer Book lectionary that a new edition of *Gradual Psalms* is needed. When I was asked to edit a new edition, I chose to begin afresh rather than to alter Richard Crocker's work.

The Musical Settings Provided

The psalm selections appointed in the *Revised Common Lectionary* (as in other post-Conciliar lectionaries) are too long to be sung to the elaborate melodies of the Gregorian graduals. Furthermore, these melodies are too difficult for congregations to sing. They are also beyond the competence of many cantors. The melodies of the simple antiphons of the Daily Office, on the other hand, lend

³ "Concerning the Psalter," 382.

⁴ Richard Crocker, comp. *Gradual Psalms, Alleluia Verses, and Tracts...* (New York 1980-1981)

⁵ Howard E. Galley had selected and edited the texts of the refrains, following the model of the Roman lectionary, *mutatis mutandis*.

themselves to adaptation as congregational psalm refrains, and the simple psalm tones associated with these antiphons serve well as settings for the verses.

Very few of the antiphons of the office are original, through-composed pieces. Some are built upon *type melodies*, which were devised to fit many texts of varying length and with varying accentuation. Others are *centos*, composed of familiar melodic motifs, skillfully combined in accordance with discernible conventions, often with the addition of some original melodic material.

The music of the refrains in this collection has been composed in the same way—based upon type melodies or centonized.

The form of the third psalm tone used here differs from the form found in the first edition of *Gradual Psalms* and in *The Hymnal 1982*. The reciting note of this psalm tone originally was *ti*. With the advent of polyphony it was in many regions raised to *do*, so as to forestall the occurrence of the dreaded augmented fourth—called the “diabolus in musica”—when *fa* occurred in another voice. Because the alteration obscures the modality of the psalm tone, I have restored the reciting note in this tone to *ti*.⁶

Using This Psalmody in the Liturgy

Since the psalm that follows the first lesson at the Eucharist was in origin a lesson and, in its restored form, has regained the character of a lesson, its verses are most appropriately sung by a soloist, standing at the lectern or pulpit from which the other lessons are read, with the choir (if present) leading the people in singing the refrain. If a competent soloist is unavailable to perform this ministry, several

⁶ The reciting note has been returned to *ti* in the *Antiphonale monasticum* of 2005 and a form of the tone in which the reciting note had been returned to *ti* had, in fact, been provided (as an option) in the *Antiphonale Monasticum* of 1934.

members of the choir (or even the whole choir) may sing the verses; but solo rendition is preferable.

The cantor begins the psalm by singing the refrain. The (choir and) people repeat it. The cantor sings the first group of verses, and the people repeat the refrain. The cantor then sings the other groups of verses, and after each the people repeat the refrain.

It is fitting that the people remain seated during the gradual psalm, as they do during other lessons.

Gloria Patri is not added to gradual psalms, not because these psalms follow an Old Testament Lesson (as they do not always do), but because *Gloria Patri* is not historically associated with *responsorial* psalmody. It was first added to psalms during the fourth century, when *antiphonal* psalmody⁷ was introduced. Ambrose of Milan introduced antiphonal psalmody to the West, encouraging the singing of antiphonal psalms—with *Gloria Patri*—at rallies against Arianism. Antiphonal psalmody was subsequently introduced to the Eucharist to accompany the entrance of the ministers and the communion of the people; but the older psalmody of the Liturgy of the Word retained its responsorial form, without *Gloria Patri*.

The Alleluia is a Gospel acclamation and, ideally, ought to precede the Gospel immediately. A hymn may precede the Alleluia. Sequences, strophic compositions added to the Roman liturgy during the late Middle Ages, were placed *after* the Alleluias. Tradition, therefore, suggests that a hymn sung in combination

⁷ In true antiphonal psalmody the psalm verses are also sung by a soloist, but the refrain is sung by two groups in alternation. Psalmody in which two sides of the choir alternate in singing the verses is more properly called alternate psalmody. See Robert Taft, *Beyond East and West: Essays in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington, D.C. 1984), 157-159.

with an Alleluia should follow it; but because the purpose of the Alleluia is to herald the proclamation of the Gospel, placement of the hymn before the Alleluia is better.

