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# Liszt's "authentisch-kirchlich-liturgische Jagd", or the Quest for Gregorian Modernity

Nicolas Dufetel

## Introduction

The idea of progress is essential for the understanding of Liszt's oeuvre and aesthetics. His piano technique, the invention of the symphonic poem, his musical language and his search for extended tonality, chromaticism and modality, eventually his role as an interpret of the music of his fellow composers, show him as a restless advocate of modernity. In 1884, when he was asked by Theodor Michaelis to support his *Chefs d'oeuvres classiques de l'opéra français* (Lully, and Rameau), he declined with the following explanation: "Without lacking any respect to the ancestors, I have devoted myself entirely to their brave offspring<sup>1</sup>". Yet Liszt always tried to balance his quest for modernity with his deference and creative inquisitiveness for the past. His religious music may be the best illustration of an applied philosophy of history and historical Aesthetics in close association to Hegel:

"Just as the arts of outward life, the accumulated skill and invention, the customs and arrangements of social and political life, are the result of the thought, care, and needs, of the want and the misery, of the ingenuity, the plans and achievements of those who preceded us in history, so, likewise, in science, and specially in Philosophy, do we owe what we are to the tradition which, as Herder has put it [*Zur philosophie und Geschichte*] like a holy chain, runs through all that was transient, and has therefore passed away. Thus has been preserved and transmitted to us what antiquity produced.

But this tradition is not only a stewardess who simply guards faithfully that which she has received, and thus delivers it unchanged to posterity, just as the course of nature in the infinite change and activity of its forms ever remains constant to its original laws and makes no step in advance. Such tradition is no motionless statue, but is alive, and swells like a mighty river, which increases in size the further it advances from its source<sup>2</sup>."

The purpose of this paper is to present why and how Liszt studied, incorporated and assimilated Gregorian melodies in his compositions, mostly in his oratorio *Christus*.

## I. Progress and Regeneration

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<sup>1</sup> Liszt, letter to Theodor Michaelis, October 20, 1884 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, ed. by La Mara, vol. 8, Leipzig 1905, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E. Z. Haldane, vol. 1, Lincoln and London 1995, vol. 1, p. 2.

The idea of progress, as developed by Hegel and Hegelians in the field of general Philosophy, Philosophy of history, and historical Aesthetics, was a dominant concern during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Adolf Bernhard Marx and Franz Brendel blended it into their Darwinian conception of the history of music<sup>3</sup>. In his brochure *De la Fondation-Goethe à Weimar*, Liszt writes about the “new ideas that Humanity has been continuously creating since its origin”, before quoting Leibniz: “The Present, shaped by the Past, creates the Future<sup>4</sup>”. Liszt’s obsession with the balance between traditions and modernity, sustained and clarified by the concept of progress, can be found in many of his writings and letters, among them the ones to princess Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, who shared his view on this concept. In their article about Donizetti’s *Favorite*, for instance, one can read that: “Art, in its restless progress, knows no power that can set any limits [to its development] nor tell to the waves of the spirit: ‘till here, no further!’<sup>5</sup>” ; and in the one on Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, an unquenchable thirst for progress is said to be the main characteristic of Genius: “Genius, in the works of art, reveal itself mainly with an incessant movement toward progress<sup>6</sup>”. To his daughter Blandine, Liszt eventually wrote that art, as well as society, is “worked out” by progress: “May the artists never give up; art, as society, is silently worked out by an limitless need for extension and progress. An indefinite power drives it forward<sup>7</sup>.”

Much has been written about the “modernity” of Liszt’s music<sup>8</sup>, and there is no doubt that Liszt himself always took responsibility for his modern ideas. The famous following statement, for example, usually functions as an illustration to his faith in future: “My only ambition as a musician was and will be to cast my lance into the infinite space of the future... Provided that this lance is well-tempered and does not fall to earth, the rest is of no importance to me.”<sup>9</sup> However, it shall be noted that it is not in fact *solely* by Liszt, who is repeating word for word a phrase used in one of Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein’s letters; he himself places it in quotation marks, but La Mara

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<sup>3</sup> John Williamson, “Progress, modernity and the concept of an avant-garde”, in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. by Jim Samson, Cambridge 2001, p. 287-318.

<sup>4</sup> Liszt, *Die Goethe-Stiftung*, in *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 3 (*Die Goethe-Stiftung*), ed. by Detlef Altenburg, Britta Schilling-Wang, Wolfram Huschke and Wolfgang Marggraf, Wiesbaden 1997, p. 70. Originally in French. The French source may have been Pierre Leroux, *Réfutation de l’éclectisme, où se trouve exposée la vraie définition de la philosophie, et où l’on explique le sens, la suite et l’enchaînement des divers philosophes depuis Descartes*, Paris 1841, p. 17. See also Liszt, *Die Goethe-Stiftung*, p. 323.

<sup>5</sup> Liszt, “Donizetti’s Favoritin” in *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 3 (*Dramaturgische Blätter*), ed. by Dorothea Redepenning, Britta Schilling and Detlef Altenburg, Wiesbaden 1989, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Liszt, « Le *Fidelio* de Beethoven », in *L’Europe artiste*, 18 février 1855 (original in French). For other quotes, see Nicolas Dufétel, *Franz Liszt. Tout le ciel en musique: pensées intempestives*, Paris, 2016, n° 11, 16, 29, 43, 58, 125, 180, 182, 268, 329, 577.

