

Article

The Hymn Gloria and Its Place in the Celebration of the Eucharist

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Abstract: Music is an essential part of human life, but it is also integral to the experience of faith. From its beginnings, music has been associated with religious expression and worship. One of the oldest Christian hymns is the hymn “Gloria in excelsis Deo”—“Glory to God in the highest”, which was originally a component of morning and evening prayer. Later, it became part of the Holy Mass and is still sung during the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays and feast days. The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive view of this precious hymn in terms of its historical use. The study pays special attention to the sources of the text of this ancient hymn. A theological analysis of the text is also an indispensable prerequisite for a deeper understanding. Finally, the study offers up-to-date guidelines for the hymn’s use today.

Keywords: Gloria; liturgical music; tropes; hymnal; Roman Missal; liturgy; ordinary chant; mass

1. Introduction

Music is an integral part of people’s lives. It is encountered in many different contexts. Music is not limited to classical or popular music concerts; it also shapes the atmosphere in public spaces, shopping centers, and restaurants. Music is a medium that strongly influences a person’s emotional life. It can express joy or soothe a person, but it can also agitate, conveying emotions like fear or can stimulate action.

In addition to everyday places, sacred spaces like temples, churches, and cathedrals are special environments where music has resonated since their beginnings. Human history bears witness to the rich history of church music, from monophonic Gregorian chants to polyphony and the development of vocal–instrumental music. For many people, sacred spaces were the only places where they could hear high-quality music that shaped their sensibilities, and this became part of their faith experience.

Music intrinsically holds symbolic value, as it can point to a reality that transcends the music itself. Music, especially when associated with words, becomes a part of prayer, a dialogue between God and human beings. The Second Vatican Council, in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in number 112, points out that music is an integral part of liturgical celebrations: “The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united with words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II 1963*, art. 112).

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, the singing of psalms became an essential part of prayer. In addition to the psalms, which became part of the so-called processional chants,¹ the chants of the Ordinary of the Mass were gradually incorporated into Christian liturgy. These songs include Kyrie eleison, Gloria in excelsis Deo, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei.

In this study, we will specifically focus on the ancient hymn *Gloria in excelsis Deo*—Glory to God in the highest, which is a part of the Eucharist celebration on Sundays, feasts, and solemnities. However, this hymn, also known as the angelic hymn



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(*hymnus angelicus*) or the Great Doxology, was not originally composed for the Eucharistic liturgy. Instead, it is an inheritance from the hymnic tradition of the early Church, which was based on biblical hymns, especially the Psalms. These privately composed compositions were called “*psalmi idiotici*”² to distinguish them from the Psalms of Holy Scripture (Jungmann 1951, vol. 1, p. 347). They usually follow biblical patterns and lack a fixed metrical structure. In their expression, they follow biblical canticles such as Mary’s Magnificat, Zechariah’s hymn Benedictus, or Simeon’s hymn Nunc dimittis. From the ancient Christian hymnic tradition, the hymn Φῶς ἱλαρόν (*fos hilaron*), attributed to Basil the Great in the Byzantine liturgy, and the hymn *Tē decet laus*, in the monastic tradition, are still preserved. In the Roman liturgy, the hymn *Te Deum laudamus* and the hymn *Gloria in excelsis Deo* are well-known. Although many hymns have disappeared over the centuries, the hymn *Gloria in excelsis Deo* has been highly esteemed since the ancient Church and endures to this day.

In the present study, we primarily employed a historical–analytical methodology. The aim and anticipated results are to enhance the understanding of this ancient hymn, enabling contemporary individuals to participate more actively and derive greater benefit from the contemporary liturgy.

2. History of the Use of the Hymn Gloria

The hymn *Gloria in excelsis Deo* was originally delivered in Greek and formed part of the morning choral service. It was included in the liturgy of the Eucharist in Rome only on particularly solemn occasions. The *Liber Pontificalis* (Duchesne 1886) states that Pope Telesphorus³ established that before the sacrifice, the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* should be repeated, but only on the night of the Lord’s nativity.⁴ This information from the *Liber Pontificalis* was disputed by Walafrid Strabo, a 9th-century monk and theologian, who argued that the *Gloria* could not have been introduced into the celebration of the Eucharist by Pope Telesphorus because, until the time of St. Celestine (423–432), the Mass began with the epistle and Gospel (Cuthbert and Godfrey 1905, p. 71). However, the *Gloria* hymn was certainly part of the papal mass in the 6th century. Pope Symmachus⁵ had permitted the *Gloria* to be used on Sundays and the feasts of martyrs, but only at the masses of bishops.⁶