Western tradition decrees that from Ash Wednesday until the Great Vigil of Easter the word, “Alleluia” should not be uttered in the Liturgy. During Lent, therefore, a Tract replaces the Alleluia before the Gospel.

The tract, a selection of psalm verses sung without a refrain, is a vestige of the *direct* form psalmody first used in the Liturgy of the Word, in which the verses were sung without a refrain. The tract was originally a solo chant and may still be sung by a solo voice. Nowadays, however, it is more commonly sung by two choirs in alternation or by a soloist and a choir in alternation.

In this publication, as in the first edition of *Gradual Psalms*, single scriptural verses are provided as alternatives to the tracts. These, when used, are best sung by a soloist.

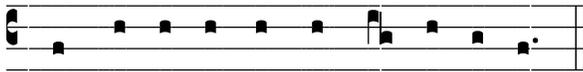
I wish to thank Marilyn Haskel and Frank Tedeschi for inviting me to undertake this work and also to thank James McGregor for allowing me to include several refrains that he has composed.

Bruce E. Ford
Holy Cross Day 2007

Notes on the Pointing of the Psalm Verses

The purpose of chant recitation formulas (prayer tones, lesson tones, psalm tones) is to facilitate proper declamation of liturgical texts.

Specimens of fully-notated psalm verses, lessons, prayers, etc. that we find in medieval manuscripts reveal that when musicians of the Middle Ages set texts to these formulas, they used the formulas with greater flexibility than the rules given in twentieth-century chant books allow. Eugène Cardine, in his *Beginning Studies in Gregorian Chant*,⁸ reproduces the following example from St. Gall 381:



quó-ni-am Dó-mi-nus spés é- ius est.

This cadential formula, used according to the rules, does not accommodate proximate accented syllables satisfactorily. If it had been applied “correctly,” the text would have been set thus:



quó-ni-am Dó-mi-nus spés é- ius est

—much to the the detriment of good declamation.

Cardine writes:

⁸ Eugène Cardine, *Beginning Studies in Gregorian Chant*, tr. from the Italian and French eds. with editorial comments by William Tortolano (Chicago 1988), 71. Translation of: *Primo anno di canto gregoriano*.

Even in the narrow genre of psalmodic cadences we see the Gregorianists of the true epoch going against their will. They dared to liberate themselves from the general rule when its application would have put both text and melody in too strong a conflict... Could we not act in a similar manner in like cases? It can be wished and even achieved only on *two conditions*

- that the adopted solution be, as in the given examples, altogether in conformity with the norms of the Gregorian composition,
- and that the unity and ease of execution do not suffer therefrom

In fact, it is especially the second point which justifies the simple and fixed rules: a soloist can be successful in pleasant adaptations if he possesses a true knowledge and a good technique; but can it ever be expected that a choir be capable of improvising as a group in order to solve the varied problems presented by the singing of the song? A particular case *noted with precision*⁹ and reserved to a soloist or a small group of well-trained singers such as the verse taken from the MS of St. Gall 381 — does not offer any difficulty. But, unfortunately, one cannot generalize this usage. It is too complicated.

The editors of modern chant books, including the new *Antiphonale monasticum* (2005) set forth rigid rules for fitting words to psalm tones on the assumption that choirs will sing the psalms from **unpointed texts**. These editors would, indeed, be foolish to expect a choir singing from unpointed texts to improvise alterations to fit irregularly-accented phrases.

The accentuation of Latin is very regular, however, and the cadential formulas of the psalm tones were devised to accommodate the four accentual patterns that predominate in Latin. The mediant cadence of the first psalm tone, for example, takes the following forms:

⁹ Italics added.