<sup>7</sup> Liszt, letter to Blandine Ollivier, June 14, 1861 (original in French), in *Correspondance de Liszt et de sa fille Madame Émile Ollivier. 1842-1862*, ed. by Ollivier, Daniel, Paris 1936, p. 274.

<sup>8</sup> See for example René Leibowitz, *L’évolution de la musique, de Bach à Schoenberg*, Paris 1951; László Somfai, “Die Metamorphose der ‘Faust-Symphonie’ von Liszt,” in *Studia Musicologica* 5 (1964): 283–293; Dorothea Redepenning, *Das Spätwerk Franz Liszts: Bearbeitungen eigener Kompositionen*, Hamburg 1984; *Liszt the Progressive*, ed. by Hans Kagebeck and Johan Lagerfelt, Lewiston 2001; Serge Gut, *Franz Liszt. Les éléments du langage musical*, Paris 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Liszt, letter to Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein, February 9, 1874 (original in French), *Franz Liszt’s Briefe*, vol. 7, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1902, p. 57-58. See Dufétel, “Nella Selva Oscura...: Discovering Liszt,” in *Liszt. A Chorus of Voices. Observations from Lisztians around the World*, ed. by Michael Saffle, John C. Tibbetts, and Claire McKinney, Hillsdale 2012, p. 106-114.

removed them and in that way altered our perception of the matter.<sup>10</sup> May this example recall the importance of careful study of primary sources as long as there is no critical edition of Liszt's correspondence, and whatever its ultimate origins, this statement about Liszt's "lance" serves merely as one more example of the need for a critical study of the sources.

In 1855, Bülow considered Liszt's *Psalm XIII.* as "Zukunfts-Kirchenmusik", and was astonished that Stern, despite his "antécédants Mendelssohniaques" ("Mendelssohniaque antecedents": a metaphor for being anti-*Neudeutschen*), liked it and agreed to conduct it at one of his concerts<sup>11</sup>. The next year, after the performances of his *Missa solennis (Graner Messe)* and *Missa quattuor vocum ad aequales*, Liszt wrote that he had been very happy that Father Santoffi called him "*der Regenerator der Kirchen Musik*", commenting that "this idea starts to gain a foothold among the intelligent fraction of this country's clergy<sup>12</sup>". And in fact, from a practical point of view, Liszt always tried to balance his compositions and desire for modernity with the catholic traditions.

It was during the 1830s, while he was living in Paris, that Liszt first developed an interest in plainchant and in the music of the Renaissance, mainly the Roman School. In his own words, he wanted to play a part in the "regeneration of religious music," an idea he explains in his famous essay of 1835, *De la musique religieuse*.<sup>13</sup> The catholic traditions of the Renaissance and Chant were the two pillars on which Liszt based his regeneration of Church music. From the second half of the 1850s and particularly in the 1860s, he cautiously studied them in many books and scores, even manuscripts that he had copied, and that still bear his annotations.

In 1853, in the introduction to his *Dictionnaire liturgique, historique et théorique de plain-chant*, Joseph d'Ortigue, Liszt's old friend from the Parisian years, sought to champion the music of the past: "The reader will understand that it is not our aim to say much that is new. Our aim, rather, is to provide much that is old – old in a good sense. This is arguably harder to find than the new. It becomes new by dint of being old."<sup>14</sup> Two years after d'Ortigue's dictionary was published, Liszt wrote to Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein to inform her that his "travel reading was the plainchant dictionary of Joseph d'Ortigue," full of "interesting things."<sup>15</sup> In 1861 Liszt settled in Rome—in part because princess Sayn-Wittgenstein was living there, in part as fulfilment of his youthful dream of devoting himself to religious music. More important, he accepted an

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<sup>10</sup> See the autograph letter, D-WRgs 59/89, n° 7.

<sup>11</sup> Liszt, letter to Hans von Bülow, Septembre 30, 1855 (original in French), in *Briefwechsel zwischen Franz Liszt und Carl Hans von Bülow*, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1898, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Liszt, letter to Marie von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Sepember 9, 1856 (original in French), *Lettres de Liszt à la princesse Marie de Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, née de Sayn-Wittgenstein*, ed. by Pauline Pocknell, Malou Haine and Nicolas Dufetel, Paris 2011, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> Franz Liszt, "De la musique religieuse", quoted from Liszt, *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 1 (*Frühe Schriften*), ed. by Rainer Kleinertz and Serge Gut, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 52-58.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph d'Ortigue, *Dictionnaire liturgique, historique et théorique de plain-chant*, Paris 1853, col. XV-XVI.

<sup>15</sup> Liszt, letter to Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, August 9, 1856 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, vol. 4, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1899, p. 311.

invitation from Monsignor Gustav zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, the Pope's Grand Almoner. As he wrote in 1859, Hohenlohe wanted to give Liszt the opportunity to realize his "plan" for "saving" Church music:

"Opinions on sacred music are nowadays well and truly divided, and it is up to your genius to decide on the form that it should take from now on. May your inspiration guide you by the grace of God. This inspiration will be the soul and the delight of the faithful, a powerful weapon that will bring more and more of our prodigal children back into the bosom of our holy mother, the Church. Once you are in Rome, I very much look forward to learning details of the plan that you have formed with regard to religious music, and I am writing to you now to offer you a modest place to stay with me in the Vatican, an offer that I make in all sincerity and with immediate effect."<sup>16</sup>