The rubric in the *Sacramentarium Gregorianum* states that the hymn *Gloria* is said if there is a bishop present and only on Sundays or feast days, but priests do not say it at all, except at Easter.⁷ *Gloria*, from the beginning, was the hymn intended for the congregation⁸; however, the hymn was soon chanted by the clergy gathered in the sanctuary. Since the *Gloria* hymn was initially used only at pontifical Masses, a more solemn and artistic accompaniment was preferred, and the participation of the people could hardly have been practical. The choir either sang the *Gloria* straight through or alternately in two semi-choruses, as in the *Kyrie* (Jungmann 1951, vol. 1, pp. 358–59). The musical setting corresponded to this disposition of the hymn. The earliest melodies were syllabic recitations; it was a declamation performed in a higher voice rather than a song.⁹ Unlike the *Kyrie*, the *Gloria* hymn was intoned by the Pope himself.

The seventh-century *Ordo Romanus Primus* provides evidence of the singing of the *Gloria* in the papal Mass, as follows: “When they (schola/cantors) have finished (Kyrie eleison), the pope turns to the people and begins, ‘Glory to God in the highest,’ if it is the season for it. He turns to face east immediately until they have finished. Then he turns to face the people again and says, ‘Peace be with you,’ and turning east again he says, ‘Let us pray’ and the prayer. At the conclusion of the prayer, he sits down. Bishops and presbyters also sit”.¹⁰ According to the *Ordo* of St. Amand (c. 800 AD), the priest could intone the *Gloria* during Easter and on the day of his ordination. Regarding other solemn Masses, it was not until the late 11th century that, similar to bishops, priests were allowed to intone the *Gloria* (Jungmann 1951, vol. 1, p. 356).

The Gelasian Sacramentary, used by priests in titular churches in Rome in the 7th and early 8th centuries (Folsom 1998, p. 268), indicates the part of the liturgy when the priest intoned the *Gloria*. It was during the Easter Vigil, after baptism, and after confirmation,

that is, after the anointing with chrism on the forehead of the catechumen and after the sign of peace:

“Postea signat eos in fronte de chrismate dicens:

Signum Christi in uitam aeternam.

Respondet: Amen.

Pax tecum.

Respondet: Et cum spiritu tuo.

Inde uero cum laetania ascendit ad sedem suam et dicit:

Gloria in excelsis Deo”. (Mohlberg 1960, p. 74)

3. Sources of the Text of the Hymn Gloria

3.1. Greek Version of the Text from the Apostolic Constitutions

The sources of the hymn text for the Gloria were influenced by the theological climate surrounding the Trinitarian doctrine. One of the earliest versions of the text is the Greek version from the Apostolic Constitutions (c. 375–380). This text was part of the Morning Prayer (proseuche eothine).¹¹ Although the hymns of the early centuries were largely addressed to Christ, the text of this version from the Apostolic Constitutions is directed towards the Father with some reference to Christ’s mediation. For instance, the statement “we worship you through your great high priest” reflects this emphasis.

A characteristic of this version of the text is the stress on the subordination of Christ to the Father. Additionally, the invocation of Christ is absent in the second part of the hymn text, and there is no mention of *Filius unigenitus*—the Only-begotten Son. The reference to the Holy Spirit is also entirely absent. Some writers believe that these aspects reveal the influence of Arian thought and expression (Capelle 1949, pp. 439–57), while others emphasize Origen’s influence (Metzger 1987a, pp. 10–11, 71–74, 84–85). Arianism is the Christological doctrine of the bishop of Alexandria, Arius, who does not acknowledge Christ’s equality with God. Origen first used the term θεάνθρωπος theanthrōpos “god-man” to express the fullness of humanity and divinity in Christ.

The text of the hymn Gloria from the Apostolic Constitutions is as follows:

<p>47. 1. Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις Θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη, ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία.</p> <p>2. Αἰνοῦμέν σε, ὑμνοῦμέν σε, εὐλογοῦμέν σε, δοξολογοῦμέν σε, προσκυνοῦμέν σε διὰ τοῦ μεγάλου ἀρχιερέως σου, σὲ τὸν ὄντα θεὸν ἀγέννητον ἕνα, ἀπρόσιτον μόνον, διὰ τὴν μεγάλην σου δόξαν, Κύριε βασιλεῦ ἐπουράνιε, Θεὲ Πάτερ παντοκράτορ.</p> <p>3. Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ Κυρίου, τοῦ ἀμώμου ἀμνοῦ ὃς αἶρει τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου, πρόσδεξαι τὴν δέησιν ἡμῶν, ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῶν Χερουβίμ· ὅτι σὺ μόνος ἅγιος, σὺ μόνος Κύριος, ὁ Θεὸς καὶ Πατὴρ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ Θεοῦ πάσης γεννητῆς φύσεως, τοῦ βασιλέως ἡμῶν, δι’ οὗ σοι δόξα, τιμὴ καὶ σέβας (Metzger 1987b, vol. 336, p. 12).</p>	<p>47. 1. Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.</p> <p>2. We praise you, we celebrate you, we bless you, we glorify you, we worship you through your great high priest, you the true God, only and unbegotten, the only inaccessible, because of your great glory, Lord, heavenly King, God Father Almighty.</p> <p>3. Lord, God, and Father of the Lord, the spotless Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, receive our prayer, you who are enthroned upon the cherubim; for you alone are holy, you alone are Lord, God, and Father of Jesus Christ, the God of all created nature, our King, through whom to you be glory, honor, and worship.</p>
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3.2. The Syrian Version of the Hymn Gloria

