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Translating the Hebrew Psalms to be Sung: The 2010 *Revised Grail Psalms*, a Case Study

"Ethnographic research has shown that 'poetic' forms and behaviors are almost universally widespread" [Banti and Giannattasio 2004: 290; see Feld and Fox 1994: 30, citing Lomax 1968]. Moreover, "poetry is performed more commonly as sung rather than spoken discourse in all oral traditions" [Banti and Giannattasio 2004: 297]. Even within literate traditions worldwide, sung poetic discourse – song – is no less ubiquitous. Yet, while most of the world's poetic discourse is sung, it is most often translated to be read. The Hebrew Psalms, for example, were composed for the most part to be sung, yet more often than not, they are translated to be read. Why this change in pragmatic use and purpose? In the introduction to his 2007 English translation of the Hebrew Psalms, Robert Alter writes, "It is a constant challenge to turn ancient Hebrew poetry into English verse that is reasonably faithful to the original and yet readable as poetry. Perhaps the most pervasive problem is the intrinsic structural compactness of biblical Hebrew" [Alter 2007: xxviii-xxix]. Alter specifies the nature of this "structural compactness" as "rhythmic compactness."

> There is no way of consistently getting this terrific rhythmic compactness into English, but I am convinced that a more strenuous effort to approximate

it is called for than the existing translations have made […]. The King James Version is often (though not invariably) eloquent, but it ignores the rhythms of the Hebrew almost entirely. The various modern English versions are only occasionally eloquent, sometimes altogether flat-footed, and, more often than not, arhythmic. […] This preoccupation with rhythm […] is inseparable from the underlying aspiration of [my] translation of the Psalms [into English] [Alter 2009: xxix-xxx].

In this same introduction, Alter, understandably, does not detail *how* he actually went about meeting the challenge of versifying ancient Hebrew poetry into English; he simply manifests it in his translation. My interest in this present case study, however, lies precisely in documenting those kinds of details. My purpose, then, is to begin to reconstruct and describe some of the intuitive, and thus, for the most part, undocumented decision-making processes that commonly guided the translators of two other English translations of the Hebrew Psalms.

More specifically, the following case study follows and describes a variety of translation decisions that were carried out in the 2010 revision of the 1963 English translation of the Hebrew Psalms commonly known as *The Grail Psalms* (*GP*). This revision was not inconsequential: the 2010 *Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter* (*RGP*) was approved and promulgated as the confirmed text of the English-language liturgical psalter of the worldwide Roman Catholic Church.

Both the 1963 *GP* and the 2010 *RGP* privilege the rhythmic dimension of the biblical Psalms. As a result, by intentionally marking the Hebrew Psalms' rhythmic art, both translations are said to be remarkably "adaptable to the exigencies of different musical settings," and – more importantly – eminently singable [Polan 2010: xiv-xv]. Evidence of this "singability" is abundantly manifest in the avalanche of new musical settings that have been composed, published, and liturgically performed in the wake of both publications.

As Robert Alter attests, the challenges of translating and formalizing a text according to a given rhythmic principle are formidable. In particular, when translators champion a lyric's rhythmic dimension, its semantic, rhetorical, and syntactic art is often found lacking. Indeed, despite the accolades afforded the 1963 *GP* translation, eventually, after more than 30 years of liturgical use, it was found to "too frequently […] paraphrase the text rather than translate it literally," often resulting in "the loss of rich biblical

imagery that unfolds the meaning of the passage in a unique and often elevating, stirring and inspiring way" [Polan 2010: xvi; 2011: 2]. Ultimately, then, in 1998 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops requested a "more literal" revision of the 1963 *GP* translation [Polan 2003: 1]. Abbot Gregory Polan – monk, biblical scholar, translator, musician, and composer – along with the help of the Benedictine monks of Conception Abbey, was appointed the task of directing the translation project.

My present study reconstructs just a small number of representative translation decisions that were made in the course of that more than 12-year revision process. My principal sources for this reconstruction included Abbot Gregory's unpublished "Textual Notes" [Polan 2016], personal interviews with Abbot Gregory on May 6-8, 2016, an academic lecture he presented in 2011, and the parallel *Grail Psalms* translations of both 1963 and 2010. From this reconstruction, I have culled out and will briefly narrate a very small sample of some of the most prevalent types of translation and textsetting challenges encountered by Abbot Gregory and his translation team.