How could a composer with profoundly Catholic sensitivities resist such blandishments, especially when that composer had for decades harbored ambitions for the future of religious music? Liszt's "plan," as mentioned by Hohenlohe, can be reconstructed in part thanks to Liszt's writings and various other documents. One letter regarding the "canon of the chant of the church," is of particular importance. Liszt wanted to adapt what he called the "old" notation and wrote about this idea to Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein on July 24, 1860, when he was preparing for his future work on Catholic music and his Roman stay.<sup>17</sup> He also wanted to read anew the memorandum on the reform of Church music presented by Spontini to Pope Gregory XVI in 1839. Two months after his arrival in Rome, Liszt told his daughter Blandine that he was reading d'Ortigue's *Dictionnaire*, for him "a great source of instruction."<sup>18</sup> As if to highlight his attachment to this volume, Liszt went on to explain to Blandine that he had "given it the honor of having it bound in a beautiful white parchment *à la romaine*, perfectly matching the contents of this excellent work."<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, Liszt's copy of this *Dictionnaire* has been lost, but it was almost certainly heavily annotated. Its loss represents a setback for the study of his religious music, because he—by his own admission—was particularly fond of dictionaries.<sup>20</sup>

In 1860, when Liszt had made his decision to leave Weimar and his activities as a Kappellmeister — another "transformation" of his career —, he looked back at his accomplishment for the Neudeutsche Schule, and made a clear statement about the

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<sup>16</sup> Gustav von Hohenlohe, letter to Liszt, September 28, 1859 (original in French), D-WRgs 59/18, 11 n° 1. Published with minor variants in *Briefe hervorragender Zeitgenossen an Franz Liszt*, vol. 2, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1895, p. 251.

<sup>17</sup> Liszt, letter to Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, July 24, 1860 (original in French), D-WRgs 59/81, 1 n° 21. Published with minor variants in *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, vol. 5, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1900, p. 33-36.

<sup>18</sup> Liszt, letter to Blandine Ollivier, December 25, 1861 (original in French), in *Correspondance de Liszt et de sa fille Madame Blandine Ollivier*, p. 298.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See for instance what Liszt wrote to Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein on February 12, 1861: "I have always had a mania for dictionaries! May I find soon the pleasure to cultivate it more—close to you" (original in French, D-WRgs 59/82, 1, n° 8, edited in *Franz Liszt's Briefe*, vol. 5, p. 131, where an important part of the letter, before the last sentence, has been cut. That part contains quotations from the definition of "onomastique" as found in two different dictionaries: the Académie française and the Bescherelle. See Dufetel, *Franz Liszt. Tout le ciel en musique*, p. 216.

“enemies” and “opponents” he had to face all his artistic life. This comment, in a letter to Agnes Street-Klindworth, helps us understand his relationship with—or more precisely his appreciation of—musical tradition and his creative inquisitiveness for the past:

“If, when I settled here [Weimar] in 1848, I had decided to attach myself to the *posthumous* party in music, to share in its hypocrisy, to flatter its prejudices, etc., nothing would have been easier for me through my earlier connections with the chief bigwigs of that crew. By so doing I would certainly have won myself more esteem and pleasanter relations in the outside world; the same newspapers which have assumed the responsibility of abusing me with a host of stupidities and insults would have outdone each other in praising and celebrating me, without my having to go to much trouble about it. They would have gladly *whitewashed* a few of my youthful peccadillos in order to laud and boos in every way the *partisan* of good and sound traditions from Palestrina up to Mendelssohn.

But that was not to be my fate; my conviction was too sincere, my faith in the present and future of the art was both too fervent and too firm for me to be able to be content with the empty objurgatory [from *objurgate*: “to scold or rebuke sharply; berate”] formulae of our pseudo-classicists, who shriek until they are blue in the face that the art is being ruined.<sup>21</sup>”

Liszt refers here to his interest in “fine and wholesome traditions” that were not, however, understood by the “pseudo-Classicists”, i.e. composers who thought the only way to celebrate the past and traditions was to treat them as sacred and untouchable. Such conservative musicians were blinded by his much-touted progressivism and thus unable to appreciate his paradoxical traditionalist “zeal.” Liszt was a Janus-like figure who wanted to reconcile tradition and modernity<sup>22</sup>.

By that time, he had decided to devote himself entirely to Church music and was studying carefully its traditions. In 1862, the year he finished *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth*, he wrote to Franz Brendel: “Nachdem ich die mir gestellte *symphonische* Aufgabe in Deutschland, so gut ich es vermochte, zum grösseren Theil gelöst habe, will ich nunmehr die *oratorische* (nebst einigen zu derselben in Bezug stehenden Werken) erfüllen<sup>23</sup>”. No doubt that he considered his mission about instrumental and religious music as a counterpart to Wagner’s one regarding opera. In 1863, in another letter to Street-Klindworth, written in Rome, he explains that he is

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<sup>21</sup> Liszt, letter to Agnes Street-Klindworth, November 16, 1860 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt and Agnès Street-Klindworth: A Correspondence, 1854-1886*, ed. by Pauline Pocknell, Hillsdale 2000, p. 187 and 352.

<sup>22</sup> See Nicolas Dufetel, « Religious Workshop and Gregorian Chant: The Janus Liszt, or How to Make New with the Old », in *Liszt’s Legacies. Based on papers presented at the International Liszt Conference held at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada ; 28-31 July 2011*, ed. by James Deaville and Michael Saffle, Hillsdale 2014, p. 43-71.