Similar to the Apostolic Constitutions, in the Syriac version of the hymn text, we encounter the mediational formulation “through the Mediator of our blessings, Jesus Christ”. Although such formulations are not present in the orations of the East Syriac liturgy, this expression points to an ancient tradition. The Syrian version from the Nestorian liturgy offers us the fundamental structure of the hymn, at least in its general form:

“Glory to God in the highest, thrice.* And on earth peace.* And a good hope to men.* We worship thee.* We glorify thee.* We exalt thee.* Being who art from eternity.* Hidden and incomprehensible Nature.* Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

King of kings.* And Lord of lords. * Who dwellest in the excellent light.* Whom no son of man hath seen.* Nor can see.* Who alone art holy.* (And) alone mighty.* (And) alone immortal.* We confess thee.* Through the Mediator of our blessings.* Jesus Christ.* The Saviour of the world.* And the Son of the Highest.* O Lamb of the living God.* Who takes away the sins of the world.* Have mercy upon us.* Thou who sittest at the right hand of thy Father.* Receive our request.* For thou art our God.* And thou art our Lord.* And thou art our King.* And thou art our Saviour.* And thou art the forgiver of our sins.* The eyes of all men hang on thee.* Jesus Christ.* Glory to God thy Father. * And to thee and to the Holy Ghost, for ever, Amen". (Macleay 1894, p. 170)

3.3. The Greek Version of a Text from the Byzantine Liturgy

The Greek version of the text from the Byzantine liturgy, as found in the fifth-century *Codex Alexandrinus*, is directed toward the Father in its initial part and is entirely in a glorifying tone. The second part of the text addresses the Son, with an introductory reference to the Holy Spirit. This portion carries a supplicatory character. The hymn concludes with an echo of Philippians 1:11,¹² ultimately culminating in the praise of God the Father. The Greek version from the *Codex Alexandrinus* bears a significant resemblance to the Latin text found in the manuscript Antiphony of Bangor.

3.4. Latin Text from the Manuscript Antiphony of Bangor and from the Stowe Missal

The oldest witness to the Latin text is the Irish Monastic Antiphony of Bangor, which dates back to about 690. The first part of the text comprises the singing of the angels on the night of the Nativity of the Lord, as recorded by St. Luke 2:14. The use of a biblical phrase as a motif at the beginning of a hymn is also found in other ancient Christian hymns.

The second part of the text expresses the glorification of God. This section gathers expressions that reflect human activity and highlights several names referring to all three Divine Persons, in contrast to the current text used in the Roman Missal. A similar trinitarian aspect is found in the Syriac version of the text.

We compare this text with the current text provided in the third edition of the Roman Missal:

<i>Antiphony of Bangor (Ad Vesperum et ad Matutinam)</i>	<i>Roman Missal, third edition</i>
(1) Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. (2) Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, magnificamus te, gratias agimus tibi, propter magnam misericordiam tuam, Domine, rex cœlestis, Deus, Pater omnipotens. Domine, Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe, <i>Sancte Spiritus Dei</i> , et omnes dicimus, Amen. (3) Domine, Fili Dei Patris, Agne Dei, qui tollis peccatum mundi, miserere nobis. Suscipe orationem nostram, qui sedes ad dexteram Dei Patris, miserere nobis. Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus gloriosus cum Spiritu Sancto in gloria Dei Patris. Amen (Warren 1895, p. 31).	Glória in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. Laudámus te, benedicimus te, adorámus te, glorificámus te, grátias ágimus tibi propter magnam glóriam tuam, Dómine Deus, Rex cæléstis, Deus Pater omnipotens. Dómine Fili Unigénite, Iesu Christe, Dómine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris, qui tollis peccáta mundi, miserére nobis; qui tollis peccáta mundi, súscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserére nobis. Quóniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dóminus, tu solus Altíssimus, Iesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu: in glória Dei Patris. Amen (Missale Romanum 2002, p. 510).