1. Rhythm in poetically organized discourse

I will focus on one particular poetic phenomenon, the phenomenon of rhythm; for I would contend that the practical challenge of rhythmically organizing a discourse, one like the Hebrew Psalms, often persuades translators – consciously or subconsciously – to choose to translate the Psalms primarily for reading, and not for singing. Further, it is my observation that the rhythmic segmentation of sung verbal discourse is at once the most distinctive characteristic of any lyric, and yet the most problematic element to translate.

Of all the formalizing procedures that mark poetically organized discourse, no poetic procedure is as important as the special rhythmic segmentation of that discourse [Banti and Giannattasio 2004: 295, 297], and no unit of rhythmic segmentation is as fundamental as the poetic line [Brogan 2012: 801]. The poetic line is perceived "as a rhythmical unit and unit of structure" and is progressively formed of constituent units while simultaneously informing higher-level structures [*ibid*.].

2. Textsetting poetically organized discourse

At the heart of the challenge of translating poetically organized discourse, especially discourse that is sung, is the cognitive phenomenon that scholars of generative metrics refer to as "textsetting."

> The textsetting problem, proposed by Halle and Lerdahl [1993], concerns how lines of linguistic text are [intuitively] arranged in time against a prede-termined rhythmic pattern [particularly as it] arises in the context of sung and chanted verse. [Scholars of generative metrics] suppose [that] when a person knows at least one verse of a particular song or chant, she has internalized its rhythmic pattern. Later, novel verses are generally compelled to adhere to this pattern, even when they have different stress patterns or syllable counts than the original lines. Whenever speakers use their native intuition to arrange the syllables of novel lines into an existing pattern, they are engaged in textsetting [Hayes 2005: 2].

Textsetting in the *Grail Psalms* translations of 1963 and 2010 is pri-marily governed by the segmentation of the utterances of the Psalms according to special patterns of English word-stress. The rhythm of the English word-stress patterns chosen for the 1963 and 2010 Grail Psalms is typically referred to as "sprung rhythm." Abbot Gregory characterizes the word-stress patterns of the *Grail Psalms*' sprung rhythm: "Sprung rhythm imitates natural speech patterns, designating a certain number of major accents *per* line, while having an unfixed number of unstressed syllables, [and] no more than four syllables between each foot" [Polan 2010: xv].

Sprung rhythm, as it is applied in both *Grail* psalters, conveniently bears a strong resemblance to the general accentual word-stress patterns of the biblical psalms. Hebrew poetic line patterns are partially formed on the basis of word stresses. Zogbo and Wendland [2000: 35, citing Schoekel 1988: 35] draw attention to the accentual rhythms of Hebrew parallelism in the following two psalm texts (Figure 1).

"The most commonly found pattern is 3+3," that is, three major stresses in each of two coupled, "parallel" lines. And "though 3+3 pattern is the most common pattern in Hebrew poetry, other patterns exist as well: 3+2, 2+2, 4+4, 4+3, 3+4, and others" [*ibid.*].

Figure 1. Two accentual rhythms of Hebrew parallelism

3. Manipulating language to conform to poetic rhythms

The least challenging – though not uncommon – revisional textsetting operation of the *RGP* involved those cases in which the translators were simply faced with replacing one single-syllable word with another single-syllable word. Such was the case in the revision of Psalm 34 (Figure 2) wherein the word "hide" (in verse 23b of the 1963 version) is replaced with the more literal word "trust" (in the 2010 version).

Figure 2. Psalm 34 – simple revision of one single-syllable word

Conveniently, then, the accentual nature of both words is the same; and as a result, the prescribed 3+3 word-stress pattern of the entire poetic line was easily preserved.

The resolution of most textsetting operations, however, is rarely as simple as replacing a one single-syllable word with another single-syllable

word. Generally, **textsetting becomes progressively complicated as the number of affected linguistic constituents in a poetic line increases.** The speech rhythms of multi-syllable words, for example, are, by comparison, more complicated than those of single-syllable words, the rhythms of grammatical phrases are more complex than those of single multi-syllable words, clauses are more complicated than phrases, and so on.

