

An Essay on Cistercian Liturgy

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Cistercian Liturgy

Concerning the mode and order of Divine services, the monks of Cîteaux decided right at the beginning to observe in everything the traditions of the Rule, cutting away entirely and rejecting all appendages to the psalms, orations and litanies, which were added (to the Office) arbitrarily by less considerate fathers. Aware of human frailty and infirmity, after sagacious consideration, they found (these additions) to be more dangerous than salutary for the monks, since their multiplicity results in their entirely tepid and negligent recitation, not only by the slothful, but also by the diligent.¹

The Cistercians rejected the elaborate liturgical practices of contemporary religious orders, in particular the liturgy of the Benedictine monks of Cluny, which was notoriously excessive and occupied almost the entire monastic day, allowing little time for manual labour. The Cistercians sought to impose a liturgy that was simple and faithful to the *Rule of St Benedict*, and stripped away appendages that had steadily accumulated over the centuries. They introduced a liturgy that was greatly reduced and centred on the eight canonical hours and a daily conventual mass - a second mass was soon added on Sundays and feast days. The psalmody of 150 psalms was recited over the course of the week and not, as at Cluny, during the course of a single day.²

The Cistercians' concern with liturgical excess extended to singing and music. They criticised shrills, frills and trills, which were dismissed as frivolous, distracting and vain. The General Chapter prescribed that monks should sing in virile voices and avoid extremes, to ensure gravity and devotion.³ Aelred of Rievaulx vehemently denounced musical embellishments, and in a colourful invective he criticised the 'swelling and swooping' of voices, the 'din of bellows and the humming of chimes'. He argued that far from enhancing religious observance, these histrionic displays and 'saucy gestures' made a mockery of worship; sound was of secondary importance and

¹ From the *Exordium Magnum*, cited in L. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Ohio, 1977) p. 249.

² The Cluniacs recited up to 210 psalms a day, and some of their houses even organised shifts to ensure that this was sustained, Lekai, *Cistercians*, p. 248.

³ Institutes LXXV, in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, p. 489: *It behoves men to sing with manly voices and not imitate the lasciviousness of minstrels by singing with shrill voices like women, or, in common parlance, falsetto. And, therefore, we have decreed that extremes in singing be avoided so that the singing may be redolent of seriousness and devotion be preserved.*

should merely augment the meaning.⁴ The Cistercian monk in Idung of Prüfenings' twelfth-century *Dialogue* criticised the Cluniacs for taking expensive liquorice cordials to help them reach the high notes when singing the Office;⁵ in the fourteenth century an English Cistercian, John Anglicus, debated the legitimacy of choir monks sucking lozenges to improve their singing of the Divine Office.⁶

Further attempts to pare down the Cistercian liturgy included reducing the number of processions and feasts.⁷ Over the years, however, new feasts were added and others raised in rank. The increased number of feasts meant that an *Ordo* was now needed to ensure there were no clashes. Two are known from the early fourteenth / fifteenth centuries, and a computistic calendar from Calder, in Cumbria, dating to c. 1400 / 1425, is now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.⁸ The liturgical reforms of the White Monks did not escape reproach. The theologian and philosopher, Peter Abelard, was a particularly harsh critic and railed against what he claimed were 'scandalous innovations'.⁹ Of all their reforms it was the Cistercians' celebration of Lent which provoked the greatest reaction from their contemporaries, for, in stark contrast to the practice at that time, the White Monks recited the office without any alterations until Easter, they did not stop singing the *Alleluia* after Septuagesima, and, even during Holy Week chanted the usual hymns and concluded the psalms with the *Gloria*.¹⁰

⁴ See appendix I.

⁵ Idungus, *Dialogus*, I: 41 (p. 44).

⁶ Talbot, 'The English Cistercians and the universities', p. 208.

⁷ Whilst the Cistercians accorded few saints feasts, they commemorated many more; the earliest extant calendar of the Order shows that although only fifty-seven saints were granted feasts, over one hundred were commemorated. This calendar is included in the earliest Cistercian breviary, which dates from c. 1130 i.e. during Stephen Hardings' abbacy; it was recovered in Berlin during World War II, K. Koch, 'Vollständiges brevier aus der schreibstube des HL Stephen', *Analecta Cisterciensia* 2 (1946) pp. 146-7.

⁸ See King, *Liturgies*, p. 73.