An almost identical version of the hymn to that in the Bangor Antiphony is also found in the Stowe Missal, which is the oldest Missal of the Irish church. The Stowe Missal is a small Irish illuminated manuscript primarily written in Latin, with some Old Irish, dating back to the late eighth or early ninth century, probably after 792. It reflects the Celtic region and attests to the presence of the Gloria hymn during solemn Mass.¹³

3.5. Medieval Tropes of the Hymn Gloria

This section may be divided by subheadings. It should provide a concise and precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation, as well as the experimental conclusions that can be drawn. The text of the hymn Gloria is found in the 8th-century Missal of Bobbio (Legg 1917, f. 17v). From the ninth century onwards, the creation of tropes developed, which also included the hymn Gloria. The monumental work *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, in its 47th volume, provides 51 tropes of the Gloria hymn, in addition to those texts not written in metrical and rhythmic form (Blume and Bannister 1961, n. 168–218, pp. 217–99). In these tropes, the Gloria is divided into a varied number of up to 20 pieces. From the vast array of tropes, we will present one example of the troped *Gloria Qui sonitu melodiae*. The trope dates back to the 10th–11th centuries. Notably, in connection with the Incarnation, the Virgin Mary is also mentioned in the trope: “The Word of God incarnate, Born of a virgin mother” (*Verbum Dei incarnatum, De virgine matre natum. . .*). In the sixth section, the Eucharist is mentioned:

*“Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax
hominibus bonae voluntatis.*

1. Qui sonitu melodiae

Virginis matris Mariae

Conceptum et ortum pie

Attollimus,

Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.

2. Verbum Dei incarnatum,

De virgine matre natum,

Circumcisum, revelatum

Magis scimus;

Gratias agimus tibi—Deus pater omnipotens,

3. Cui filius est oblatum

In templo, sed morti datus.

Gloriose suscitatus,

Quo vivimus.

Domine fili unigenite, Iesu Christe—miserere nobis,

4. Qui in caelum ascendisti,

Sacrum flamen infudisti,

Discipulos docuisti,

Quae credimus.

Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.

5. Quem cum patre et neumate

Essentiae unitate

Deum verum trinitate

Concolimus.

Qui sedes ad dexteram patris—tu solus altissimus,

6. Te nobis eucharistiam

Salutarem dans hostiam;

Tecum assumptam Mariam

Concinimus,

Iesu Christe cum sancto spiritu in gloria Dei patris”.

(Blume and Bannister 1961, n. 201, pp. 264–65.)

Although Pope Pius V's reform after the Council of Trent prohibited tropes, the hymn Gloria was still extensively set to music.

3.6. Slovak Text of the Gloria from the First Printed Catholic Hymnal *Cantus Catholici* (1655)

An important source of liturgical music in Slovakia, which also includes the hymns of the Ordinary, is the first Catholic printed hymnal *Cantus Catholici*, published in two editions. The hymnal was first published in Levoča in 1655 (Szölösy 1655), and the second edition was published in Trnava in 1700. Its editor was the Jesuit Benedikt Szölösy. The first edition of the *Cantus Catholici* contains five texts and seven melodies of the Gloria:¹⁴ Gloria. *Sláva buď Bohu na Nebi*,¹⁵ *Gloria Paschale 1. A na Zemi budiž lidem, Gloria Paschale 2. A Na Zemi pokog Lidem, Gloria Paschale 3. Sláva na Wysostech Bohu. The last three texts of the Gloria are intended for the season through the year: Gloria 1. A Na Zemi buď iž Lidem, pokog, [Gloria 2.] A Na Zemi buď iž Lidem, pokog, Gloria 3. Sláva na wýsostech Bohu.*

Although the primary textual and musical sources of the Slovak *Cantus Catholici* include two Moravian hymnbooks edited by Jan Rozenplut (Rozenplut 1601) and Jiří Hlohovský (Hlohovský 1622), the text of the Gloria Paschale 3 appears in Slovak for the first time only in *Cantus Catholici* 1655 (Dufka 2019, pp. 133–34). The individual parts of the Gloria text are consistently accompanied by the double exclamation *Alleluja, alleluja*:

<i>Cantus Catholici</i> 1655, pp. 122–23.	English translation
Gloria Paschale 3. Sláva na Wysostech Bohu, A na Zemi pokog Lidu, Alleluja, Alleluja: Který mági wůli dobrú, aťby se lýbili Bohu. Alleluja, Alleluja. Chwálíme t'e až nehodný: Kľaňýme se gsúc pokorňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Dobrorečýme Gméno twé. Genž gest weliké, a' swaté. Alleluja, Alleluja. Dýki wzdáváme gsúc wd'ečňý, Z-twého wssého dobrod'eňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Které od tebe bereme, A nagwýce z-wykúpeňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Pane Bože Otče Swatý, Králi nad králmi sám mocňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Wzhledniž na nás swé stworeňý; Odpustiž nám prowineňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Pane Gežissi náš milý. Synu od Otce zrozeňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Genž gsy gemu we wssem rowňý, z-Duchem Swatým nerozd'ilňý. Alleluja, Alleluja. Beránku Boží newinný, Ráč zhlad'it'i nasse winný. Alleluja, Alleluja. Genž gsy Syn Boží nagwýžssý, Smilůg se nad wernú Ryssi. Alleluja, Alleluja. Genž znýmass hrychi wsselyké, Prýgmiž prozbi nasse také. Alleluja, Alleluja.	Gloria Paschale 3. Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace to the people, Alleluia, Alleluia: Who have a good will to please God. Alleluia, Alleluia. We praise you, though we are unworthy; we worship you, being humble. Alleluia, Alleluia. We bless your name, which is great and holy. Alleluia, Alleluia. We give thanks, being grateful for all your benefits. Alleluia, Alleluia, which we receive from you, most of all for redemption. Alleluia, Alleluia. O Lord God, Holy Father, King of kings, the only mighty one. Alleluia, Alleluia. Look upon us, your creation; forgive us our trespasses. Alleluia, Alleluia. Lord Jesus, our beloved. Son begotten of the Father. Alleluia, Alleluia. You are in all things equal with him, undivided by the Holy Spirit. Alleluia, Alleluia. The Lamb of God, innocent, Take away our guilt. Alleluia, Alleluia. Who is the Son of God most high, have mercy on the faithful earth. Alleluia, Alleluia. Who takes away all kinds of sins, accept also our supplications. Alleluia, Alleluia. Who sits with the Father in heaven, remember us here on earth. Alleluia, Alleluia. For you alone are the holy God, You alone are the reigning Lord. Alleluja, Alleluja. You are supreme, Son of God, most precious. Alleluia, Alleluia. Being in unity with the Holy Spirit. In undivided essence. Alleluia, Alleluia, with God the Father, the mighty Lord, to whom be praise for evermore. Amen. Alleluia, Alleluia.

The above text of the hymn Gloria was also literally adopted by the evangelical hymnal *Cithara Sanctorum*¹⁶ of 1674 in its sixth edition.

4. Text Analysis

The hymn begins with the words: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will” ([The Roman Missal 2011](#), p. 504). The Greek version of this text is as follows: Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας. Our common interpretation of this text is primarily connected to humans, but this does not reflect the original meaning of the text: Εὐδοκία is not the good will of men but the good will of God, God’s pleasure, God’s favor and grace. The ἀνθρώποι εὐδοκίας are therefore men of God’s grace and selection, men to whom the news of God’s kingdom has been proclaimed” ([Jungmann 1951](#), vol. 1, p. 351). Some scholars similarly interpret the opening words of the hymn: “The phrase *bonae voluntatis* is in the genitive case, like the original Greek (Luke 2:14). In Latin, the genitive case serves either a possessive function (people possess the virtue of good will) or an objective one (people are the object of God’s benevolence or good will). A majority of interpreters prefer the second: peace is God’s gift to those whom he favors; it is not God’s reward to people who possess good will” ([Foley 2011](#), p. 140). This is not to imply that only the privileged should be admitted to the kingdom of God and its peace; rather, all people are invited into God’s kingdom. However, participation in this peace is attained through the free and merciful decision of God, as the apostle Paul notes: “He (the Father) destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will” (Eph 1:5). One possible interpretation of the hymn’s opening text could be that the angels are proclaiming a plan and purpose to be gradually realized, with the intent: May God be given glory in the highest, and may men find peace in His grace! ([Jungmann 1951](#), vol. 1, p. 351).

The opening sentence is followed by a listing of activities on the part of human beings that glorify God in various ways: “We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory” ([The Roman Missal 2011](#), p. 504). This dimension of gratitude and praise is already present in one of the earliest documents of the first century, the Didaché, which, in its 10th chapter, speaks of the celebration of the Eucharist: “Before all (these) things, we give you thanks because you are powerful (on our behalf). To you (is) the glory forever” ([Milavec 2003](#), 10:4, p. 25). The glorification of God in this hymn is not an expression of duty but of privilege, through which people are liberated from egoistic narrowness and closed-mindedness. The collective giving of thanks and praise to God is thus a source of mutual unity among the people. The subsequent list of God’s names intensifies the praise: “Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father” ([The Roman Missal 2011](#), p. 504).¹⁷ This first part of the hymn is addressed to God the Father.

The second part of the hymn is addressed to Christ. In this Christological section, we can recognize the following structure: a celebratory greeting with names associated with Christ, litany exclamations, a triple invocation with “you alone” (*Tu solus*), and finally, the Trinitarian conclusion.