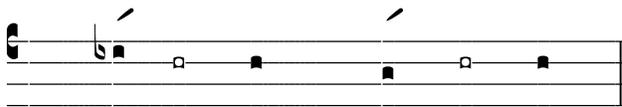


1. cór- de mé o
2. nó- men Do- mi- ni
3. spí- ri- tus mé- us
4. tér- ra vi- vén- ti- um

Because other accentual patterns occur only occasionally, strict adherence to formulas such as this rarely hampers good declamation of Latin texts.

The accentuation of English is far less regular. While almost all the accentual patterns that we encounter in the Prayer Book psalter can be found somewhere in the Latin Vulgate psalter; a number that occur infrequently in Latin occur frequently in English.

We often encounter in English prose the four accentual patterns that occur regularly in Latin:

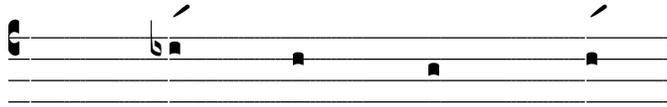


1. mý sal- vá- tion
2. shóws his hán- di- work
3. tále to an- óth- er
4. líved with in- tég- ri- ty

But in English other patterns occur with equal regularity:

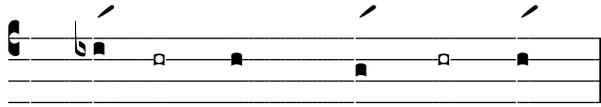
5. Náme of the Lórd
6. wórds be-hínd your báck

The cadential formula that we are examining easily accommodates an accented final syllable preceded by two unaccented syllables, which, when encountered in Latin, is always treated thus:



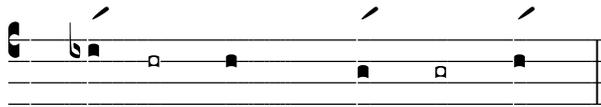
pro-pi-ti- á- ti o ést.
 per-se- quén- ti bus mé
 Náme of the Lórd

No distortion results. But the formula does not as easily accommodate an accented final syllable preceded by two unaccented syllables.



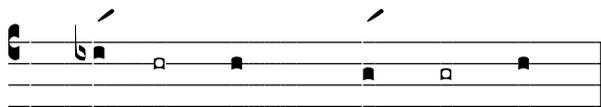
mé- a lau- dá- bunt té
 words be- híd your bák

Here the final syllable effectively loses its accent. Fortunately a slightly different form of the cadence found in some manuscripts places the extra note assigned to the penultimate syllable on *sol* rather than *la*. This arrangement of notes serves beautifully when both the penultimate and final syllable are accented.



wórdz be- híd your bák
 Gód him sélf is júdge

This variant form of the cadence, unfortunately, does not fit texts in which the final accent falls on the antepenultimate syllable because it places a false accent on the final syllable.



líved with in- tég- ri- ty
 shóws his hán- dí- work

Consequently I have decided to employ **two** forms of this formula and of many other cadential formulas, choosing in each case the form that fits the text best. My decision to do so would create difficulties for singers if the psalms in this publication were not fully notated, but because they are fully notated, “unity and ease of execution do not suffer therefrom.”

Proximate accented syllables such as those encountered in the half-verse Cardine reproduced from St. Gall 381, which are rare in Latin, also occur frequently in English. When proximate accented syllables occur at cadences, *syneresis*,¹⁰ the technique used in Cardine's example, can be used effectively to eliminate conflict between the verbal and musical accents. I have used this technique freely. In so doing I am not alone among editors of English-language psalters. G.H. Palmer did so in his *Sarum Psalter*.¹¹ So also did H.B. Briggs and W.H. Frere in *A Manual of Plainsong*.¹²

When the last two syllables of a phrase are both accented, as in these cases:

The mountains also shall bring péace

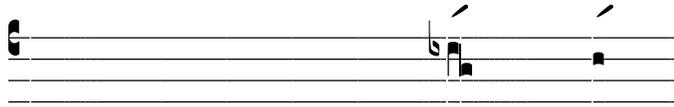
He shall come down like rain upon the mówn gráss

the mediant cadences of the first and seventh psalm tones do not fit the text. I have, therefore, devised modified forms of these cadences to suit cases such as these:

¹⁰ Syneresis is the fusion of two neumes—in this case the fusion of two separate notes into a single neume.