⁹ Abelard was however rather sore from Bernard of Clairvaux's recent reaction to his modifications for the saying of the Lord's Prayer by the nuns of the Paraclete: the words 'daily' bread' had, on Abelard's recommendation, been changed to 'supersubstantial bread', prompting somewhat of a surprised response from Bernard, see C. Waddell, 'Peter Abelard's letter 10 and Cistercian liturgical reform', p. 76; also note B. Lackner, 'The liturgy of early Cîteaux'.

¹⁰ Lekai, *Cistercians*, p. 250.

The Canonical Hours

Seven times a day have I given praise to thee (Psalm 119: 164)

The monastic day revolved around the seven canonical hours that were celebrated during the day, and an eighth night office of Vigils. The exact time of each office varied depending on the season, but the sequence remained the same: the night office of Vigils was followed by Lauds at daybreak, and thereafter the daily offices of Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and the concluding office of Compline.

Whilst the Cistercians were noted for the brevity of their Divine Office, their decision to forego the customary pre-Lauds nap attracted the most attention from contemporaries.¹¹ Traditionally, monks rose at midnight to celebrate Vigils, in accordance with Psalm 119: 162, ‘At midnight I rose to give thanks to thee’, and then returned to bed until Lauds. The Cistercians, ‘sterner and more stricter with themselves’¹² dispensed with this nap so that they could remain in prayer and vigil until daybreak, when Lauds was sung. Their intention was noble but overly-ambitious, so to sustain their prayers they rose later, and were noted for their tardy start. Walter Map, a rather bitter commentator on the White Monks, cynically remarked on this:

*After some time the practice appeared too hard for them and as it was disgraceful to change their rule they preferred to change the midnight hour into that before dawn, so that the service might end with night, and the rule suffer no deviation.*¹³

The monks celebrated all of the hours in the church, except at harvest-time, when they recited them as they worked in the fields.¹⁴ The lay-brothers, in contrast, only celebrated some of the hours in their choir, reciting the others as they worked: in

¹¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, pp. 581-3: *They sleep fully clothed and wearing their girdles and do not return to their beds at any time after matins, but so arrange the time of matins that daybreak may precede Lauds, keeping so closely to the Rule that they think it wrong to diverge by one letter, one iota. Immediately after Lauds they sing Prime, and after Prime go out to work for the prescribed number of hours; all work or singing in choir is completed by daylight without artificial light.*

¹² Walter Map, *De Curialium*, p. 77.

¹³ Walter Map, *De Curialium*, p. 77.

¹⁴ Idungus, *Dialogus*, II: 52 (pp. 93-4): the Cistercian in Idungus’ *Dialogue* refutes any suggestion that the White Monks farmed to escape liturgical duties and argued that, in fact, those who worked recited the entire Psalter during their labour and were often moved to shed tears of compassion.

summer, when the lay-brothers rose earlier and the work day was longer, they said Vigils, Lauds and Prime in church; in winter, when the time for work was greatly reduced they left the church after Vigils, but generally returned for Compline. On Sundays and great feasts when the lay-brothers had no work they participated in the full liturgical day, but celebrated their offices in silence.¹⁵

Certain monastic officials, such as the porter, were excused from attending the hours on account of their duties, but during the times at which the rest of the community was singing in the choir these officials were instructed to draw up their hoods and observe silence. Otherwise attendance was mandatory and punctuality expected. Latecomers were punished, regardless of their rank and irrespective of the hour, for tardiness was as unacceptable at Vigils as it was during the day, but more reprehensible on a feast. Those who were late were not permitted to enter the choir until they had atoned - the penitent faced the altar at the presbytery step and knelt until the abbot signalled that he could return to choir, where he took the last place. On Sundays and feast days the penance was greater, and indeed more physically challenging: the offender bowed, extended his hands so that they touched the floor and sustained this position until the abbot signalled that he could proceed to the choir.¹⁶

In theory, if not always in practice, anyone who was not a member of the Order was prohibited from attending the hours. This applied to Benedictine monks as much as laymen and bred considerable resentment, provoking complaints about the Cistercians' exclusiveness:

*They bar their gates and keep their private quarters completely enclosed. They will not admit a monk from another religious house to their cells, nor allow one to come with them into the church for Mass or any of the offices.*¹⁷

¹⁵ According to Walter Daniel, the church at Rievaulx was packed on feast days when all the lay-brothers attended the services - *On feast days you might see the church crowded with brethren like bees in a hive, unable to move forward because of the multitude clustered together rather, and compacted into one angelic body*, Walter Daniel, *Vita Aelredi*, p. 38.

¹⁶ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, p. 222 (75:44); Institutes, XLIX in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, p. 477.

