

10 Sacred music

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That music survives from the past with the inevitable loss of its original context is a truism that might be challenged above all by sacred music, on the grounds that a liturgy provides a timeless context within which music composed for its service can continue to fulfill its original purpose. Indeed, the Catholic liturgy that emerged from the Counter-Reformation after the Council of Trent (1545–63) – the Tridentine Rite, a normative form of late medieval Roman Use¹ – persisted until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), providing for four centuries a constant framework of worship (local variations and emphases of practice aside) for which music could long remain in use. As many a set of manuscript parts from the repertoires of religious establishments in the former Habsburg lands of central and eastern Europe attests, Haydn’s sacred music continued to be performed within the Catholic liturgy throughout the nineteenth century, a tradition often reflected in the nature of the performing material (a core of original eighteenth-century parts, supplemented by various accretions) and the recording of dates of performance on the reverse of the organ part or folder. Yet today Haydn’s sacred music is seen to have suffered a loss of context more far-reaching than that undergone by some other genres of his output. The late masses for instance – works large enough to form independent musical entities – are performed as concert pieces, crossing boundaries of genre, style, and purpose between “church” and “chamber” more fundamental than the contextual changes affecting, say, the string quartets and symphonies. Moreover, the transference of a mass to the concert hall has its problems, for the unbroken sequence of movements in the same tonality places on aesthetic sensibilities a strain not encountered in the liturgical context; and a sense of propriety may be jarred by the secular performance of liturgical texts. Some pieces have appeared too prolix (the *Missa Cellensis in honorem Beatissimae Virginis Mariae*, which rivals Bach’s Mass in B minor in length) or peculiar (the *Stabat mater*, with only two of its fourteen movements in an above-moderate tempo and half in the minor mode) to have been taken up with any frequency as concert music, while others are simply too small to establish that independent existence.

The historical and liturgical contexts²

Haydn's sacred music encompasses his entire career, falling approximately in three distinct periods: the early years until his appointment as Esterházy Vice-Kapellmeister at Eisenstadt in 1761; from 1766, on his succession to full Kapellmeister after the death of his predecessor Gregor Joseph Werner, until the mid-1770s, by which time Prince Nicolaus Esterházy's passion for opera at Eszterháza had made it Haydn's principal concern; and the late years from 1796. His output comprises a presumed total of fourteen masses, from all stages of his career; the large-scale *Stabat mater* (1767) and late *Te Deum* (1800); and from the early and middle periods numerous other smaller works together with a somewhat indeterminate group of *contrafacta* (adaptations of existing compositions for sacred use).³ Works can be divided according to their setting of liturgical or non-liturgical texts and – not a direct correlation – whether they were performed within the liturgy or outside it in connection with the liturgical season. At least until the introduction of Joseph II's ecclesiastical reforms from 1783 – in the usual account of Haydn's church music dividing the earlier from the later works – his sacred music reflects a liturgy and associated practices shaped by a peculiarly Habsburg synthesis of church and state, in which the liturgy of a propagandist Catholic church emerging triumphant from the Counter-Reformation was overlaid in the early eighteenth century by the victory of Habsburg over Turk. Under Charles VI (1711–40) the combination of secular pomp, public display of imperial piety, the Viennese enthusiasm for pilgrimages and processions, and a veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary of medieval intensity was at its height. This *pietas austriaca* – preserved by Empress Maria Theresa (1740–80), albeit under some retrenchment and softening into rococo – continued to echo through Haydn's church music, not only in the evocation of imperial power and signalling of a particular grade of liturgical ceremony by the C major clarini and timpani of the first *Missa Cellensis* (1766), composed in connection with the pilgrimage church of Mariazell, but also in Haydn's intimate and devout settings of Marian texts.

