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# A Necessary or Integral Part: The Choral Ordinary and Proper in the Roman Catholic Mass after the Second Vatican Council



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**Abstract**

The ritual texts of the Roman Catholic Mass have inspired many of the choral masterworks of Western music. For many composers, one of the central considerations in setting these texts has been to determine the proper relationship of music with the ritual action it accompanies. From the Middle Ages onward, the Catholic liturgy was characterized by its multiple streams of parallel ritual activities. The music of the choir and the private devotions of the congregation proceeded alongside the sacramental prayers and actions of the clergy. In this setting the choir enjoyed a great deal of freedom, as it ornamented most of the liturgy with elaborate music. In the twentieth century this musical-ritual relationship underwent a profound change as a result of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, in the post-conciliar Mass the priests, choir, and congregation are asked to focus together on each text, hymn, or prayer. In addition, the Catholic Church has called for an increase in congregational singing in the twentieth century--culminating in the directives of the council. The musical implications of these official reforms are significant. This document describes the key characteristics of the pre-conciliar Mass, as well as the musical implications of its liturgical structure. Twentieth-century reforms are then examined, through the relevant church documents. This analytical process clarifies the place of both inherited choral music and new compositions in the post-conciliar liturgy. A large part of the existing sacred choral repertoire--a body of music encompassing over six centuries of masterworks by numerous famed composers--no longer functions well in a Catholic liturgical context. In particular, choral settings of the Mass Ordinary have become very difficult to integrate into the post-conciliar liturgy. On the other hand, choral settings of the Mass Proper texts continue to work well liturgically. These Proper texts also present abundant opportunities for future liturgical compositions. This document seeks to explain the musical characteristics and dynamics of the post-conciliar Mass. It is hoped that this treatment will be helpful for researchers, church musicians, and composers who concern themselves with the Catholic liturgy.

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“A Necessary or Integral Part:” The Choral Ordinary and Proper in the Roman Catholic Mass after the Second Vatican Council By Jared Ostermann. Submitted to the graduate degree program in The School of Music and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Music. The Council—began its discussion of sacred music with the following famous declaration: The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this preeminence is that, as sacred song closely bound to the text, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.<sup>1</sup> This short statement beautifully encapsulates the unique nature of Catholic liturgical music,<sup>2</sup> 1. On October 28, 1965, the Second Vatican Council promulgated the Declaration on Christian Education Gravissimum educationis. The document describes the distinguishing characteristic of a Catholic school in this way; "The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. It tries to guide the adolescents in such a way that personality development goes hand in hand with the development of the intellect." Collects of the Roman Missals: A Comparative Study of the Sundays in Proper Seasons before and after the Second Vatican Council by Lauren Pristas. The Organic Development of the Liturgy by Alcuin Reid. Vestments and Vesture by Dom E.A. Roulin. It is of course a well-known fact that the Jesuits have never had choral singing or recitation of the Office as part of their order's way of life. Their two great Roman churches, the Gesù (1584) and Sant' Ignazio (1650), have enormous sanctuaries, designed to be clearly visible from the entire nave; unlike the churches of older religious orders, neither one has any choir stalls.