The negotiation of some translation and textsetting operations, for example, begins with a seemingly simple substitutionary procedure, the consequences of which, however, quickly complicate the subsequent and ensuing textsetting choices. Figure 3 exhibits the manner in which the *RGP* translators opted to handle such consequences in their revision of Psalm 48, verse 10.

Ps 47(48):10 (1963)

O Gód, we pónder your **lóve**   (3)

withín your témple.   (2)

Ps 48(47):10 (2010)

Your **mérciful lóve** , O Gód,   (3)

we pónder in your témple.   (2)

Figure 3. Psalm 48(47) – a complicating substitutionary revision

According to the exegetical notes of Abbot Gregory [2016b: 3; 2016a: 8], the "more precise meaning to the common Hebrew expression '*hesed*'" – translated simply as "love" in the 1963 version – refers to "divine love," which is "most often characterized by faithful and steadfast love given by relationship in the [Mosaic] covenant." It expresses more the notion of "steadfast loyalty" or "fidelity," which is often associated with Mosaic "covenant fidelity." The *RGP* translation attempts to conote this kind of love by employing the expression "merciful love" (Figure 3). However, as shown in Figure 4, it is not possible to simply replace the one-syllable word "love" with the two-word, four-syllable English expression "merciful love."

Ps 47(48):7-9, 10 (1963)

⁷ A trémbling séized them thére,	**(3 accents)**
anguish, like pángs in giving bírth,	(2 accents)
⁸ as whén the éast wind shátters	**(3 accents)**
the shíps of Társhish.	(2 accents
⁹ As we have héard, só we have séen	**(3 accents)**
In the cíty of our Gód,	(2 accents)
In the cíty of the Lórd of hósts,	**(3 accents)**
which God estáblishes foréver.	(2 accents)
O **Gód**, we **pón**der your **mér**ciful **lóve**	**(4 accents)**
We pónder in your témple.	(3 accents)

Figure 4. Psalm 48(47) – problematic revision

The poetic line would then, either (1) accrue a fourth word-stress in the line, and thus, completely disrupt the expected 3+2 rhytmic pattern established in the previous parallel couplets, or (2) as shown in Figure 5, create an excessive series of five unstressed syllables between the second and third word-stresses, and so, exceed sprung rhythm's conventional limit of three adjacent unstressed syllables between any two major word-stresses.

	1	2	3	4	5	unstressed syllables
O **Gód**, we **pón**/der your mer/ci/ful **lóve**						
1	2			3		(3 major word-stresses)

Figure 5. Psalm 48(47) – problematic revision

The 2010 translation team, of course, did not accept either of these preliminary textsetting options. Rather, as shown in Figure 6, they altered the syntax of verse 10a and ellipsed the phrase "we ponder."

Ps 47(48):10 (1963)

O Gód, we pónder your <u>**lóve**</u>   (3)

withín your témple.   (2)

Ps 48(47):10 (2010)

Your <u>**mérciful lóve**</u> , O Gód,   (3)

we pónder in your témple.   (2)

Figure 6. Psalm 48(47) – revision through altered syntax and ellipsis

The translators crafted this option in order to negotiate the oft competing demands of producing a literal yet singable rendering of this psalm. For we recall that although the revision translation team was commissioned to execute and privilege a more literal rendering of the Hebrew source-texts, they were no less responsible for producing a liturgical translation, a "singable" translation, one especially composed to meet the internalized rhythmic textsetting expectations of groups of singers. Any sudden occurrence of unexpected rhythmic figures – such as those occurring in Figures 4 and 5 – would to one degree or another surely disrupt the liturgical performance purposes of those texts. Such rhythms were therefore avoided.

As exemplified in Figures 4-6 (above), the *RGP* translators did not generally negotiate the conflicting constraints of text and rhythm simply through a protracted pursuit of suitable single-syllable English synonyms to substitute for Hebrew expressions like "*hesed*," but rather, as highlighted in the formatting of Figure 7, **by altering and revising the syntax** of the verse under revision.