An awareness of liturgical context can restore to Haydn's sacred music a dimension otherwise missed. For example, the grave simplicity of the four *Hymni de Venerabili* (c.1767) is explained and enhanced when they are imagined performed in turn to accompany the processional display of the Host at four altars during the celebration of Corpus Christi, the last and one of the most important festivals of the liturgical year, observed with particular emphasis in Vienna and its surrounding regions.⁴ Titles may indicate the liturgical purpose (*Missa Sancti Nicolai*, "Cantilena pro adventu"), although a title may accommodate use on various occasions ("in honorem Beatissimae Virginis Mariae") and masses in particular were appropriated

to other purposes. For instance, Haydn apparently used either the *Missa Sancti Nicolai* or the *Missa in honorem BVM* (“Große Orgelsolomesse”) later as a *Missa Sancti Josephi*.⁵ On the other hand, the presence of a liturgical text should not be taken to mean a direct location in the liturgy. For example, the thirteenth-century verse meditation “*Stabat mater*” was adopted in the liturgy as late as 1727 for use on the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the BVM on the Friday of Passion Week. Haydn’s *Stabat mater*, however, was identified with the following Holy Week, in particular Good Friday. In all likelihood Haydn directed the first performance of the *Stabat mater* from the organ in the Eisenstadt castle chapel on Good Friday, April 17, 1767, following the tradition of Good Friday oratorios composed by Werner, and the work is known to have received Good Friday performances on at least two further occasions.⁶ Likewise, Haydn’s settings of two Marian antiphons – the *Ave regina* and the two *Salve reginas* – might find their liturgical place, according to season, at the end of Vespers or Compline (although in the Tridentine Rite they could follow any Office).⁷ The tradition of Marian devotion known to Haydn, however, suggests their alternative use in a votive observance (one outside the normal course of the liturgy) dedicated to the Virgin. As for pieces with non-liturgical texts, the “motets” and *contrafacta* in particular found a liturgical place as substitutes for the Proper offertory of the mass, as perhaps did Haydn’s Advent arias during that season, although again, on account of their characteristic extolling of the Virgin Mary, a votive use seems possible. Similarly, Haydn’s only authenticated pastorella (“Herst Nachbä”) and possibly one or two others may have been performed as the offertory of Christmas mass or even outside the liturgy within a traditional observance centered on the crib of the Nativity.⁸ Dialect texts presenting in dramatic fashion (not without a touch of comedy) the shepherds’ amazement on hearing the angels’ news, and their seeking out and adoration of the Christ Child, set to an intentionally homespun and allusive musical style, suggest that Haydn’s pastorella(s) were destined beyond the court, an inference supported by the location of surviving sources; nevertheless, a capacity on the part of the Esterházy for indulgence in a popular tradition both entertaining and edifying should not be entirely discounted.

c.1749–65

Sacred works contribute all that is known of Haydn’s first attempts at composition. It was perhaps inevitable that the “Kapellknabe” drilled in the liturgy under Reutter at the Stephansdom should try his hand first in church music;

the contrast with the genres first essayed by Mozart is instructive. Haydn's earliest works in their likely order were the disputed *Missa "Rorate coeli desuper"* (1749 or earlier?), the *Missa brevis* in F (Haydn's later dating: 1749) and the *Lauda Sion* in C (c.1750?), preceded, if we take the accounts of Griesinger and Dies on trust, by some boyish attempts that again indicate a first location in sacred music.⁹ The transmitted *Missa "Rorate,"* if authentic,¹⁰ gives ample evidence of Haydn's early deficiencies in technique, as he admitted later: "I wrote diligently, but not quite correctly."¹¹ Gross errors in part-writing and other solecisms argue against the authorship of Reutter, the principal other contender, but a competence of the figured organ bass invites speculation that Reutter might have offered some instruction. Individual pairings of parts work well enough – soprano and organ bass, violins and organ bass, violins and soprano – to suggest piecemeal composition without an understanding of the complete texture. A peculiarity of Haydn's writing for voices, particularly noticeable in the early works, is the low pitching of the tenor, often undercutting the bass and apparently subverting the position of the voices within the harmony. Haydn's procedure can be justified by a linear understanding of the part-writing and the restitution of the harmonic bass by the instrumental bass (violone), sounding an octave lower. The technical lapses of the early works are less important than the indications of artistic substance, as in, for example, the "melody, and a certain youthful fire"¹² of the *Missa brevis* in F, with its affective use of harmony ("Et incarnatus"), control of formal structure (Benedictus) and assured writing for the violins.