The list of names associated with Christ is ancient: “Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father” ([The Roman Missal 2011](#), p. 504). Firstly, the term Lord serves as a distinctive name for the risen Lord (John 21:7). The expression only begotten Son (Greek: *monogenes*, Latin: *unigenitus*) was used and highly esteemed in the ancient Church to refer to Jesus Christ: “The Christian usage of this term (Latin, *unigenitus*) dates from some of the earliest creeds of our tradition, reflecting baptismal practice since the mid-third century and codified in the ‘Symbol or Creed of Eusebius’ (325). This doctrinal position stands in contrast to those who argued that the Son was created by the Father and thus was a lesser creature” ([Foley 2011](#), pp. 148–49).¹⁸ The name *only begotten Son* is also found in the NKJ translation of the Bible in the Gospel of John: “For God so loved the world that He gave His *only begotten Son*, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NKJ).

The second group of names begins with “Lord God” (Latin: *Domine Deus*). This name indicates the fundamental equality of the Father and the Son. In earlier versions of the hymn Gloria, the name “Son of the Father” (Latin: *Filius Patris*) was positioned after “Lord

God”, as seen, for example, in the Antiphony of Bangor. In the current version of the hymn, it is in third place. This name emphasizes the mystery of which St. Paul speaks in his letter to the Hebrews: “God. . . has, in these last days, spoken to us by his Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things. . . who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. . . sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:1–3). Christ is, therefore, the true radiance of the glory of his Father.

The name “Lamb of God” (Latin: *Agnus Dei*) refers to Christ’s redemptive work and serves as a reminder of the great mercy of Jesus Christ. This name was typically associated with the plea for mercy in the form of a litany, as found in the litany chant during the Mass before Holy Communion: “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us—grant us peace” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 651). The origin of this litany form is found in the Gospel according to John, where John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and exclaimed: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The Christological names are followed by a three-part litany with a supplicatory character: “You take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 504). This supplicatory character is particularly evident in the musical setting of the hymn. Composers typically present this part of the hymn with a less solemn character, and based on the litany structure of the text, they create a dialogue between the first part of the litany¹⁹ and its response.²⁰

The final section of the Gloria hymn begins in the Latin version with the words *Quóniam tu solus Sanctus*—For you alone are the Holy One (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 504), and the penitential and pleading character of the litany chant transitions to the distinctly joyful and celebratory character of the hymn. The text emphasizes the uniqueness of the glorification of the second divine person, Jesus Christ, contrasting it with the glorification of divinities created by human hands and imagination. While the Catholic Church shows reverence to the saints, their holiness is always understood as a participation in the holiness of God, in the holiness of Jesus Christ: “You alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 504). All the epithets and adjectives referring to Jesus Christ in the hymn can also apply to any of the three Divine Persons.

The hymn Gloria concludes with a Trinitarian doxology: “Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father” (*The Roman Missal 2011*, p. 504). In the Christological part of the text, we find a certain progression: Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord to whom we have presented our petitions, and who is exalted and glorified, lives eternally in the glory he shared with the Father before the foundation of the world. The text alludes to the words spoken by Jesus in His farewell speech: “And now, O Father, glorify me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5).

The hymn begins with praise to God and ends with the praise of Christ, in whom the glory of God is revealed to us, as expressed by St. Paul in one of the most beautiful hymns of the New Testament, which conveys the mystery of Christ as the incarnate and glorified Son of God: “. . . at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10–11).

5. Hymn Gloria and Its Use Today

In the current liturgy, the hymn Gloria is sung at all Sunday Masses except during the seasons of Advent and Lent. The use of this hymn is not confined to the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist but may also be used during solemnities and special feasts. As seen from a historical perspective, the Gloria hymn could initially only be intoned by the Pope, bishops and later by priests only during Easter and at the celebration of their first Mass. Today, not only the priest but also the cantor or choir can intone the hymn, as specified by the General Instruction of the Roman Missal in its 53rd article:

“The Gloria in excelsis (Glory to God in the highest) is a most ancient and venerable hymn by which the Church, gathered in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats

God the Father and the Lamb. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other. It is intoned by the Priest or, if appropriate, by a cantor or by the choir; but it is sung either by everyone together, or by the people alternately with the choir, or by the choir alone. If not sung, it is to be recited either by everybody together or by two choirs responding one to the other.