Ps 47(48):10 (1963)

O Gód, we pónder your lóve   (3)

withín your témple.   (2)

Ps 48(47):10 (2010)

Your mérciful lóve, **O Gód,**   (3)

we pónder in your témple.   (2)

Figure 7. Psalm 48(47) – highlighted units of revision

For the *RGP* translators, a more literal translation did not necessitate a slavish adherence to the syntax of any of the extant versions, including their own drafts. As a result, the *RGP* translators aptly **reordered the syntax** in Psalm 48(47) by preposing the clause's object constituent ("Your merciful love,") to the front of the first line, and then, by successively shifting the vocative phrase to the end of that line, and then, the subject and predicate to the front of the second line, and then, the prepositional phrase of the clause to the end of the second line. By reordering the syntactic constituents in these ways, the translators achieved a more literal rendering and (at the same time) maintained the prescribed 3+2 sprung rhythm of the poetic line.

The *RGP* translators revised just two other verses and one other word in Psalm 48. They revised multiple verses, however, in several other psalms. In Psalm 35, for example, fifteen verses were revised. (See highlighted verses in Figure 8.) As a result, more than half of that psalm was, in effect, re-composed.

[1] *Of David.*
Conténd, O Lórd, with my conténders;
fight those who fight me.
[2] Táke up your búckler and shíeld;
aríse in my defénse.

[3] Táke up the jávelin and the spéar
against thóse who pursúe me.
Say to my sóul, "Í am your salvátion."

[4] Let thóse who séek my life
be shámed and disgráced.
Let thóse who plan évil agáinst me
be róuted in confúsion.

[5] Let them bé like cháff before the wínd;
let the Lord's ángel trip them úp.
[6] Let their páth be slíppery and dárk;
let the Lord's ángel pursúe them.

[7] Unprovóked, they have hídden a nét for me;
they have dúg a pit for mé.
[8] Let rúin fáll upón them,
and táke them by surpríse.
Let them be cáught in the nét they have hídden;
let them fáll in their own pít.

[9] Then my sóul shall rejóice in the Lórd,
and exúlt in his salvátion.
[10] Áll my bónes will sáy,
"Lord, whó is like yóu
who rescue the wéak from the stróng
and the póor from the oppréssor?"

[11] Lýing witnesses aríse,
asking me quéstions I cánnot understánd.
[12] They repáy me évil for góod;
my sóul is forlórn.

[13] When they were síck I dréssed in sáckcloth,
afflícted my sóul with fásting,
and with práyer ever anéw in my héart,
[14] as for a bróther, a fríend.
I wént as though móurning a móther,
bowed dówn with gríef.

[15] Now that I stúmble, they gládly gáther;
they gáther, and móck me.
Í myself do not knów them,
yet strangers téar at me céaselessly.
[16] They provóke me with móckery on móckery,
and gnásh their téeth at me.

[17] O Lórd, how lóng will you look ón?
Réscue my life from their rávages,
my sóul from these líons.
[18] Then I will thánk you in the gréat assémbly;
amid the míghty thróng I will práise you.

[19] Do not lét my lýing fóes
rejóice over mé.
Do not lét those who háte me without cáuse
wink éyes at each óther.

[20] They spéak no péace to the quíet ones
who líve in the lánd.
Rather, they máke decéitful plóts,
[21] and, with móuths wide ópen,

they útter their crý against me:
"Yes, yes! Our éyes have séen it!"
[22] O Lórd, you have séen; do not be sílent;
Lórd, do not stánd afar óff!
[23] Awáke! And stír to my defénse,
to my cáuse, O my Gód and my Lórd!

[24] Víndicate me, Lórd, my Gód,
in accórd with your jústice;
and lét them not rejóice over mé.

[25] Dó not let them thínk in their héarts,
"Yés, we have wón."
Dó not lét them sáy,
"Wé have destróyed him!"

[26] Let them be shámed and bróught to disgráce
who rejóice at my misfórtune.
Let them be cóvered with sháme and confúsion
who ráise themselves agáinst me.

[27] Lét them exúlt and be glád
who delight in my delíverance.
Lét them sáy without énd,
"Gréat is the Lórd who delights
in the péace of his sérvant."

[28] Then my tóngue shall spéak of your jústice,
and all day lóng of your práise.

Figure 8. Psalm 35 (RGP) – revised verses highlighted in gray

In total, the *RGP* translators revised 78 of the 150 psalms in the 1963 *GP* translation. Those revisions were negotiated in numerous and diverse ways, too numerous to recount in this present article. However, in the space that remains, I will characterize what I consider to be the two most fundamental types of negotiation strategies.