¹⁷ Orderic Vitalis, monk of St Évroul, Normandy, was writing c. 1145, Orderic, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, p. 326. Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux in 1149 voicing his frustration at the Cistercians' unwillingness to let Black monks into their cloisters, and suggested that if

The Format of the Hours

The sacrist sounded a bell to announce the office and summon the brethren to choir, although occasionally, such as on Good Friday, a wooden clapper, the *tabula*, was used.¹⁸ Each office began with the Lord's Prayer and consisted of hymns (from the hymnal), psalms (from the psalter) and canticles /chants (from the antiphoner). The lay-brothers' hours were simpler and shorter, and essentially consisted of a series of 'Our Fathers'. The monks prayed upright, not prostrate,¹⁹ and stood for Vigils, probably to ensure that the brethren stayed awake. The monk appointed as the priest for the week led the office, while the precentor stood to the right of the choir and led the chant. The Cistercians were greatly concerned with the quality of worship and sought to prevent sloth, boredom and negligence. Psalms were not to be rushed nor the words slurred, clipped or skipped, and those who were did not sing devoutly were to be beaten.²⁰ The precentor and succentor (sub-cantor) were charged with the tasks of encouraging singing in choir and ensuring vigilance; the latter was particularly important during Vigils and a number of anecdotes warned of the dangers of succumbing to the demon sleep.²¹ Measures were also taken to minimise distraction and disruption. The twelfth-century customary of the Order describes how to deal with any bloody noses or vomiting that occurred during the Hours.²² It also stipulates that if a guest should arrive when the Hours were in progress, the porter should wait until the monks had finished singing before approaching the abbot's stall to announce the visitor's arrival.²³

they were more open diverse customs would not separate these and those monks, whom the same faith and charity should truly make brothers, Peter the Venerable, *Letters* I, ep. 150.

¹⁸ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, p. 100 (20: 2).

¹⁹ *Capitula LXXXVI* in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, p. 492.

²⁰ See C. Harper-Bill, 'Cistercian visitation in the late Middle Ages: the case of Hailes Abbey', *Bulletin of Historical Research* LIII (1980), pp. 103-114 at p. 108.

²¹ The Cistercian monk, Caesarius of Heisterbach, tells of a monk who was notorious for falling asleep; on one occasion the monk nodded off while the psalms were being sung at Vigils, and in his sleep he saw before him a tall, misshapen man, holding a filthy wisp of straw – the kind that grooms used to rub down horses. The man leered, asked the monk why he 'son of the great Lady', slept, and struck him over the face with the filthy straw; the monk awoke, at once, instinctively drew back his head from the blow and, much to the amusement of his fellow brethren, banged his head against the wall, Caesarius of Heisterbach, *On the Dialogue of Miracles* I, ch. XXXIV, p. 231.

Another monk who was accustomed to nod off in church had a similarly rude awakening. As usual, the monk had fallen asleep while the others were chanting at Vigils, when the image of the crucified Christ came down from the altar, aroused him and struck the monk with such a blow upon the cheek that he died three days later; as Caesarius warns: 'A lazy monk provokes the wrath of God', Caesarius of Heisterbach, *On the Dialogue of Miracles*, I, ch. XXXVIII, p. 234.

²² *Ecclesiastica Officia*, pp. 252-3 (89: 1-41); p. 218 (74: 10).

²³ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, p. 246 (87: 4); p. 334 (120: 15).

Mass

Whilst the *Rule of St Benedict* includes no prescriptions for the daily high mass, this became an integral part of the monastic day. Cluny celebrated two or three conventual masses daily, but the Cistercians, who advocated simplicity and brevity, reduced this to one. A second ‘low’ mass was soon introduced on Sundays and feast days, and there were further additions during the twelfth century, including a daily mass for the dead (for deceased members of the community and ‘familiaris’), for benefactors and of the Virgin. It was conceded that in times of crisis a mass for special needs might replace the conventual mass, and in 1194 the *General Chapter* ordered that prayers be said for the recovery of the Holy Land.²⁴ In addition to corporate masses, private masses were said by monk-priests at side altars, and specific times were set aside for this purpose.²⁵ The priest was assisted by two witnesses - a cleric who ministered to him and a layman who served the water and lit the candles.²⁶ Following the teaching of St Augustine and in accordance with Jeremiah 3: 12 [*Go and proclaim these words towards the north...*], the priest faced northwards to read the Gospel.²⁷ The daily celebration of private masses was not obligatory, but was generally observed and was indeed necessary with communities receiving a growing number of requests from donors for foundation masses. These could be lucrative, for the monks might acquire considerable gifts in return for their spiritual services; however the practice became increasingly onerous and from 1192 all foundation masses required the General Chapter’s approval.²⁸ Those who served communion to the monks might themselves receive communion at private masses, a measure that was surely intended to minimise problems created by a large community.²⁹