Probably none of Haydn's instrumental works of this time rivals the achievement of what may justly be called his first masterwork, the *Salve regina* in E, which Haydn later dated from 1756. It demonstrates full command of the current Italianate style in Viennese church music (acquired, on Haydn's own testimony, from his experience as general factotum to Nicola Porpora)¹³ in the service of an affective and expressive setting of the Marian text. Haydn's characteristic and lifelong choice of E major for music of deep intensity is established here, as is his manipulation of formal paradigms to effective ends. A remarkable feature of the second movement ("Ad te suspiramus") is the extraordinary sequence of parallel fifths, broken only by dissonant "second inversions," for the setting of "gementes" ("mourning"), in the long chromatic descent "in hac lacrimarum valle" (mm. 32–47). In the closing movement ("O clemens"), the surprising turn to the minor (m. 60) turns the final ritornello into an unexpected course that includes a rapid alternation of solo and tutti invocations of the Virgin (mm. 63–69), thereby expressing a heightened anxiety not dispelled until the final plagal cadence.

1766–81

The six years immediately following Werner's death in March 1766 saw Haydn's most sustained period of engagement with sacred music. As director of the modest musical forces of the Eisenstadt castle chapel, Haydn apparently assumed the role of solo organist on occasion¹⁴ and composed works both for the chapel and for other destinations. According to Haydn's original contract of employment, authority over the sacred music at the Esterházy court had been reserved for Werner;¹⁵ now Haydn's change in status to full Kapellmeister appears to have prompted him to an overt statement in the genre. Year by year (except for 1770, when he was apparently overcome by a serious illness)¹⁶ Haydn produced a major sacred work: the first *Missa Cellensis* in 1766, the *Stabat mater* in 1767, *Missa "Sunt bona mixta malis"* in 1768, *Missa in honorem BVM* ("Große Orgelsolomesse") in 1769, the *Salve regina* in g minor (again with a solo organ part) in 1771, and finally, the *Missa Sancti Nicolai* in 1772. This may be seen as part of a larger desire at this time to explore all branches of composition, which in sacred music posed challenges in the setting of text, large-scale musical structure, supra-movement coherence, mastery of a range of styles and techniques (including fugue and *stile antico*) and, not least, measuring up to tradition.

Haydn no doubt drew on a repertory of large-scale *missae cum clarinis* in C major for the first *Missa Cellensis*. What is so astounding about this work – Haydn's most ambitious in any genre to date – is its mastery of the required range of styles and techniques: choral movements in Baroque ritornello structure (Kyrie I), modern symphonic style ("Gloria in excelsis") and *stile antico* ("Gratias"); solo ritornello arias ("Christe," with choral interjections; "Laudamus"; "Quoniam"); affective movements for chorus and solo voices ("Qui tollis"); and choral fugues (Kyrie II; "In gloria") carried out on the largest scale and with the greatest assurance, all the more impressive in that these were among Haydn's earliest essays in fugue. The "Domine" initiates in Haydn's sacred music a type of movement in 3/8 meter with moderate to brisk tempo and usually based on a ritornello procedure. This typical movement of mid-century Italianate church music becomes in Haydn's hands an extended, freely developing structure, incorporating the entry of the solo voices by turn, various solo combinations, and chorus. The achievement represented by the *Missa Cellensis* is no less remarkable if, as there is evidence to suggest, it was composed in more than one stage between 1766 and c.1773, first as a Kyrie–Gloria pair (an Italianate *missa solemnis* of the time) in 1766, and gaining the other movements later.¹⁷

The structural coherence and expressive import of "through-composition" proposed for the *Salve regina* in g minor¹⁸ is preceded in the *Stabat mater* by a comparable manifestation of a long-range design that both