4. Manipulating musical rhythm to conform to poetic language

In the two previous rudimentary examples, I drew attention to those kinds of translation and textsetting challenges that were principally resolved by revising a Psalm text's language to conform to its fixed poetic rhythms. However, the *RGP* translators also resolved many of their translation and textsetting conflicts by innovating new, more flexible musical rhythms, rhythms that possess a greater capacity to conform to the demands of the text's language. Simply put, **when the translation team could not find a translation and textsetting solution by changing the words, they modified poetic or musical rhythms instead**. This had always been possible – though perhaps not historically realizable – because the process of producing new, "singable" Psalm performances does not ever begin and end solely with the setting of speech rhythms to poetic rhythms. Rather,

poetic rhythm in song is also inextricably set to musical rhythm, i.e., melodic rhythm, in particular.

In song, speech rhythm, poetic rhythm, and melodic rhythm intertwine, each asserting its distinct influence on the others. As a result, the rhythms of different musical designs cannot fail to influence the shape of the linguistic text. It is critical to understand, then, that the melodic system to which the 1963 *GP* translation is set, and the melodic system to which the 2010 *RGP* translation is set are not the same. Simply put, the 2010 musical setting accommodates the linguistic text much more readily than does the setting composed for the 1963 translation. As a means of comparison, I offer the following simple description of these two similar but critically distinct musical settings.

The composer of the musical settings for the 1963 *GP*, Fr. Joseph Gelineau, composed a set of 59 chant melodies ("psalm-tones") to animate the 1963 Psalm texts. Six of those fifty-nine melodic formulae are shown in Figure 9 [Gelineau 1963: 253-56]. Each major word-stress in a poetic line is synchronized with a single stressed tone of a "measure." The boundaries of each segment (A, B, C, D, E, or F) coincide with the boundaries of successive poetic lines.

Figure 9. 6 Gelineau "Psalm-Tones"

In Figure 10, I have renotated the first melodic formula (from the set of six formulae above) so as to quickly indicate the relationship between each melodic tone ("psalm-tone") and each successive, corresponding poetic word-stress.

Figure 10. 4-line, 3- + 2-stress Gelineau "Psalm Tone"

The onset of the movement of each stressed melodic "tone," indicated here with vertical arrows, coincides with each successive poetic line word-stress. The three successive stressed tones in the "A" phrase are composed

to synchronize with the three successive word-stresses of the first line of a couplet; the following two successive stressed tones in the "B" phrase are designed to synchronize with the two successive word-stresses in the second line of a couplet; phrase "C" repeats the 3-tone 3-stress pattern; and phrase "D" repeats the 2-tone 2-stress pattern. This fixed cycle of four phrases is repeatedly performed for as long as a text continues.

Figure 11 synchronizes the successive chanted tones of this same melodic formula with the successive accented word-stresses of the 1963 translation of Psalm 115: 12-13.[1]

(1963)
Hów can I re**páy** the **Lórd**   (3 accents)
for his **góodness** to **mé**?   (2 accents)
The **cúp** of sal**vátion** I wil **ráise**;   (3 accents)
I will **cáll** on the **Lórd's** name.   (2 accents)

Figure 11. Psalm 48(47) – synchronizing Gelineau melodic tones and major word-stresses

Not surprisingly, this highly symmetrical chant formula is easily internalized and sung after two or three hearings. The ease with which this melodic formula is internalized corroborates the principles of generative metrics which suppose that once a speaker or singer is familiar with a given rhythmic pattern, he or she can readily set novel lines to that pattern. With this advantage in mind*,* it is not surprising to find that all of the fifty-nine chant formulae composed for the 1963 *GP* exhibited this striking structural regularity. Problems arise, however, when in the process of translating the text irregular textual and poetic patterns emerge.

The revision of the 1963 version of Psalm 115: 10-19 (designated Psalm 116(b) in the *RGP*) provides a convenient example of the emergence

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[1]   A simple audio recording of a synchronized performance of this chant's text, line, and melody can be accessed in a PowerPoint presentation (Slide 19) which is linked to this article at the following URL address: https://www.dropbox.com/s/hj5rdckr9od-kmbb/NSTS%20RGP%20Wed%20eve.pptx?dl=0.

of such an irregularity. Figure 12 juxtaposes the four-line stanza of the 1963 version with the five-line stanza of the 2010 version.