The daily conventual mass was celebrated by all choir monks. Officials, such as the porter, were excused on account of their work, but on feasts of two masses they were relieved of their post by a deputy and free to join the choir for the first mass that was celebrated after Prime.³⁰ On normal work-days the lay-brothers did not attend mass,

²⁴ *Institutes* LI, in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, p. 477; *Statutes* I: 1194: 3.

²⁵ See *Ecclesiastica Officia*, pp. 180-1 (59: 1-6); the period generally allocated was during reading time, and sometimes also after the conventual mass.

²⁶ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, p. 182 (59: 10).

²⁷ Note Idungus’ discussion of this in his *Dialogus* I: 43-44 (p. 45).

²⁸ Lekai, *Cistercians*, p. 254.

²⁹ *Institutes* XLVI, in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts* p. 476, n. 3.

³⁰ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, p. 334 (120: 22).

although on Sundays and feast days they, and the brethren who worked on the granges, celebrated both masses in the church, and indeed participated in the full liturgical office. On feast days when they worked, the lay-brothers only attended the first conventual mass, but their presence was also expected at all burial masses.³¹

The procedure for mass was defined by its ritual simplicity – even with subsequent modifications. Like each of the canonical hours, it began with the Lord’s prayer and the sign of the Cross, which was followed by an abbreviated version of the *Confiteor*, rather than the customary *Judica* (Psalm 42). A priest acted as deacon, but wore the stole around his neck as a priest and not, as a deacon, across his shoulder. The celebrant was the monk appointed as priest for the week, and it was his duty to sing the oration until the offertory, where the altar was censed; this was one of the few times that the Cistercians permitted the use of incense, which was otherwise considered a luxurious and unnecessary expense.³² Other parts were sung by the servers and the choir. The *Gloria* was intoned at the epistle side of the altar, the *Creed* at the gospel side. At the beginning of the Collect or *Gloria* the chalice was prepared; it was not covered by vellum or a pall, but by a corner of the corporal that was folded over for protection.³³ During the canon of the mass the celebrant broke the Host (which was made of pure wheat)³⁴ in three – two large pieces and a smaller piece that was dropped into the chalice. Initially the sacrament was not elevated and the community did not genuflect. The Cistercian statutes first prescribed that the host be elevated in 1152 and the chalice in 1444; from 1210 it was decreed that candles might be raised during the elevation to enable those in the choir to have a better view, and the lesser bell rung so that all who heard it could genuflect and pray.³⁵ The Pax (the Kiss of Peace) which followed, was only given to those who were about to receive communion.³⁶

³¹ *Lay-brothers’ Usages*, ch. IV (p. 174); *Clairvaux Breve et Memoriale Scriptum*, ch. I (pp. 197-8).

³² The Cistercian in Idungus’ *Dialogue* explains that the White Monks only used incense at the sacrament of the altar and on feast days, and refers to the unnecessary expense of frankincense and myrrh that were used lavishly at Cluny, Idungus, *Dialogue*, III: 23 (p. 113).

³³ Lekai, *Cistercians*, p. 254.

³⁴ Canivez, *Statutes* I: 1191: 92.

³⁵ Canivez, *Statutes* I: 1152: 23; 1210: 5; see Williams, *Cistercians*, p. 226.

³⁶ *Ecclesiastica Officia*, p. 169 (57: 1).

Communion

Cistercian monks received communion more regularly than their Benedictine counterparts. Whereas the black monks of Cluny communicated once a month and on the major solemnities, the Cistercians received communion every Sunday and on feast days – in the early days of the Order this only included Pentecost and Christmas, but other feasts were later added. At first all communicants received the host and the chalice. The monk was given the host at the right of the altar, and then proceeded behind the altar to the left side where he took the Blood of Christ through a silver or gold-plated reed; thereafter the sacrist offered an ablution of wine. In 1261 the General Chapter expressed concern at the danger of taking the Blood of Christ from the chalice, and ruled that thenceforth the chalice should be reserved to those officiating at the altar;³⁷ communicants now received only the host, although the ablution of the mouth was retained.³⁸ Whilst it is not clear what exactly was feared – or why - their decision is in accordance with contemporary practice.³⁹ At the close of communion the celebrant returned to the altar and completed the ritual cleansing of the vessels with wine; water was only introduced in the late thirteenth century.⁴⁰ The statutes made no provision for a valedictory blessing, which was introduced as part of the seventeenth-century reform.⁴¹ When the ceremony was concluded the altar cloths were removed; these were generally linen, although from 1256 silk hangings were permitted.⁴²