It is sung or said on Sundays outside Advent and Lent, and also on Solemnities and Feasts, and at particular celebrations of a more solemn character". (GIRM 2011, art. 53, p. 33)

Although in some countries or on certain occasions, the text of the hymn has been modified or substituted according to local customs or circumstances,²¹ the above-mentioned article of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that "the text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other" (GIRM 2011, art. 53, p. 33). An exception in this area may be Masses, where there is a significant attendance of children. The *Directory for Masses with Children*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship on 1 November 1973, in its 31st article, states the following: "To facilitate the children's participation in singing the *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*, it is permissible to use, with melodies, appropriate vernacular texts accepted by competent authority, even if these do not correspond exactly to the liturgical texts" (DMC 1973, art. 31).

Originally, only the Pope could intone the hymn, and later, only priests were permitted to do so. However, the article explicitly allows the hymn to be intoned by a singer or choir "if appropriate": "The appropriateness of the cantor or choir intoning the *Gloria* is a determination often based on musical factors; at the same time, presiders need to be trained not to neglect their responsibility for musical leadership in the Eucharist, which is an inherently lyrical act" (A Commentary on the GIRM, Foley et al. 2007, p. 144)

The singing of the hymn is primarily intended for the people, but it may also be performed in alternation with the choir or by the choir alone. If the article mentions alternating the singing of the *Gloria* between the people and the choir, we can assume that alternating the singing between the choir and the solo singer is also appropriate. As the *Gloria* consists of a lengthy text, a useful option for presenting the hymn is the possibility of alternating the two parts of the congregation, which could avoid the monotony of singing together.

Interestingly, the *Gloria* is currently the only chant of the Mass Ordinary that can be sung by the choir alone. Felice Rainoldi gives several reasons in the light of which some explanation can be found. According to him, one reason why this chant can only be sung by the choir alone has to do with the concern for the preservation of ancient compositions of great value, which can only be sung by the choir (Rainoldi 1999, pp. 141–42). Singing the *Gloria* by the choir alone, however, is not the preferred way of presentation.

Although the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that if the *Gloria* is not sung, it is to be recited. Joseph Gelineau, a pioneer of post-Conciliar liturgical music, emphasizes the original intent of presenting the hymn as follows: "simply reciting the Glory to God does not really do justice to the prayer that is meant to be sung" (Gelineau 2002, p. 157).

Regarding musical settings, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document, *Sing to the Lord*,²² provides the following guidelines: "While through-composed settings of the *Gloria* give clearest expression to the text, the addition of refrains is permitted, provided the refrains encourage congregational participation" (STL 2008, art. 149, p. 47). The priority of fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations, as outlined in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, is evident in this recommendation: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4–5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II* 1963, art. 14).

Concerning the responsorial form of the *Gloria*, however, Joseph Gelineau indicates that this form can disrupt the lyrical flow of the hymn: "while I will not deny the prac-

tical interest of this type of easy arrangement for the assembly, it is worth noting that the responsorial form is already frequently used during the Mass. This form breaks up the lyrical flow of the original hymn; it can quickly become tedious and wearisome” (Gelineau 2002, p. 157).

During the Second Vatican Council, a working group of *Coetus X* was engaged in the reform of the Ordo Missae. The group also dealt with the placement of the hymn Gloria in the Mass. Several alternatives for its placement were proposed, such as before the Kyrie, after the Collect, or after Communion. Ultimately, the placement of the Gloria hymn remained after the Kyrie, as it was before the Council (Barba 2002, pp. 172–76). As some liturgical musicians have used the Gloria hymn for other parts of the Mass for which the hymn was not intended, the document *Sing to the Lord* provides the following instructions: “The Gloria may not be moved to a different part of the Mass than the one assigned by the Roman Missal. It may not, for example, be used in place of the Entrance chant or song or during the sprinkling with blessed water” (STL 2008, art. 150, p. 47).

6. Conclusions

The hymn Gloria is one of the oldest Christian hymns deserving special attention. According to Felice Rainoldi, some musicologists propose the identification of the Gloria with the *Carmen Christo quasi Deo* performed by the Christians of Bithynia at the beginning of the second century, as testified by Pliny the Younger (Rainoldi 1999, p. 136, note 37).

The Gloria emphasizes the Trinitarian dimension of the celebration, especially due to the final doxological phrase that follows the two parts directed to the Father and the Son, respectively. The hymn is, for the most part, a magnificent song of exaltation to God with Trinitarian specificity, remaining a festive element with a solemn character. It highlights a Christmas element through its opening phrase.

Although the hymn Gloria is primarily a hymn of praise, it is not without supplication and penitential content, with phrases like “you take away the sins of the world” and “have mercy on us” repeated twice. With this penitential and litany section, the hymn forms an obvious link with the preceding chant *Kyrie eleison—Christe eleison, Lord have mercy—Christ have mercy*. The second part of the hymn is addressed to the Son, to Christ as the Lamb of God. He is thus seen in His redeeming death for our sins and then as our Advocate at the Father’s right hand, open to our requests for mercy.