binds the piece together in musical terms and projects an interpretive setting of the text. At the immediate level the text drew from Haydn, who hoped to have “expressed adequately words of such great importance,”¹⁹ an affective response and musical symbolism of Baroque intensity (for example, in the first movement, the solo tenor’s opening *messa di voce* stasis on “Stabat,” “Neapolitan”-inflected and chromatically descending line for “dolorosa,” C♯ at “crucem,” brokenly “tearful” falling thirds for “lacrymosa,” and long chain of suspensions for “pendebat”). Beyond that, the progression of the text – i.e., from the depiction of the Mother of Christ at the foot of the Cross (“Stabat mater dolorosa”) through the appeal to sympathy (“Quis est homo”) and the request to participate in her grief (“Eja Mater”) to the prayer for her aid in the Day of Judgment (“Flammis orci ne succendar”) and the gaining of salvation (“Quando corpus morietur . . . Paradisi gloria”) – is paralleled by a sequence of movements linked for the most part by tonalities falling by a third. The process is inflected by other tonal relationships, so that the home G minor, together with its heightened affective import of “Neapolitan” and “augmented sixth” harmonies, recurs at crucial points in the text: at the return of standing by the Cross (no. 9: “Fac me vere tecum flere . . . Juxta crucem tecum stare,” in which an additional coincidence is the unique movement-heading *Lagrimoso*, recalling the opening two lines of text “Stabat mater dolorosa, juxta crucem lacrymosa”), and for the anticipation of death (no. 13). This is transformed at last to radiant G major for a vision of Paradise (no. 14) in *stile antico*, interrupted by the joyous roudades of the solo soprano.

Various traditions of Austrian church music are addressed in turn by the following three masses: classic *stile antico (alla cappella)* in the *Missa “Sunt bona mixta malis,”* which even in its apparently fragmentary state presents Haydn’s most extended essay in this style; the mass with *concertante* organ part in the “Große Orgelsolomesse,” which uses for the first time in the masses a secular instrumentation of horns and cors anglais in line with the Esterházy musical forces; and the *missa brevis* in the *Missa Sancti Nicolai*. Here Haydn appears to have exploited labor-saving strategies associated with the genre – the repetition of music for subsequent sections of text, notably that of the Kyrie for “Dona nobis pacem,” and the simultaneous setting of successive lines of text in the longer movements, as in the Credo – in combination with certain features of a large-scale mass, among them an expanded instrumentation (again secular, with horns) and vocal solos, in order to compose, perhaps in some haste, a setting appropriate to the celebration of Prince Nicolaus’s nameday on December 6, 1772.²⁰ After 1772, Haydn’s composition of sacred music decreased as the opera house at Eszterháza claimed ever more of his attention: chief among the few works from these years is the *Missa brevis Sancti Joannis de Deo*

(“Kleine Orgelsolomesse”; c.1773–77), in which the extreme brevity of the Gloria (thirty-one measures, Allegro di molto), achieved by declaiming lines of text simultaneously, led Haydn’s brother, Michael, to provide a version “un poco più prolungato” (118 measures). Yet practicality does not deny art in this miniature mass: the Adagio Kyrie has a breadth beyond its twenty-five measures; the Benedictus presents an exquisite pairing of the solo soprano and concertante organ part; and the Adagio Agnus Dei eschews the common procedure of a *missa brevis* “Dona ut Kyrie” for an independent setting of “dona nobis pacem,” effecting a peaceful close (violins *perdendosi*, pizzicato bass *senza Organo* and each voice in turn *pianissimo*).

1782–1802

Haydn’s claim that the Op. 33 string quartets (1781) were “written in a new and special way” might equally be made for the second *Missa Cellensis* (1782), in that the latter shows a greater kinship with Haydn’s subsequent masses than with his earlier ones. Indeed, the *Missa Cellensis* might well be termed the first of “the last seven masses,” contrary to the traditional proposition of a stylistic gulf between the earlier and last six masses, reflecting the fourteen years’ hiatus that was shortly to follow in Haydn’s composition of sacred music (1782–96). Not that the *Missa Cellensis* has no connection with its predecessors; for example, comparison with the *Missa Sancti Nicolai* shows a similar employment of recapitulation as a means of structure. But in the *Missa Cellensis* the strategy appears with greater subtlety. Whereas the opening “Gloria in excelsis Deo” of the Gloria of the *Missa Sancti Nicolai* effects a literal return to close the first section of the movement (mm. 1–2 become mm. 35–36), in the Gloria of the *Missa Cellensis* the opening musical substance returns appropriately for “glorificamus te” (mm. 35ff.), with rhythmically adjusted vocal parts inserted into the repeated instrumental texture. In the Credo – here the parallel with the *Missa Sancti Nicolai* is exact – a musical recapitulation accompanies “Et resurrexit,” with the text compressed in *missa brevis* fashion (mm. 112ff.). The *Missa Cellensis* also carries forward other features of Haydn’s earlier sacred works, notably the Baroque affective style in the Credo for “Et incarnatus . . . crucifixus.” On the other hand, it displays characteristics of the late works, including a menacing Benedictus (a trait already present in the first *Missa Cellensis*), a fugue in 6/8 meter for “Et vitam venturi saeculi, amen” and, most immediately striking, a Kyrie with an Adagio introduction leading to a Vivace in symphonic style.