<sup>23</sup> Liszt, letter to Franz Brendel, November 8, 1862 (original in French), *Franz Liszt’s Briefe*, vol. 2, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1893, p. 28.

following a method, or “system used constantly in Rome with regards to the Christian monuments”:

“Do not the magnificent pillars of Sainte Marie des Anges come from Diocletian’s thermal baths, and has not the bronze from the Pantheon found a use as the baldachin of Saint Peter’s altar? One could go on for ever listing similar transformations, for at every turn here, one is struck by the harmony in the divine plan and between what was, what is, and what will be. And so I am singularly attached to Rome [...].<sup>24</sup>”

This description of “palimpsest” compositions, absorbing traditions and transforming them, is a useful and crucial guideline to any analysis of his (Church) music.

The historian of literature Sarga Moussa has noticed in Liszt’s book *Des bohémiens, et de leur musique en Hongrie* the presence of the rare word “intussusception”. Far from being insignificant, it maybe a key to the understanding of Liszt’s creative process. Indeed, “intussusception”, still used in Medicine and Botany, has its origin from the modern Latin “intussusceptio”, from *intus* (*within*) and *susceptio/suscipere* (*take up*); it means “incorporation”, or “absorption”, but aiming to create a new substance (in Botanic, “the growth a cell wall by the deposition of cellulose<sup>25</sup>”). Liszt’s interest for the Chant corresponds to this idea.

In 1862, Liszt asked his old friend d’Ortigue about his opinion of the Abbé Raillard, one of many figures seeking to revive plainchant at this time. Liszt, who calls Raillard the “knight without fear of Gregorian Chant”, writes that: “The most daring excesses of the music of the future are no more than childish timidity when set beside the heroism of true plainchant, which is stuffed full of quarter-tones, tristrophs and strophicus authenticated by the Abbé Raillard.”<sup>26</sup> Liszt’s claims are unambiguous: the music of the future is unadventurous when compared with the “heroism”, i.e. the courageous modernity of “true plainchant.” Of course, there are in fact no quarter-tones or “tristrophs” in his own religious music. Much of that music does, however, contain Gregorian elements — elements that can be used to renew musical language and, paradoxically, as old things become “new by dint of being old” (d’Ortigue) can also represent a turn toward the future.

## II. Gregorian modernity

Scholars have long known about the existence of Gregorian melodies in Liszt’s works, and his interest in this part of the religious repertory has already been acknowledged. Already in 1923, Heinrich Sambeth wrote a dissertation on *Franz Liszt und die Gregorianischen Melodien und ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklung seiner Religiosität*

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<sup>24</sup> Liszt, letter to Agnes Street-Klindworth, August 30, 1863 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt and Agnes Street-Klindworth*, p. 217 and 360.

<sup>25</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford 2010, p. 918 (“intussusception”).

<sup>26</sup> Liszt, letter to d’Ortigue, November 28, 1862 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt’s Briefe*, vol. 8, p. 155-158.

*und Kunstanschauung*<sup>27</sup>. But there is still no serious modern study of this phenomenon that preoccupied Liszt during the whole of his career. This is a particularly fertile field of study that covers his complete output, whether it be sacred or secular, vocal, orchestral and even pianistic, and that extends over more than forty years. Indeed, from the early version of the secular *Totentanz* (1839) until the unfinished oratorio *Die Legende vom heiligen Stanislaus*, Liszt's music makes heavily use of Gregorian melodies. Moreover, the available sources are not only plentiful in number but for the most part still largely unexamined. In the main they comprise Liszt's own music manuscripts, together with the many references to the Chant in his letters and the books that he owned and annotated. As a Catholic, Liszt was brought up listening to melodies from the Gregorian repertory. But beside this oral tradition, he also could have got to know Gregorian melodies in liturgical books of one kind or another: Roman missals and graduals, books on the history of music, and theoretical and practical treatises on plainchant, are preserved in Budapest and Weimar, with his annotations (Herzogin Anna Amalia Library, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Centre)<sup>28</sup>.

Gregorian melodies can be found in almost every area of his oeuvre in three different ways:

1. First, the Gregorian melodies may be reduced to recurrent cells and in that way assimilated into Liszt's musical language. He takes his inspiration from these melodies and uses them in the same way that he uses other motifs of his own invention. This is the case, for example, with the introduction to *Die Seligkeiten* from *Christus* quoting the Gregorian melody of the *Rorate coeli desuper* from the opening of the oratorio. It is used as a cyclical motif:

**Examples 1 and 2: Liszt, *Christus* : the *Rorate coeli desuper* at the beginning of the *Eineleitung* (In *Nativitate Domini*) and *Die Seligkeiten* (Post *Epiphaniam*).**

2. Second, the Gregorian melodies may be quoted, arranged and/or harmonized in their entirety, as in the flourished treatment of *Benedicamus Domino* in the Antiphona *Cantantibus organis* and the motet *Sancta Caecilia*.

**Example 3: *Paroissien romain complet noté d'après le chant grégorien. Plain-Chant* (Paris: A. Le Clere, 1860), p. 117, with Liszt marginalia. Budapest, Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Center, library, LK 172**

<sup>27</sup> Heinrich Sambeth, *Franz Liszt und die Gregorianische Melodien und ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklung seiner Religiosität und Kunstanschauung*, Münster University, 1923. Sambeth also extracted an article from his dissertation: "Die Gregorianische Melodien in den Werken Franz Liszts, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner kirchenmusikalischen Reformpläne", *Musica sacra* 55 (1925), p. 255-256.