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Notes

- ¹ The processional chants of the Eucharist are the opening chant (introit), the chant for the preparation of the gifts (cantus ad offertorium) and the chant during Holy Communion (communio).
- ² The term *psalmi idiotici* is used by the 4th century Council of Laodicea to express a contrast to the biblical chants.
- ³ The pontificate of Pope Telesphorus was from c. 126 to c. 136.
- ⁴ “Hic constituit ut septem ebdomadas ante Pascha ieiunium celebraretur, et natalem Domini noctu missas celebrarentur: nam omni tempore, ante horae tertiae cursus nullus praesumeret missas celebrare, qua hora Dominus noster ascendit crucem; et ante sacrificium hymnus diceretur angelicus, hoc est: Gloria in excelsis Deo” (Duchesne 1886, p. 129).
- ⁵ The pontificate of Pope Symmachus was from 498 to 514.
- ⁶ “Hic constituit ut omne die dominicum vel natalicia martyrum Gloria in excelsis ymnus diceretur” (Duchesne 1886, p. 263; Jungmann 1951, vol. 1, p. 356).
- ⁷ “Item dicitur Gloria in excelsis Deo, si episcopus fuerit, tantummodo die dominico sive diebus festis, a presbyteris autem minime dicitur, nisi solo in Pascha” (Lietzmann 1921, p. 1).

- 8 Gregory of Tours (+594) states that clergy and people sang the Gloria in thanksgiving for special events but does not specify whether this was a practice related to the Mass. An 8th-century Irish hymnal, without specifying its liturgical context, assumed its performance by the monastic community and the people (Raffa 2003, pp. 291–92).
- 9 Among the oldest Gloria, for example, is the Gloria from Mass XV (Graduale Romanum 1979, pp. 760–62).
- 10 “53. Quando vero finierint, dirigens se pontifex contra populum incipit *Gloria in excelsis Deo* si tempus fuerit. Et statim regerat se ad orientem esquedum finiatur. Post hoc dirigens se iterum ad populum dicens: *Pax vobis*, et regerans se ad orientem dicit: *Oremus*, et sequitur oratio. Post finitam sedit. Similiter episcopi vel presbiteri sedent” (Griffiths 2012, p. 41).
- 11 The text of the hymn Gloria was mainly assigned to the morning or the end of the nocturnal Office, as it was already in the 4th century in Athanasius (von der Goltz 1905, p. 56, cf. p. 112) De virginitate, ed. Eduard von der Goltz, Lpz. 1905 (=Texte und Untersuchungen zur Gesch. der altchristl. Lit., N.F. 14, H. 2a p. 56, cf. p. 112)
- 12 Biblical pericope is given in context: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9–11).
- 13 “Gloria in excelsis deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae uoluntatis laudamus té benedicimus té adoramus té glorificamus té magnificamus té gratias agimus tibi pro [propter] magnam missericordiam tuam domine rex caelestis deus pater omnipotens domine filii dei unigeniti (unigenite) iesu christe sancte spiritus dei et omnes dicimus amen domine filii dei patris agne dei qui tollis peccatum mundi misserere nobis suscipe orationes nostras qui sedis ad dextram dei patris misserere nobis quoniam tú solus sanctus tú solus dominus tú solus dominus (The words “tú solus dominus” are repeated twice in this place. We suppose that there is an error in the edition) tú solus gloriosus cum spiritu sancto in gloria dei patris amen” (Warner 1915, p. 4).
- 14 *Cantus Catholici* 1655 (CC 1655) lists seven hymns of the *Gloria*, but *Gloria Paschale 1* (CC 1655, p. 120) does not contain its own text but refers to the text of *Gloria Paschale 2* (CC 1655, p. 121). The *Gloria* on p. 202 (CC 1655, p. 202) gives a separate melody but refers to the text of *Gloria 1*.
- 15 This *Gloria* is for the feast of the Nativity of the Lord.
- 16 The first edition of the hymnal *Cithara sanctorum* was published in 1636, and its compiler was Juraj Tranovský (Tranovský 1636).
- 17 The final denomination, “God, almighty Father” (Deus, Pater omnipotens) is also found in the Apostles’ Creed and points to the venerable age of hymn.
- 18 This name is also used in the Creed in the current Roman Missal: “I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God” (The Roman Missal 2011, p. 510).
- 19 You take away the sins of the world—you take away the sins of the world—you are seated at the right hand of the Father.
- 20 Have mercy on us—receive our prayer—have mercy on us.
- 21 For example, in German-speaking countries, the song “Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr” is well known and has been sung in those countries since 1525 in place of the *Gloria*.
- 22 This document was developed by the Music Subcommittee of the Committee on Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was approved for publication by the full body of bishops at its November 2007 General Meeting.

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