

By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy by Paul F. Ford. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

On the copyright and credits page of this handsomely produced volume, one is disquieted to read that “*By Flowing Waters* . . . is in no sense an official liturgical book. It is designed as a collection of chants, chiefly from biblical and liturgical sources, for use during the liturgy when alternatives to official liturgical texts may be chosen.” This would suggest the notorious rubrical authorization of “another suitable song” as the rationale for this book. But an examination of the contents does not really bear this out. Chants are provided for all the proper parts of the Mass as well as several Ordinary settings and some miscellaneous hymns and responsories. The point of the caveat on the copyright page may well be that throughout the book the Psalm texts and other scriptural portions are from the New Revised Standard Version, which, as is well known, has been refused recognition for use in the liturgy in the United States.

This textual problem would appear to make the collection inadmissible for liturgical use in this country. In any case, one would be surprised to see it making much headway in the pews of very many parishes, although it certainly would be a significant improvement, musically speaking, over the “songbooks” full of jaunty sacro-pop tunes and melancholy ballads which currently infest the *Ecclesia orans*.

By Flowing Waters is, in fact, an English version of the *Graduale Simplex*. Whatever one’s feelings about that publication (mine are not very positive), this attempt to adapt Gregorian melodies to English words is, one may well feel, doomed to the same kind of failure with which its many predecessors have met. There is simply no way to do the trick without distorting something –either the rhythm of the music or the rhythm of the words.

Without adverting for the moment to the musical problems of an almost exclusively responsive format, or to the question of the appropriateness of taking chant “snippets” from the Divine Office and other sources and Shanghai-ing them into service at Holy Mass, it seems clear that people who would like to sing or hear chant at Mass probably would just as soon sing or hear the authentic melodies from the *Graduale Romanum*, and sing or hear them in Latin. The well-enunciated (by Msgr. Schuler and others) principle of “vernacular texts need music specifically composed for vernacular texts” holds good today.

Now, to advert to some musical considerations, is there not a certain monotony and consequent discontent almost built in to the idea of singing practically everything with short, quite unchallenging refrains for the people and longer, but still pretty unchallenging verses for the cantor (useful as this practice certainly is, if not overdone)? The proponents of the “ritual-music” theory of functionalism as the main principle of musical liturgy have tended to advocate this sort of thing, and practically everyone involved in making music in church has used it for some purposes, but the treasury which the Council commanded to be preserved “*summa cura*” surely affords greater riches to be explored.

But one’s primary objection to *By Flowing Waters*, carefully crafted and musically tasteful as Professor Ford’s work undeniably is, remains one of emphasis. Where the *Graduale Simplex* becomes the standard book of chant, the richer repertoire of the *Graduale Romanum* is almost inevitably lost (*vide* St. Peter’s in Rome.)

Calvert Shenk

To: Calvert Shenk
From: Paul Ford

Dear Mr. Shenk,

I am sorry I missed seeing you at the Chicago consultation on the music of the new edition of the Roman Missal. I hope you received a copy of my comments which I had asked to be distributed at that meeting in my absence (I shall append them to this message).

The latest issue of *Sacred Music* just arrived at our seminary library and I found your review of my book, *By Flowing Waters*, that I have long been awaiting since I had The Liturgical Press send you a review copy.

I am glad you found my work well-crafted and musically tasteful and the volume handsomely produced. I agree with you that its use in the pews would be a significant improvement. And I am glad that you detected that my book is a very faithful English version of the 1988 *editio typica altera* of the *Graduale Simplex*. I will note my other points of agreement shortly.

I wish you had known that the disclaimer at the top of the copyrights/credits page was revised in light of the GIRM 2002 by Msgr. James Moroney of the USCCB Secretariat for Liturgy last July 2, 2003 (partly as a consequence of your suggestion ten months ago that I approach Bishop Vigneron and Msgr. Moroney). This removes the “textual problem” you mention. The substance of Msgr. Moroney’s letter follows (copy attached):

By Flowing Waters: Chant for the Liturgy, although not an official liturgical book, is approved for publication by the USCCB Committee on the Liturgy. The chants are translated from the *Graduale Simplex* and may be used as sung settings of the Responsorial Psalm, Entrance, and Communion Chants.

I wonder if you would do my work the kindness of a note to this effect in the next issue of *Sacred Music*?

The previous disclaimer had to be published in order for the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy to permit ICEL to release its Roman-approved English translation of the *Graduale Simplex* for use in my book.

May I say without offense that my friends in the Adoremus Society exaggerate the “textual problem” because they misunderstand the significance of the Roman request for the withdrawal of the NRSV as the translation for liturgical proclamation at the Eucharist in the US? Few are aware that this was done in favor of the USCCB’s proposal to Rome of one translation per conference of bishops so that their own translation, the RNAB, would be the only one used in the US, at some financial advantage to the conference—I hope this was not the only motive.

So although the NRSV may not be PROCLAIMED at the Eucharist in the US still, this does not mean that it may not be SUNG, a permission that has existed as particular law for the US since Rome confirmed it on December 17, 1968. The NRSV continues to enjoy the imprimatur; and I have agreed with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in advance of the completion of their negotiations on Roman-required changes in the translation to incorporate all the changes in the next edition and make them immediately available on the *By Flowing Waters* website and my

website: <http://www.pford.stjohnsem.edu/> with its special section on *By Flowing Waters*
<http://www.pford.stjohnsem.edu/PFordsite/ByFlowingWaters.htm> and the Index of Latin
Originals
<http://www.pford.stjohnsem.edu/PFordsite/BFW%20site/BFW%20items/New%20Indexes/Index%20of%20Latin%20Antiphons.pdf>

May I also say that I love chanting the Mass from the *Graduale Romanum*, that I teach chant at my seminary and conduct a schola which sings weekly there in hopes of keeping chant alive in the Church, and that I agree with Msgr. Schuler that “vernacular texts need music specifically composed for vernacular texts”? I was hoping to have a kinder reception of my efforts in the pages of *Sacred Music* but I am happy for the positive things you did say and I wish you very well.

Sincerely,

Paul F. Ford