Tradition has it that Haydn composed his last six masses for the annual celebration of the nameday of Princess Marie Hermenegild Esterházy, wife of

Prince Nicolaus II. Although all six were performed in this connection, only the last three – the “Theresienmesse” (1799), “Schöpfungsmesse” (1801), and “Harmoniemesse” (1802) – can be said with certainty to have been composed for the occasion. The relationships of the first three with the Princess’s nameday are more complicated, colored by the fact that the usual day for the celebration – not the nameday itself, the Nativity of the BVM on September 8, but, appropriately enough, the following Sunday, the movable Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary – continued to be the day the Viennese commemorated victory over the Turks in 1683: and this at a time when Austria was again at war.²¹ Thus the first performance of the *Missa Sancti Bernardi d’Offida* (“Heiligmesse”), in all likelihood on Sunday September 11, 1796, in the Bergkirche at Eisenstadt, would have enjoyed the coincidence in that year of the saint’s day – thus fulfilling the primary designation of the first of the six masses – with the double celebration of a historic military victory and the Princess’s nameday. The explicit and implicit references to war in the *Missa in tempore belli* (“Paukenmesse,” 1796) and *Missa in angustiis* (“Nelsonmesse,” 1798) suggest an original connection not with the Princess Esterházy but with external events, and both masses received only belated performances in Eisenstadt in honor of the Princess’s nameday on September 29, 1797, and September 23, 1798, respectively. The association of the latter mass with Nelson or his defeat of Napoleon’s fleet at Aboukir Bay in the summer of 1798 is spurious.

By 1796, and after Joseph II’s restatement of the relationship between church and state, the musical component of the Baroque amalgam of imperial show and liturgical ceremony was no longer a valid stylistic mode for a large-scale mass. Even so, the comparison of Haydn’s last six masses with his late symphonies, although valid in many respects of style and structure,²² should not obscure the fact that the late masses were conceived as sacred music and performed liturgically, albeit on special occasions when attention no doubt focused on the musical part of the proceedings. In these masses Haydn continued to draw on Viennese traditions, both in the musical representation of vivid textual images – in particular, those of the Gloria and Credo – and in matters of structural organization. Gloria and Credo, for example, follow an established Viennese tripartite pattern, with a central section for “Gratias . . . qui tollis” and “Et incarnatus . . . crucifixus” respectively, each with a major point of internal articulation as indicated. Some movements are overlaid with strategies of thematic return that make fair claim to a symphonic comparison, but also draw on ritornello procedure: the Gloria movements of the *Missa in tempore belli* and *Missa in angustiis*, for example, are particularly tightly organized in this respect. Kyrie movements, often proposed as “sonata” structures with a slow introduction comparable with a symphonic first movement, demonstrate the tension that exists, if

liturgical propriety is to be preserved, between a tripartite text (“Kyrie . . . Christe . . . Kyrie”) and a musical structure with the fundamental bipartite logic of departing from the tonic and returning to it: each Kyrie presents a different solution to the crucial placing of “Christe eleison.” In setting the text Haydn exploits a variety of relationships between solo and tutti voices and instrumental forces, ranging from a texture that is primarily instrumental in conception to one that is primarily vocal. For example, the Kyrie of the “Theresienmesse” begins with an Adagio, which in its opening measures might well preface a symphony. In mm. 4–11 the vocal parts are inserted into this predominantly instrumental texture, first entering on a dominant octave, as if horn parts; only from m. 11 do the vocal parts begin to take precedence, with instrumental accompaniment. The ensuing Allegro (mm. 29ff.) begins as a thoroughly vocal fugato, the instruments *colla parte*.