1963 *GP*

[16] Your sérvant, Lord, your sérvant am Í,
      you have lóosened my bónds.   4-line "stanza"
[17] A thánksgiving sácrifice I máke;
     I will cáll on the Lórd's name.

2010 *RGP*

[16] Your sérvant, Lord, your sérvant am Í,
     the són of your hándmaid;   5-line "stanza"
     you have lóosened my bónds.
[17] A thánksgiving sácrifice I máke;
     I will cáll on the náme of the Lórd.

Figure 12. Psalm 116b(115) – 4-line versus 5-line stanzas

Immediately, we note that the line "the són of your handmaid," found in line 16b of the 2010 *RGP*, is not present in the 1963 translation. The Hebrew noun phrase rendered in line 16b of the revised translation was, in fact, omitted from the 1963 text.[2] Why was this segment omitted? In short, it was not included in the 1963 text in order to avoid the arhythmic formation of a five-line stanza.

The 1963 project avoided the formation of a five-line stanza in verses 16-17 because verses 10-11, 12-13, and 14-15 had already developed the singer's expectation of a regular series of 4-line stanzas (as shown in Figure 13).

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[2]   The Hebrew noun phrase that was omitted in line 16b of Psalm 115 of the 1963 *Grail Psalms* is helpfully displayed in Slide 20 of the PowerPoint presentation accessed through the URL address cited in footnote 1.

10 I trústed, éven when I sáid:
'I am sórely afflícted,'
11 and whén I sáid in my alárm:
'No mán can be trústed.'

12 How cán I repáy the Lórd
for his góodness to mé?
13 The cúp of salvátion I will ráise;
I will cáll on the Lórd's name.

14 My vóws to the Lórd I will fulfíl
befóre all his péople.
15 O précious in the éyes of the Lórd
is the déath of his fáithful.

16 Your sérvant, Lord, your sérvant am Í;
you have lóosened my bónds.
17 A thánksgiving sácrifice I máke:
I will cáll on the Lórd's name.

Figure 13. Psalm 115: 10-11, 12-13, 14-15, 16-17 (1963 GP) – series of 4-line stanzas

The three four-line stanzas of verses 10-11, 12-13, and 14-15, by design, could only be synchronized to a four-phrase chant formula. And so, lines 16-17, like the previous three stanzas, would also be expected – by those who would actually sing this psalm – to be paired with and sung to the same fixed, four-phrase chant (as designated above with the letters "A, B, C, and D" in Figure 13).

As already pointed out, this highly predictable pattern greatly facilitates singers' internalization of the chant's complementary poetic and melodic rhythmic structure. This familiarity, in turn, facilitates the ready performance of any number of additional four-line stanzas. The disadvantage of this predictable pattern, of course, is only realized when a translator encounters a stanza in the Hebrew source text that unfolds over five poetic lines, as described earlier in our discussion of Psalm 115(*GP*)/116b(*RGP*) (Figure 12). In that situation, and others, the prescribed four-lined chant formula for the 1963 *GP* had no capacity for such an irregularity. To resolve the incompatibility, the 1963 *GP* translators chose to eliminate a line of the source text (line 16b; see Figure 14) in order to conform to the inalterable musical constraints of the Gelineau psalm-tone formula.

¹⁶ Your sérvant, Lord, your sérvant am Í,
   ~~the són of your hándmaid;~~
   you have lóosened my bónds.   5 -1 = 4
¹⁷ A thánksgiving sácrifice I máke;
   I will cáll on the Lórds name.

Figure 14. Psalm 48(47) – 1963 GP omits v. 16b

The translation team for the *RGP,* on the other hand, were not subject to the musical constraints of the Gelineau psalm tones. Indeed, the **RGP translators resolved many conflicts between text and tune not by adapting texts to tunes, but by inventing new, more flexible musical formulae.** As a result, the rhythmic principles of their new, simpler compositions proved to be much more flexible musical settings than those associated with the 1963 translation.

The melodic formulae for the 2010 translation were developed – in performance – by Abbot Gregory and the monks of Conception Abbey. The "Conception Psalm Tones," as they are called, consist of nine chant formulae, presented in Figure 15 as nine "modes."