<sup>28</sup> See Mária Eckhardt, *Liszt Ferenc hagyatéka a Budapesti Zeneművészeti Főiskolán. I. Könyvek / Franz Liszt's Estate at the Budapest Academy of Music. I. Books*, Budapest 1986; Mária Eckhardt and Evelyn Liepsch, *Franz Liszts Weimarer Bibliothek*, Laaber 1999.

**Example 4: Liszt, *Cantantibus organis*, m. 1-3. Gregorian melody from the *Benedicamus Domino* (unison).**

**Example 5: Liszt, *Cantantibus organis*, m. 17-23, and comparison with the Gregorian model.**

**Example 6: Liszt, *Sancta Caecilia*, m. 32-39.**

This melody is also used in *Christus*, as the main melody of *Der Einzug in Jerusalem*, closing the second part (*Post Epiphaniam*):

**Example 7: Liszt, *Christus, Der Einzug in Jerusalem*, m. 1-8.**

3. Third, Liszt sometimes left the Gregorian melodies unaccompanied and unharmonized as in the *Angelus ad pastores ait* from *Christus*<sup>29</sup>. In that case, he does not write plain bar-lines (see also the antiphona *Cantantibus organis*) as if he wants to let to the melody its original and free melodico-rhythmic flow:

**Example 8: Liszt, *Christus*, “*Angelus ad pastores ait*” (*Pastorale und Verkündigung des Engels*), incipit.**

Whether they are oral or written, Liszt’s Gregorian sources raise the problem of the rite to which they relate. For instance, in Liszt’s day, the Roman rite had not yet been fully adopted in France, where there were still many relics of the Gallican rite. There is a good chance, therefore, that Liszt heard Gallican chant in French churches in the 1830s. The *De profundis*, at all events, was part of a Gallican tradition, making it a special case in respect of Liszt and Gregorian chant, for although the *De profundis* is associated with the Gregorian repertory, it is most definitely not a Gregorian melody but, specifically, a fauxbourdon. But Liszt’s books on Gregorian chant kept in Budapest and Weimar all reflect the Roman rite, even those published in France (notably by Adrien Le Clere). Liszt remained faithful to the Roman rite, which transcended national barriers and represented a universal version of the Catholic liturgy.

There were several reasons why Liszt took an interest in plainchant. First – and more generally – everything that is old and hieratic, everything that is traditional is dear to the Catholics. Second – and more particularly – Gregorian chant was regarded by Catholics

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<sup>29</sup> Unlike the *Rorate coeli desuper*, the *Angelus ad pastores ait* is sung. Compare the page from Liszt’s copy of the *Graduale Romanum*, where this melody occurs, with his own final version: *Graduale Romanum, quod ad cantum attinet, ad gregorianam formam redactum ex veteribus Mss. Undique collectis et duplici notatione donatum. Notae recentiores* (Paris 1857), p. 58 (held in Budapest, Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum and Research Center, LK 71).

as the mother tongue of the Church. Plainchant can look back on a centuries' old tradition, with the result that for Liszt it had a particular value and force. Then he discovered that it could be a source of modernity (see above). It was in this sense that he wrote to Agnes Street in 1855, when discussing the religious music that he was planning to compose: "Here, as elsewhere," he wrote, quoting Jean-Baptiste-Henri Lacordaire, "it is a matter of 'going back to the roots'."<sup>30</sup> In his letter to Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein about his "plan", he wrote that his idea was to "base, so to say, the canon of the chant of the Church on the exclusive ground of Gregorian Chant"<sup>31</sup>. Liszt then went on to explain that he would have to undertake some research, to "use the material already well prepared in Ratisbonne by the publications of the Canon Proske, and Mettenleiter" and "to do some research in Bruxelles, Paris, and above all Rome [...]." He "will draw the plan, very simple in itself, because it is above all about fixing what is immutable in the catholic liturgy"<sup>32</sup>, (one of his main concerns was the modernization of the musical notation of the old Church music).

Even so, one needs to bear in mind two particular aspects of Liszt's approach. In the first place, he was a composer in his own right and so his approach was different from that of the plainchant revivalists whose writings he read. His was a more practical approach, more artistic and more sensitive. Second, although Liszt was fascinated by the centuries' old tradition of plainchant and although he recognized its importance, he did not want to preserve it in any sterile way. It is within the context of the dialectic between tradition and modernity that one needs to examine the presence of Gregorian elements in his music. In Liszt's eyes, this repertory was not just old, dusty and forgotten, it also offered him a guarantee of newness. He was just trying to apply merge his interest for tradition to his *Neudeutsche* identity.

Gregorian chant, finally, was intimately linked to questions concerning the liturgy, and these were questions in which Liszt took a deep interest. At the heart of the liturgical year the Gregorian melodies form a fine-spun web full of meaning and theological symbolism. As a result liturgical questions are fundamental and show that Liszt gave his use of plainchants a theological significance in relation to the work in which they are used — especially in *Christus*, with a narrative that corresponds to the liturgical year from the Annunciation to the Resurrection. In this oratorio indeed, a few Gregorian melodies or cells are used as recurrent, cyclical, and symbolic elements: for instance an *Alleluia* motif used in the Advent and Annunciation section:

**Examples 9-11: Alleluia motif from the *Pastorale* (A: m. 154, english horn), *Verkündigung des Engels* (B: m. 7, soprano; C: 148-150).**

This melody comes back at the very end of *Christus*, with the bells of the Resurrection (*Resurrexit*, m. 147 sq.). There Liszt also quotes the Royal Praises (*Laudes Regiæ*), or

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<sup>30</sup> Liszt, letter to Agnes Street-Klindworth, September 16, 1856 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt and Agnes Street-Klindworth: A Correspondence*, p. 108 and 330.