The “Harmoniemesse” (1802), Haydn’s last completed work and one of his most richly scored, aptly lends itself to interpretation as the summation of his late synthesis of vocal and instrumental styles. The Poco adagio Kyrie, although a complete sonata movement itself, can be perceived as a massive prelude to the Gloria, an extension of the Adagio introduction-Allegro of other Kyrie movements to a supra-movement relationship that indeed heightens the liturgical reality of the direct following of the Gloria on the Kyrie. Harmonic shifts in the Kyrie to tonal regions a third distant (including at the recapitulation, bars 83–84, a reinterpretation of the old Baroque ploy of the “hiatus return,” here from the chord of D major to B \flat major) and the subdominant-inflected coda contribute to the peculiar stasis and extraordinary breadth of this movement. The central “Gratias . . . qui tollis” of the Gloria once more invokes the 3/8 movement – by now a thoroughly old-fashioned type – and begins in E \flat with the entry of the solo voices in turn normally enough, within a ritornello structure. With “Qui tollis” (tutti), however, the movement breaks out of the ritornello frame into a continuous expansion that builds to a shattering crisis on “miserere” (m. 231, “Neapolitan” chord) and soon after collapses into a cadence in g minor – an “open” ending that again invokes coherence at a higher level. And in the “Et incarnatus . . . crucifixus” traces of Baroque symbolism – triplet movement in the accompaniment and an emphasis given to wind instruments invoking the traditional *topos* of the Nativity – are veiled by a musical expressivity that projects the state of becoming Man (mm. 100ff.); the agony of the Crucifixion (mm. 112ff., in particular, the F/G \flat dissonance between the brass and other parts in m. 115, followed by the climactic and paradoxical C major for “passus” in mm. 118–19); and a particular pathos in the recall of the opening *topos* to accompany the final “passus et sepultus est” (mm. 128ff.).

Dissemination and reception

Three major forces governed the initial dissemination of Haydn's sacred music: its liturgical purpose limited it to Catholic areas of Europe, specifically the Habsburg dominions; dissemination was in manuscript parts, the normal mode of distribution of sacred music during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and manuscript distribution was subject to the influence of regional centers, large and small, and the still little-known dynamics of commercial copying. Only the *Stabat mater* stands apart from these general conditions through its printed publication in London (Bland, 1784) and Paris (Sieber, 1785) and absorption into the tradition of the Protestant oratorio. In the main, Haydn's sacred music spread west from Vienna along the line of the Danube, only faltering when meeting the regional influences of Salzburg in Upper Austria and Munich in Bavaria. It traveled north into Habsburg (then again Catholic) Bohemia and Moravia, until reaching the Protestant lands of Saxony and Prussian Silesia, eastward into Hungary and south through Styria, Carinthia, and other Habsburg domains. It made little headway, however, in Italy, Spain, and France. The continued manuscript dissemination of Haydn's sacred music in the Catholic Habsburg heartlands during the nineteenth century indicates its defiance of the historicist campaign of the *Allgemeiner deutscher Cäcilienverein* (founded 1868) to promote the composition of sacred music in the "true church style" of Palestrina, a classicism – save for its Romantic overtones – anticipated by that traditionally espoused by the eighteenth century in the occasional composition of sacred music in *stile antico*.

Outside the natural habitat of his sacred music an incipient classicizing of Haydn himself is discernible at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the project of the Leipzig firm Breitkopf & Härtel to publish the masses in score. This dissemination in an unusual format can be seen as the beginning of the later reception of Haydn's sacred music, for the venture represented a notable change of attitude after Härtel's refusal of Haydn's offer of his masses for publication in 1799.²³ Six masses were published between 1802 and 1808 and a seventh in 1823,²⁴ with the *Stabat mater* in 1803. In England Christian Ignatius Latrobe (1758–1836) and Vincent Novello (1781–1861) promoted Haydn's sacred music through the publication of movements from the masses and other pieces in vocal score with keyboard (organ) accompaniment. Novello's complete series of Haydn's masses (1822–25) and their continued reprintings throughout the nineteenth century and beyond were of primary importance for their establishment in the English musical canon.²⁵