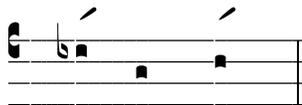
¹¹ *The Psalms & Canticles at Mattins & Evensong Pointed to the Eight Gregorian Tones from the Sarum Tonale*, by the Rev. G.H. Palmer. New ed., rev. and enl. (Wantage 1926) Cover title: *The Sarum Psalter*.

¹² *A Manual of Plainsong for Divine Service*. Rev. and enl. by J.H. Arnold. (London 1951).



the mountains also shall bring péace
like rain upon the mówn gráss

In breaking new ground, I have, nonetheless, drawn inspiration from a variant found in some manuscripts.



fác- tus ést
Ís- ra- él

In a number of English words, such as “sanctuary” and “tabernacle,” a weak accent falls on the penultimate syllable, but a stronger accent falls on the third syllable from the last. If at the mediant cadences of tones 2 and 8 these words are treated according to the rules, distortion results:



Who may dwell in your **táb-** er- ná- cle?

Such cases seem to justify the addition of an epenthesis¹³ that is not normally allowed:



Who may dwell in your **táb-** er- ná- cle?

¹³ An *epenthesis* is an extra note inserted into a formula to accommodate an extra syllable. Most chant formulas, including this one, normally allow the insertion of only one such note following each accent.

My goal throughout has been to make the psalm tones facilitate and not impede good declamation of the texts.

B.E.F.

Suggestions to Singers and Choir Directors

Singing the Verses

1. Maintain a steady pace—slow enough to allow careful pronunciation of the words, but not sluggish. Avoid singing the syllables set to the reciting note faster than the syllables set to cadential notes.
2. Some syllables take longer to pronounce than others. To say “keep me safe” takes longer than to say “enemy,” but differences in the length of syllables must never be exaggerated, as they are likely to be if they are consciously considered. If you take care to pronounce each word carefully, differences in the length of syllables will take care of themselves.
3. Do not lengthen a syllable simply because it is accented. An increase in intensity implies no increase in duration. Never sing:



Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord.

4. An accented syllable that *immediately precedes another accented syllable* must, however, be significantly lengthened. (Say, “The *táll mán* in the *gráy flánnel* suit..”) In this publication such syllables, when they are set to a reciting note, are italicized. Take care, nevertheless, not to lengthen them more than good diction requires.
5. Cadences call for a slight *rallentando* and *diminuendo*.

Singing the Refrains

1. The filled noteheads of the refrains have the approximate value of syllables in the verses.

2. The quilisma () identifies a light passing note that is preceded and followed by more important notes. The note that precedes the quilisma is often lengthened. The note that follows the quilisma is always accented and may be lengthened as well.

3. In a few cases a short vertical stroke is placed over a note (within a group) that is to be accented and may be lengthened.



4. Repeated notes set to the same syllable theoretically call for a repercussion without a hiatus, which few untrained singers can execute. A repercussion *with* a hiatus is most undesirable. Therefore, only members of a trained choir ought to attempt the repercussion, and others ought simply to sustain the pitch for two beats.

5. Verbal accents delineate rhythmic groups of varying length—primarily, but not exclusively, binary and ternary.



Your¹⁴ | wórd is a | lán- tern to my | féet, O | Lórd | and a¹⁵ | líght



up- | ón my | páth.

Conscious awareness of these groups facilitates conducting and may help to keep a choir together, but it sometimes leads the singers to place too much stress on the

¹⁴ Initial unstressed syllables may be regarded as “upbeats.”

¹⁵ This phrase begins with two unstressed syllables.

accented syllables or to stress all accented syllables equally, regardless of their rhetorical importance. (Choir directors must decide whether to draw these rhythmic groups to their singers' attention.)

B.E.F.