<sup>31</sup> Liszt, letter to Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein, 24 July 1860, D-WRgs 59/81,1 n° 21 (see above, note 17).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Carolingian acclamations “Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat” (a succession of three symbolically ascending fifths) that are engraved on the pedestal of the obelisk at the centre of St. Peter’s Square in Rome.

### III. Liszt’s “authentisch-kirchlich-liturgische Jagd”

When in 1857 Liszt began to work on *Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth* he immediately put in place a web of informants extending across, France, Belgium, Germany, and Hungary who were charged with providing suitable musical material. In Paris he asked his son-in-law Émile Ollivier to find “liturgical intonations”: “In order to ensure that my work [*Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth*] has a Catholic and highly obvious cachet I should like to introduce and develop some of the liturgical intonations that have no equivalent in music today”. He then asked him to find some of these intonations<sup>33</sup>. He also instructed Ollivier to contact Charles de Montalembert to inquire whether, while the latter was working on his own monumental *Histoire de sainte Élisabeth de Hongrie, duchesse de Thuringe*,<sup>34</sup> he had come across any “musical notation” in manuscripts he had consulted. Montalembert replied that he remembered no such notation.<sup>35</sup> Joseph d’Ortigue was instructed to copy out “simple plainchant intonations”<sup>36</sup> and the same time, princess Wittgenstein sent Ollivier additional details about the notations sought by Liszt.<sup>37</sup>

In Brussels, Liszt sought the help of Eduard Lassen, who apologized for not having found either the Breviary of the Dominicans nor the Missal of the Premonstratensians.<sup>38</sup> He also called on the Bollandists but found nothing there either. Lassen also wrote that he was hoping that Édouard Fétis might be able to help him and eventually sent a copy of some music he himself had prepared: the first antiphon from the Vespers of Saint Elisabeth, *Letare Germania claro felix germine* (see below). He did not rewrite it in modern notation, and copied out the hufnagel notation, thinking that Liszt would be able to read it easily: however he gave a few reading instructions about the clefs, dots, and custos<sup>39</sup>. As it happened Liszt did not use this melody. Unlike the other copies that were sent to him from Hungary and that are now preserved in Weimar, it includes no annotations in Liszt’s hand.

In Pest, Liszt asked colleagues to look in local libraries for manuscripts or printed editions in which he was sure “may be found musical intonations relating to the Office

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<sup>33</sup> Liszt, letter to Ollivier, July 3, 1858, F-Pn NAF 25180 f. 88-91. Published with minor variants in Hamburger, “Liszt and Emile Ollivier,” *Studia Musicologica* 28 (1986), p. 65-77.

<sup>34</sup> Charles de Montalembert, *Histoire de sainte Élisabeth de Hongrie, duchesse de Thuringe*, Paris 1836.

<sup>35</sup> Montalembert, letter to Liszt, June 30, 1858, D-WRgs 59/24, 2. Published with minor variants in *Briefe hervorragender Zeitgenossen an Franz Liszt*, vol. 3, ed. by La Mara, Leipzig 1904, p. 36-37.

<sup>36</sup> Liszt, letter to Ollivier, July 3, 1858 (original in French), F-Pn NAF 25180 f. 88-91.

<sup>37</sup> Carolyn zu Sayn-Wittgenstein to Ollivier, August 5, 1858, in *Émile Ollivier et Carolyne de Sayn-Wittgenstein: Correspondance 1858-1887*, ed. by Anne Troisier de Diaz, Paris 1984, p. 37-38.

<sup>38</sup> Lassen to Liszt, July 17, 1858; D-WRgs 59/21, 18 n° 9.

<sup>39</sup> Lassen to Liszt, undated [summer 1858?], D-WRgs 59/21, 18 n° 10. Lassen’s copy of the hymn (9 pages) is now held under shelf-mark D-WRgs 60/Z50c. See facsimile in Nicolas Dufetel, « L’atelier grégorien de Franz Liszt, ou la voie du ‘Psallite sapienter’ », *Études grégoriennes* XXXIX (2012), p. 243-288.

of Saint Elisabeth.”<sup>40</sup> He was convinced “that there must be some old plainchant manuscripts ... which [he] shall put to very good use.”<sup>41</sup> Several Hungarian composers and clerics and a few others were conscripted and some of them—Michael von Rimely, Anton von Augusz, Maurus Czinár, Kronperger, the Pater “Guardian” (Agapius Dank), Gabriel Mátray, Mihály Mosonyi (Michael Brand), Ede Reményi, and Alexander Wilhelm Gottschalg—were acknowledged in Liszt’s *Schlussbemerkung* printed at the end of the score of *Die legend von der heiligen Elisabeth*. It was Mosonyi, however, who acted as Liszt’s special, most active emissary (Mosonyi explained that Liszt had entrusted this hunt to ‘the best truffle dog’: “dem besten Trüffel-Hund<sup>42</sup>”). He and his assistants searched through Hungarian libraries, including that of the Franciscans, and sent to Weimar what with some justification was described as the results of an “authentic ecclesiastical liturgical hunt” (*authentische kirchlich-liturgische Jagd*).<sup>43</sup> On Liszt’s behalf other Hungarians visited the Benedictine Abbey at Martinsberg near Sopron, from which the composer received several copies of local manuscripts.