In the early days of the Order the lay-brothers were to receive communion twelve times a year; this was later reduced to seven, which was still unusually frequent, since the laity only received communion up to three times a year. *The Laybrothers' Usages* explain in detail how the Pax (the Kiss of Peace) that preceded communion, should be administered: the most senior lay-brother proceeded to the door that connected the two choirs and there received the Pax from the mass-server; he then returned to the stalls and gave this kiss to the next in seniority - and so it was passed

³⁷ Canivez, *Statutes II*: 1261: 9.

³⁸ King, *Liturgies*, p. 130.

³⁹ See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 48. Rubin explains that a sip of unconsecrated wine often replaced the consecrated wine to give symbolic symmetry, and also, for more practical purposes, to help with swallowing the host, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ King, *Liturgies*, p. 148.

⁴¹ King, *Liturgies*, p. 149.

⁴² Canivez, *Statutes II*: 1256: 6.

down the line, rather like a Mexican wave.⁴³ It is not clear from the sources where exactly the lay-brothers received communion, but it is likely that they were served from altars that stood to the west of the rood screen, and did not actually approach the High Altar. Whilst the door of the rood screen that linked the two choirs would have remained open for the duration of communion, the lay-brothers would have seen very little, if anything, of the proceedings in the eastern part of the church, underlining the inherent division between these two inter-connected communities.

⁴³ *Lay-brothers' Usages*, ch. V (pp. 175-6).

The Liturgical Texts

And because we receive in our cloister all their monks who come to us, and they likewise receive our monks in their cloisters, it therefore seems to us opportune, and this also is our will, that they have the usages and chant and all the books necessary for the day and night hours and for Mass according to the form of the Usages and books of the New Monastery, so that there may be no discord in our conduct, but that we may live by one charity, one Rule, and like usages.⁴⁴

The Cistercians initially followed the liturgical texts from Molesme, which Robert had brought with him on the group's departure from the abbey. In 1099 Archbishop Hugh of Lyons agreed that the community might keep the *capella* (probably liturgical works and vestments) that they had brought from Molesme, but should return the *breviarium* (probably a night-office lectionary) although they were permitted to retain this for in order to make a copy.⁴⁵ It is unclear for how long the first community continued to follow Molesme's texts, but it seems that early on concern for accuracy and authenticity prompted them to seek the revision of these liturgical works, starting with Stephen Harding's critical edition of the Bible and followed by a revision of the hymnal (a choir book of hymns used in the canonical hours) and the antiphoner⁴⁶ (a choir book of chants sung at the canonical hours). The correction of these texts underpinned the Cistercians' desire for unity and uniformity of practice. To prevent irregularity and to ensure that every house was united through common observance, the corrected works were pronounced exemplars and it was declared that no new community should be founded without them. Thus, a monk visiting another abbey of the Order might take his place in choir and follow the worship there as in his own house.

⁴⁴ *Carta Caritatis* clause III, in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, p. 444.

⁴⁵ Waddell, 'The Molesme Cistercian Hymnal', p.79. For a copy of Archbishop Hugh's letter, see *The New Monastery: Texts and Studies on the Early Cistercians*, pp. 29-30. For a more detailed discussion see Waddell, 'The pre-Cistercian background of Cîteaux and the Cistercian liturgy'.

⁴⁶ Antiphoners (or antiphonaries) were generally large and shared; they were normally of seven volumes and divided according to the days of the week (temporal) and feast days (sanctoral), see J. France, *The Cistercians in Medieval Art*, p. 176.

The Process of Revision

(a) The Bible

In order to follow what was more authentic Stephen Harding, at that time prior of Cîteaux, sought to standardise the Vulgate. The discordance amongst various texts prompted Harding to approach several Jewish rabbis for elucidation from the Hebrew version. Harding's revisions were largely concerned with the removal of superfluous passages in the Book of Kings – the places are clear from where the parchment has been scraped – and he intended that this corrected Bible should be the official model for further copies; alterations were prohibited. The work reflects Harding's great zeal for authenticity and uniformity, but is today valued for its beautiful illuminations. It was originally bound in two volumes but now survives in Dijon in four.⁴⁷

(b) The hymnal

The *Rule of St Benedict* uses the term *ambrosianum* for the hymns at Vigils, Lauds and Vespers, and while this may have referred to the way in which the hymns were to be sung, it was commonly thought to refer to St Ambrose. Therefore, when the Cistercians were deciding what hymns should be sung in choir they turned to Milan, where it was believed that the text and melodies of St Ambrose's hymns survived.