Breitkopf & Härtel's publication of the first *Missa Cellensis* (no. 5, 1807) as the only earlier mass in the series brought to critical attention hitherto

largely unknown aspects of Haydn's art as a composer of sacred music. The contrapuntal movements of the mass and what was deemed its appropriately serious spirit received repeated commendation in the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. A review of April 20, 1808, found that, compared with the masses published previously, this setting was not compromised by "their more glittering coloring and lighter style in general, the sharper contrasts, surprises and other means of achieving what one now terms brilliant effects."²⁶ Already in Haydn's day voices had been raised against the claimed theatrical style of modern church music, and the implied unease in Leipzig opinion with respect to the later masses has resonated through the reception of Haydn's sacred music ever since in a range of predominantly adverse opinion, which reaches its nadir in assessments such as "the masses of Haydn . . . lack dignity, solemnity and depth, and may be fitly termed pleasing toys of the Papacy."²⁷ At best, apologists have sought to deflect the charge that Haydn's sacred music was unfitted for the liturgy by pleading "the *topos* of rural innocence" – a cheerful "Volkstümlichkeit" that informed Haydn's background, character, and attitude to the composition of church music – and citing in support Haydn's reported comment that when he beheld God his heart leapt for joy and therefore his music did likewise.²⁸

Some have admitted the liturgical unfitness of Haydn's sacred music but have pointed nevertheless to its artistic qualities. Others have claimed both inappropriateness to intended function through the improper setting of texts and deficiencies in musical and aesthetic substance, raising the charge of naive musical representation, taking exception, for example, to the Agnus Dei of the *Missa in tempore belli*, in which "the [anxious] beating of the heart is portrayed by the timpani" or, in another interpretation, "Haydn has the timpani imitate the distant thunder of cannon."²⁹ Any response, of course, requires an assessment of the standpoint of its author. For example, one writer, presumably with ruling concepts of peace and humble prayer in mind, found the opening of the "Dona nobis pacem" of the *Missa in tempore belli* unacceptable "when . . . (after much military drumming of the timpani and similar blaring of trumpets) finally in a formal fanfare with all possible racket of timpani, trumpets, C-clarinets and other noisy apparatus, [Haydn] sighs to the Lamb of God in the following way"³⁰ (Agnus Dei, mm. 40–56). Rather, Haydn, who in his sacred music was well able to invoke Burke's sublime of astonishment verging on terror,³¹ as the climax of the Benedictus of the *Missa in angustiis* demonstrates, presents here in the *Missa in tempore belli* "the horrid sublimity" of war³² and the anguished cry for salvation. It would appear that the point was not lost on Beethoven, who in all likelihood knew this mass and included a comparable representation in the "Dona nobis" of the *Missa Solemnis*.

Any history of the reception of Haydn's sacred music leaves us with questions of how we might address this repertory today and indeed how Haydn's sacred music might speak to us. Certainly in 1776 Haydn rated his operas and sacred music above his instrumental works and late in life reportedly expressed pride in his masses.³³ Indeed, in 1790 it was claimed "around the year 1780 [Haydn] attained the highest level of excellence and fame through his church and theater works."³⁴ Such assessments compel a revision of the traditional narrative of Haydn's oeuvre and the place of his sacred music within it. These are historiographical issues; and the restoration of the contextual dimension, both historical and liturgical, to Haydn's sacred music and the recovery of some sense of the central importance it had in eighteenth-century perceptions are exercises in informed historical imagination. Beyond that stand those of Haydn's sacred works that continue to be part of current musical experience despite their loss of original context – which ultimately proves unimportant – and yet others that might be retrieved, as it were, from their status as historical documents. Such works confront us as ahistorical and immediate artistic and aesthetic presences. Relieved of time-bound questions of function and appropriateness, they reveal their continuing validity as bearers of whatever meanings we find in them, as musical creations, particular realizations of sacred texts, or conveyors of spiritual or philosophical import.³⁵ Readings are not mutually exclusive, and all belong to the larger critical inquiry into what Haydn's music might mean for today.