These manuscript copies are held in Weimar (D-WRgs 60/Z50). Liszt’s annotations were apparently made so that he could more easily read the manuscripts. He transcribed the clefs, for example, and the same kind of annotation appear in most of the printed books on Gregorian chant that he owned. The Konvolut 60/Z50 contains 3 envelopes:

A: three folios with four melodies in square-notation, copied by Mosonyi; a note by Mosonyi to Liszt (July 3, 1858); a double folio with Latin liturgical texts translated into German (Mosonyi’s hand). Liszt made annotations on the music sheets (names of the clefs in French and the notes of the first notes, as to facilitate his reading). On the second folio there is also a note in Mosonyi’s hand explaining that it would be difficult to find anything more authentic (“Musikalisch authentisch wird schwerlich mehr zu finden sein”) and that the Father Guardian of the Franciscans in Ofen had been more than willing to copy out these melodies.

B: a double folio with a letter by Kronperger, editor of the journal *Der katholische Christ*, to Mosonyi (July 7 [1858]; eight melodies in square-notation copied out by Mosonyi, among them six antiphons including *Quasi stella matutina*; a letter by Mosonyi to Liszt (July 12, 1858). Liturgical texts copied by Czimár (“custodos” of the library at Martinsberg Abbey) from a Dominican Breviary from 1519 (7 pages). Liszt made annotations on the music sheets, similar to those in pencil to the contents of the first envelope.

C: a 9-page copy by Lassen of *Letare germania claro felix germine*, in hufnagel notation. No annotation by Liszt.

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<sup>40</sup> Liszt to János Danielik, June 16, 1858, in *Franz Liszt. Briefe aus ungarischen Sammlungen: 1835-1886*, ed. By Margit Prahács, Kassel 1966, p. 101-102. Like Montalembert, Danielik also published a “life” of Saint Elisabeth, *Magyaroszági Szent Erzsébet élete* (Pest, 1857), which Liszt read. His copy is preserved in Weimar at the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek: D-WRz L 608.

<sup>41</sup> Liszt to Augusz, June 26, 1858 (original in French), in *Franz Liszt’s Briefe an Baron Anton Augusz. 1846-1878*, ed. by Wilhelm von Csapó, Budapest 1911, p. 85-86.

<sup>42</sup> Brand to Liszt, July 1, 1858, D-WRgs 59/9, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Only the Hungarians are thanked in Liszt's *Schlussbemerkung* of the score of *Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth*, certainly because only their material had proven helpful. The score also includes a *Verzeichniss der Motive* presenting four items and the intonation of the *Magnificat*:

- 1) The Gregorian melody *Quasi stella matutina*, which Liszt indicates as being 'In festo sanctae Elisabeth'. Liszt quotes the musical incipit in square-note notation;
- 2) an "Ungarisches Kirchenlied zur heiligen Elisabeth", the melody of which Liszt quotes without bar-lines and with all sixteen verses of the Hungarian text;
- 3) an instrumental « Ungarische Volksmelodie » that Liszt claims was given to him by the violinist Reményi;
- 4) an "Altes Pilgerlied angeblich aus der Zeit der Kreuzszüge" in modern musical notation. It was passed on to him by Gottschalg.
- 5) Finally, Liszt mentions the intonation g–a–c, which he claims was often used in the Gregorian repertory, notably in the *Magnificat* and *Crux fidelis*. Liszt admits to having used it himself three of his works. In *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth*, he explains that these notes represent the 'symbol of the Cross'.

Liszt indicates very precisely where these five melodic elements occur in the score. They represent a kind of musical, national and religious universality inasmuch as they comprise a melody and an intonation taken from the Gregorian repertory, the theme of a Hungarian hymn, a popular Hungarian instrumental melody and a German melody that has all the attributes of a chorale. It has already been observed that Liszt was mistaken when he claimed that *Quasi stella matutina* was associated with Saint Elisabeth of Hungary. It is in fact associated with Saint Elisabeth of Portugal. True, Liszt was mistaken. But it is the same kind of error as the one that we find in the case of the polemics bound up with the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

#### IV. Gregorian sketches for *Christus*

Liszt had not yet completed *Die Legende von der Heiligen Elisabeth* before he started to compose *Christus*. According to its title-page, this oratorio was composed "nach Texten aus der heiligen Schrift und der katholischen Liturgie". Liszt chose these texts himself and constructed, as Daniel Ortuno-Stühling has examined, his own image of the Christ<sup>44</sup>. Liturgical texts imply Gregorian melodies, and for *Christus*, Liszt understandably used chants from the liturgy. Whereas he sought help on *Saint Elisabeth*, he seems to have conducted his own research on *Christus*, a topic that isn't linked to any local and folk issue. Until now, I've found no trace in his correspondence of his asking third persons to run errands for him — maybe because when he started the *Legend*, he was still busy in Weimar and not totally focused on Church music, while he

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<sup>44</sup> Daniel Ortuno-Stühling, *Musik als Bekenntnis – Christus-Oratorien im 19. Jahrhundert*, Laaber 2011.

mostly composed *Christus* in Rome and with more time to document himself. In fact, in 1860, he specifically mentions the research he was planning to undertake *on his own* in what he called “dusty sources” (*sources poudreuses*)<sup>45</sup>, especially in Rome. Although his correspondence is relatively thin in this regard, his books on Gregorian chant and his sketches for *Christus* contain information on the melodies that he used or envisaged using in *Christus*.