The first revised hymnal was introduced by Stephen Harding c. 1108-12:

*By the common consent of our brothers and our decision we have ordained that henceforth these and no others are to be sung by us and those who come after us. This is because in his Rule (The Rule of St Benedict) - which we have decreed shall be kept with utmost zeal in this place – our blessed father and teacher, our Benedict, directed that these Ambrosian hymns be sung.*⁴⁸

A second revision was requested c. 1147, for the difficult Latin was found to impede singing; greater simplicity and brevity were needed and Bernard of Clairvaux was appointed to supervise the task. Bernard retained all of the Milanese hymns, but corrected some from alternative readings and divided the longer ones. Eighteen new hymns, selected from the Molesme hymnal, were introduced for Compline and the

⁴⁷ Dijon, Bibl. Municip. MS 12-15.

⁴⁸ *The New Monastery: Texts and Studies on the Early Cistercians*, p. 78.

Lesser Hours of Terce, Sext and None; seven new melodies were added and several re-written. This revised hymnal incorporated some fifty hymns and was extremely influential; it underwent minor revisions in the late twelfth-century, but was otherwise followed for the next five hundred years.⁴⁹

(c) The antiphoner

The Cistercians were greatly concerned with the musical qualities of the liturgy, and given the diversity of antiphonaries it was crucial to establish a standard and authoritative version. Stephen Harding sought to impose the purest form of the Gregorian chant, and one that was free from superfluities. As Metz was considered the home of the authentic Gregorian plain chant, Harding sent two monks to obtain copies of their antiphoner and gradual. The Metz chant was not, however, what they had expected. It was corrupt and *contemptible from every point of view*; lax, negligent and soiled by errors.⁵⁰ It bred apathy and disdain amongst those who used it, in particular the novices, and was blamed for slovenly worship. A change was needed and the General Chapter ordered the revision of Harding's work. Under the leadership of Bernard of Clairvaux, a committee skilled in the theory and practice of chant, examined various sources to devise rules for pure chant. They included Abbot Guy of Cherlieu and Guy d'Eu; Richard of Vauclairs, later abbot of Fountains, and William of Clairvaux, first abbot of Rievaulx, may also have been involved.⁵¹ Harding had relied on manuscript tradition alone to corroborate authority, but given the diversity of manuscripts, Bernard's committee looked to theoreticians for whom music was the science of singing correctly. They sought authenticity through reason, and advocated simplicity and unity.⁵² The revised text, therefore, reduced the number of feasts, imposed modal unity, restricted melodies to a range of ten notes and avoided

⁴⁹ Williams, *Cistercians*, p. 231; for the revised hymnal of 1656, see King, *Liturgies*, p. 97

⁵⁰ See C. Waddell, 'Monastic liturgy: prologue to the Cistercian antiphony', pp. 161-2 for a copy of this; see appendix II.

⁵¹ William certainly would have been involved in some capacity, since he and Bernard frequently discussed issues relating to the chant, Knowles, *Monastic Order*, p. 648.

⁵² Bernard's letter to the Victorines of Montier-Ramey reveals his views on the nature of music: *If there is singing the melody should be grave and not flippant or uncouth. It should be sweet and not frivolous; it should both enchant the ears and move the heart; it should lighten sad hearts and soften angry passions; and it should never obscure but enhance the sense of the words. Not a little spiritual profit is lost when the minds are distracted from the sense of the words by frivolity of the melody, when more is conveyed by the modulations of the voice than by the variations of the meaning* *The Letters of Bernard of Clairvaux*, ep. 430.

repetition.⁵³ The committee declared their new antiphoner *irreproachable in both music and text*, and the first draft was presented to the General Chapter before 1147. After minor modifications it was promulgated as the official text and was to be observed throughout the Order. The Cistercian houses in England may well have received copies of this antiphoner along with Bernard's preface.⁵⁴

