

My Approach to Setting Gospels for Chanting

The liturgical importance of the Gospel in the Eucharist is highlighted by having all who are able stand for the reading of the Gospel and by reading it from a handsome Gospel Book. A further step is to have a Gospel procession (minimally with the Deacon or Priest walking alone into the congregation, maximally with Cross, Tapers, someone to hold the Gospel Book, and censing the Gospel Book). Chanting rather than reading the Gospel adds yet another degree of solemnity to the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Here I would like to explain my approach (intention and methods) in the settings of Gospels that I have done.

My intention is to provide settings for Gospel chanting which will enable those who are not gifted musically to nevertheless chant Gospels well and in a manner which keeps the attention of hearers and brings out the meaning of the Gospel passage. To this end I have chosen not the easiest and perhaps most commonly heard method of Gospel chanting (Gospel Tone II in the “Musical Appendix” to *The Altar Book*, which is identical to what I call Method #1 in the *Liber Usualis*), because it lacks flexibility in the rendering the end of sentences and lacks the figure of the Metrum, which can add expression and variety to long sentences.

Instead I have chosen to use Gospel Tone I in the “Musical Appendix” to *The Altar Book* because it *does* utilize the Metrum, and to use both the Metrum and the Punctum that ends sentences in a flexible way, trying to apply them to the text in a way that brings out to the extent possible the meaning of the text.

There is more than one way to chant the Gospel. The *Liber Usualis* (an authoritative volume on Gregorian chant as done

before Vatican II that is widely known among church musicians) gives three “Tones” for chanting the Gospel. The “Musical Appendix” to *The Altar Book* of the Episcopal Church gives two “Tones” for Gospel chanting. And then there are non-Gregorian traditions of liturgical chant (such as the Ambrosian of Milan, the Byzantine, Russian, and other Orthodox traditions, and other oriental traditions, like the Nestorian and the Ethiopian).

Staying within the Gregorian tradition represented by the *Liber Usualis* and *The Altar Book*, we have several methods of chanting the Gospel.

The *Liber Usualis* gives three methods for Gospel chanting. The first given (on page 106 in my English edition) I will call “Method #1.” It is actually the most recent of the three tones and is probably the easiest to do. This Method #1 appears in the “Musical Appendix” to *The Altar Book* as “Gospel Tone II.”

The second method given in the *Liber Usualis* (titled “Another Tone as libitum” and which I will call “Method #2”) is older than Method #1 (high Middle Ages?) and can be described as “subsemitonal” (having a drop of two steps at the Punctum, but more on that later). “Gospel Tone I” in the “Musical Appendix” to *The Altar Book* is closest (but not entirely identical) to this method.

The third method given in the *Liber Usualis* (“There is still another tone, more ancient, as follows:”) (which I call “Method #3”) is subtonal, having a drop of only one step at the Punctum.

The “Gospel Tone I” of the “Musical Appendix” to *The Altar Book* is what I have used for all my settings, but it would not be difficult for someone to modify them slightly (without necessarily correcting with a pencil but just by singing it differently) and use them for chanting using Method #2 or Method #3.