I have already quoted above the *Rorate coeli desuper* and the *Alleluia* used as cyclical motifs, as well as the *Angelus ad pastores ait*. A manuscript (D-WRgs 60/B2, 4) with sketches for most of the numbers that make up parts 2 and 3 of *Christus* show how Liszt worked on his “repertory” of Gregorian melodies. This bifolio contains material for *Das Wunder*, *Tristis est anima mea*, *Der Einzug in Jerusalem*, *Stabat Mater dolorosa*, and *Resurrexit*; an accompanying folio contains sketches of the *Pater noster* (D-WRgs 60/B2, 5). The annotations appertaining to some of the opening melody, *Rorate coeli desuper*, exemplify Liszt’s habit to compare plainchants in the liturgical year (See Example 12, A): the number “184” is followed by the music to the words “Rorate coeli”. Then he wrote the number “252” and the words ‘Collegite primum zizania’, the antiphon for the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany. The next entry reads “805 Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus preparationem cordis eorum audivit aures tua” from Psalm 10. This is also the Offertory for the Feast of Saint Joseph Calassanctius. The final entry reads: “509 18<sup>me</sup> après Pente: Da pacem Domine sustinentibus te”, which is the Introit for the Eighteenth Sunday after Whitsun. The numbers and Latin quotes probably refer to the pages in a book relating to this melody. I have not been able to identify it, but it seems we are dealing with another example of Liszt’s comparing existing melodies. He studied every iteration of each melody within the liturgical year and examined—or at least intended to examine—the whole of the vast Gregorian



repertory.

### Example 12: Liszt’s sketches for *Christus*. D-WRgs 60/B2, 4

On bar 2, Liszt began by writing a half note (*d*), then replaced it with a quarter note. As in other Liszt works inspired by Gregorian chant, the phrase begins on an upbeat, and a

<sup>45</sup> Liszt to Agnes Street-Klindworth, December 17, 1860. *Franz Liszt and Agnes Street-Klindworth*, p. 354.

ternary structure provides a strong sense of balance and respiration. A similar upbeat and structure appear at the beginning of *Via Crucis (Vexilla Regis prodeunt)*, which was also the fruit of a laborious quest for rhythmical perfection, as the composer's manuscript shows<sup>46</sup>. Among the sketches, one can also see an elaboration of the *Laudes Regiae* for the Resurrexit (Example 12, B) and the incipit of the *Benedicamus Domino* used in *Der Einzug in Jerusalem* (Example 12, C).

Another manuscript is very important for the reconstruction of the web of documents that help us to have an idea of Liszt *working* on Gregorian melodies. On the autograph score of the piano version of the *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* (D-WRgs 60/U21, f. 3<sup>r</sup>), he wrote some very brief sketches for an Agnus Dei and, more importantly, a modal melody with the words "Surrexit Christus" ('Christ is risen') and "Scimus Christum surrexisse" ('We know that Christ is risen'). They relate to the final movement in *Christus: Resurrexit*. These words are taken from the final verses of the sequence for Easter, *Victimae paschali laudes*, and the music is taken directly from the penultimate phrase of the plainchant melody corresponding to these words. Liszt noted the Gregorian outline of one line, then, immediately beneath it, he conducted an experiment and arranged the words of the 'Surrexit Christus' and 'Scimus Christum surrexisse'. In the first line one can see an example of 'flat', regular singing, and beneath it, the way in which Liszt reconstructed the rhythm simply by means of Latin tonic accents – his prayer books are full of Latin syllables that have been underlined in this way. Even so, Liszt's version is a hybrid, for it manipulates the plainchant melody and words in order to create a new version. Liszt hasn't used the melodic fragment that goes with the words 'Surrexit Christus' but has adapted only the fragment that goes with 'Scimus Christum surrexisse'. Was Liszt planning to use this melody in *Christus*? It would certainly have made sense for him to do so as it is the Easter sequence. But it is not found in the oratorio. On the same sheet, he also worked out the *Laudes Regiae* which will eventually be the subject of the fugue in the *Resurrexit*. Liszt may have initially – and logically – thought of using the Easter sequence of the *Victimae paschali* in his *Resurrexit*, which would have allowed him to use a liturgical Gregorian melody. In the end, however, he produced the motif of ascending fifths, which perhaps offered him a greater compositional potential, notably when it came to the fugue.

### **Example 13: Sketches for *Christus (Resurrexit)*, D-WRgs 60/U21, f. 3<sup>r</sup>**

#### **Conclusion**

There are many pages of sketches and many of Liszt's books containing his own annotations and forming a complex web of philological sources that remain to be discussed, just as there are other links between his religious music and the Roman liturgy on which we could comment. It is essential to take account of the Roman liturgy when examining Liszt's use of Gregorian chant and, more generally, his liturgical and

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<sup>46</sup> H-Bn Ms. mus. 14, f. 2<sup>rv</sup>.

para-liturgical religious music<sup>47</sup>. Liturgy, theology, melody and the Latin language are intimately linked, and plainchant is the connection between two elements: a text and a melody whose outline, accents and rhythm are dictated by the words. Together, they acquire their meaning as a function of the ways in which they are used at various points in the liturgical calendar – and this, beyond Liszt's quest for a balance between progress, modernity and tradition, is a key concept if we are to understand his religious life and oeuvre and creative process.

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<sup>47</sup> See also, on Liszt's careful study and reuse of Gregorian melodies, Nicolas Dufetel, *Palingénésie, régénération et extase dans la musique religieuse de Liszt*, doctoral dissertation, 2 vols., Tours 2008.