Whilst the Cistercian Gregorian chant remained unaltered until the seventeenth century, the General Chapter had to repeatedly legislate to enforce their ideals and stamp out more innovative and elaborate musical styles. Inevitably, there was often a gap between ideal and reality. Throughout the twelfth century the General Chapter prohibited theatrical shrills and feminine screeches,⁵⁵ and insisted upon manly voices, a point reiterated by both Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx. Fourteenth-century statutes reveal that syncopation and polyphony had been adopted in some houses; these were expressly denounced, but to little avail and novelties continued. The organ was officially sanctioned in 1486, but had hitherto been played, and indeed a surviving inventory of 1396 from Meaux, Yorkshire, reveals that there was a small organ in the choir and a larger one at the west end.⁵⁶

In the nineteenth century the monks of Solesme endeavoured to restore the Cistercian Gregorian Chant 'to its original beauty', and their work was continued by monks of the Strict Observance. The revised Gradual was published in 1899, the Antiphoner in 1903.⁵⁷

The maintenance of uniformity

It was one thing to establish a framework to create uniformity, but its observance was quite another matter and became increasingly difficult with the growth of the Order. That there were variations and deviations is borne out in the few surviving liturgical manuscripts from England.⁵⁸ A mid-fourteenth century nocturnal that may originate

⁵³ For a detailed discussion, see C. Maitre, 'Authority and reason in the Cistercian theory of music', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 29:2 (1994) pp. 197-208.

⁵⁴ Knowles, *Monastic Order*, p. 648.

⁵⁵ *Capitula*, LXXV in Waddell, *Narrative and Legislative Texts*, p. 489.

⁵⁶ James, *Cistercians in Medieval Art*, p. 173. *Meaux* III, p. lxxxii.

⁵⁷ Lekai, *Cistercians*, p. 253.

⁵⁸ See Chadd, 'Liturgy and liturgical music', in Norton and Park, *Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, pp. 306ff. No chant books survive, there is one tonal (a late twelfth-century Rievaulx manuscript

from Fountains includes ‘illegal saints’ and even accords William of York a feast of twelve lessons. As calendars were continually modified and updated they were most prone to variation. They might also include authorised variations, since the General Chapter received petitions for permission to commemorate a national saint. At the request of the Cistercian abbots in England, Thomas Becket was commemorated from 1185; Edmund, king and martyr, from 1221; King Edward the Confessor from 1235.⁵⁹ Whilst some degree of diversity was inevitable (and authorised), diversity was heightened through ignorance, negligence and defiance. For example, those who did not attend the annual General Chapter at Cîteaux - or did not pay attention while there - may not have been aware of new legislation regarding liturgical practice.⁶⁰ Others may have chosen to ignore prescriptions and were not necessarily upbraided at the visitation of their house; it is not, in fact, clear whether visitors were expected to check the service-books.⁶¹ These factors contributed to the gap between the ideals of the General Chapter and their observance by members of the Order.

now in Jesus Coll. Cambridge, MS 34), one office book (of the mid fourteenth-century, perhaps from Fountains) and five missals – four of these date from the twelfth / early thirteenth centuries, and one from the fifteenth century (three are in the BL, one is in Cambridge UL, one in Stoneyhurst College).

⁵⁹ Canivez, *Statutes* I: 1185: 36; II: 1221: 50; 1235: 15.

⁶⁰ See Chadd, ‘Liturgy and liturgical music’, p. 310.

⁶¹ See Chadd, ‘Liturgy and visitation’, pp. 313-4.

Appendix I: Aelred of Rievaulx⁶²

Where, I ask, do all these organs in the church come from, all these chimes? To what purpose, I ask you, is the terrible snorting of bellows, more like a clap of thunder than the sweetness of a voice? Why that swelling and swooping of the voice? One person sings bass, another sings alto, yet another sings soprano. Still another ornaments and trills up and down on the melody. At one moment the voice strains, the next it wanes. First it speeds up, then it slows down with all manner of sounds. Sometimes - it is shameful to say - it is expelled like the neighing of horses, sometimes manly strength set aside, it is constricted to the shrillness of a woman's voice. Sometimes it is turned and twisted in some sort of artful trill. Sometimes you see a man with his mouth open as if he were breathing his last breath, not singing but threatening silence, as it were, by ridiculous interruption of the melody into snatches.⁶³ Now he imitates the agonies of the dying or the swooning of persons in pain. In the meantime his whole body is violently agitated by histrionic gesticulations - contorted lips, rolling eyes, hunching shoulders - and drumming fingers keep time with every single note. And this ridiculous dissipation is called religious observance. And it is loudly claimed that where this sort of agitation is more frequent, God is more honourably served. Meanwhile ordinary folk stand there awestruck, stupefied, marvelling at the din of bellows, the humming of chimes and the harmony of pipes. But they regard the saucy gestures of the singers and the alluring variation and dropping of the voices with considerable jeering and snickering, until you would think they had come, not into an oratory, but to a theatre, not to pray but to gawk. ... sound should not be given precedence over meaning, but sound with meaning should generally be allowed to stimulate greater attachment. Therefore the sound should be so moderate, so marked by gravity that it does not captivate the whole spirit to amusement in itself, but leaves the greater part to the meaning. Blessed Augustine, of course, said, 'The soul is moved to a sentiment of piety on hearing sacred chant. But if a longing to listen desires the sound more than the meaning, it should be censured.' And elsewhere he says, 'When the singing delights me more than the words I acknowledge that I have sinned through my fault, and I would prefer not to listen to the singer.'

⁶² *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Mirror of Charity*, bk. II, ch. 23: 'The vain pleasure of the ears', tr. E. Connor (Kalamazoo, 1990) pp. 209-212.

⁶³ This is a reference to the *hocket*: an early medieval contrapuntal style that interspersed notes of a melody with rests, thus rendering a staccato effect.

Appendix II: Prologue to the Cistercian Antiphoner⁶⁴

Bernard, humble abbot of Clairvaux

To all who are to transcribe this antiphonary or sing from it

There were a number of things for which our Fathers, that is to say, those who began the Cistercian Order were zealous, and rightly so. Among those concerns, the chanting of the divine praises according to the most authentic version was the object of their most earnest, dedicated efforts. They accordingly sent persons to transcribe and bring back the Metz antiphonary, since this antiphonary, it was said, was 'Gregorian'. They found the reality far different from what they had heard. For, upon examination, the antiphonary was to be revised and corrected, they put me in charge of the task. I, however, summoned those of these same brethren of ours, who proved to be better instructed and more skilful in the theory and practice of chant. We put together the new antiphonary – presented in the following volume – from many different sources; and we believe that, textually and musically, it is beyond reproach. Anyone who sings from this antiphonary will prove this (provided, of course, he knows something about chant).

We, therefore wish that, from now on, the antiphonary as revised and contained in this volume, be adopted in our monasteries, both as regards texts and melodies; and, in virtue of the authority of the whole General Chapter, where this antiphonary was accepted and confirmed by all the abbots, we prohibit change whatsoever to be made by anyone and in any way. Should the reader wish to know in greater detail the reasons and principles behind the present revision, he should read the following preface, which the above-mentioned revisers of the old antiphonary were at pains to prefix to the new version. A clear exposé of the textual and musical faults of the earlier volume will make the necessity and usefulness of the revised, corrected antiphonary appear in clearer light.

⁶⁴ C. Waddell, 'Monastic liturgy: prologue to the Cistercian antiphonary', in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux: Treatises I* (1970) pp. 161-2.

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The Cistercians sought to impose a liturgy that was simple and faithful to the Rule of St Benedict, and stripped away appendages that had steadily accumulated over the centuries. They introduced a liturgy that was greatly reduced and centred on the eight canonical hours and a daily conventual mass – a second mass was soon added on Sundays and feast days. [Click here to read this article from Cistercians in Yorkshire.](#) Sign up to get a Weekly Email from Medievalists.net. * indicates required. (See ALEXANDRINE LITURGY; AMBROSIAN LITURGY; ANTIOCHENE LITURGY; CELTIC RITE; Clementine Liturgy, treated in CLEMENT I; RITE OF CONSTANTINOPLE; GALLICAN RITE; LITURGY OF JERUSALEM; MOZARABIC RITE; SARUM RITE; SYRIAN RITE; SYRO-JACOBITE LITURGY.) In this article they are considered only from the point of view of their relation to one another in the most general sense, and an account is given of what is known about the growth of a fixed liturgy as such in the early Church. Liturgy (leitourgia) is a Greek composite word meaning originally a public duty, a service to the state undertaken by a citizen. Its elements are leitōs (from leōs = laos, people) meaning public, and ergo (obsolete in the present stem, used in future erō, etc.), to do. Names & Abbreviations: Cistercian Order, Cistercians of the Original (Common) Observance, O. Cist.; Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, Trappists, O.C.S.O. Date of Foundation(s): 1098 (O. Cist.), 1892 (O.C.S.O). Founder(s): Sts. In addition to having designated times for private prayer, we celebrate together the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours daily. It is through prayer that we seek to raise our minds and hearts to God and live in union with Christ; for it is from him that we find inspiration for all our activities and the ability to discern the direction of our lives.