Figure 15. Conception Abbey "Psalm Tones" [2010]

(By comparison, you will recall in Figure 9, that the Gelineau psalm-tones associated with the 1963 *GP* publication included fifty-nine optional chant formulae.)

You may also recall that in the 1963 chant formulae, each word-stress is synchronized with a single stressed tone in each "measure" (see Figures 11 and 13). In the Conception Tones, by contrast, an entire psalm line is synchronized with the melodic rhythm of a single "measure." To illustrate, Figure 16 reproduces and elongates the notation of Mode 1 (in Figure 15) and aligns the text and poetic accents constituting Psalm 23 with the melodic rhythm of Mode 1.[3]

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3   A simple audio recording of a synchronized performance of this chant's text, line, and melody can be accessed on PowerPoint presentation (Slide 27) which is linked to this article at the URL address indicated in footnote 1.

Figure 16. "Conception Abbey Tone" – Mode 1 (accommodating a 6-line stanza)

The performance instructions for a Conception Abbey "psalm-tone" are as follows:

> If a stanza has fewer than six lines, the last line of the stanza is sung to the last measure of the psalm tone. In other words, the first and last measures of the tone are always used, and the intervening measures are omitted based on the number of lines in the stanza [Polan 2010: iv-v].

Thus, in contrast to the 6-line stanza of Psalm 23 in Figure 16 (above), Figure 17 notates a simple example of the setting of a 3-line stanza from Psalm 100 to Mode 1 of the Conception Abbey Psalm Tones.[4]

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[4]   A simple audio recording of a synchronized performance of this chant's text, line, and melody can be accessed on PowerPoint presentation (Slide 28) which is linked to this article at the URL address indicated in footnote 1.
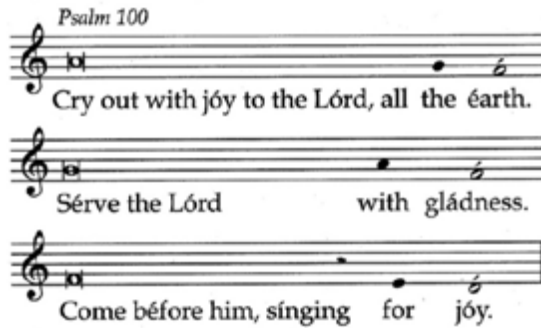
Figure 17. "Conception Abbey Tone" – Mode 1 (accommodating a 3-line stanza)

Plainly, the performance of any irregular stanza or word-stress pattern will not be problematic when set to the melodic rhythm of a Conception Abbey Tone. By using this more flexible chant form, the textsetting options of the translator, then, are greatly expanded. No poetic line of the source text needs to be eliminated, nor contracted in translation.

Our final example is taken from Psalm 51. Figure 18 displays verses 3 and 4 of both translations side-by-side. Quickly comparing the two versions, we first note an obvious discrepancy while examining the stanzaic structures alone. The 1963 version renders this stanza in four lines; the 2010 renders it in six.

Figure 18. Psalm 51 – 1963 GP 4-line stanza versus 2010 RGP 6-line stanza

Verse 4 is reasonably similar, both structurally and semantically. Verse 3, however, plainly differs structurally, and critically, it differs rhetorically. In short, what the 1963 translation renders in just two lines, the revised translation renders in four. More importantly, the 1963 *GP* considerably condenses the repeated elements of verse 3, while the 2010 *RGP* dwells on them. In fact, throughout the entire revision process, the *RGP*

translators privileged the inclusion of repeated structures such as these. Abbot Gregory Polan [2011: 6] confirms as much, stating, "The repetitions that appear in the Hebrew open for us a better understanding of the message contained in the rhetoric itself. The ABBA structure [of lines 3 a, b, c & d] signal transition and change." Polan extends his commentary on this transition and change as follows:

> While the initial request for God is to "have mercy 'according to [his] merciful love'," the text grows in its intensity by repeating the expression "according to," and then [it] expresses [a] second element, "God's great compassion," and [finally] completes the verse with the powerful request to "blot out my transgressions" [*ibid.*].

Abbot Gregory concludes, "The parallels here are strong and forceful, and should not be missed. [...] [They] enhance our understanding of the text" [*ibid.*].

As we have already observed, The *RGP* liturgical psalter was able to render verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 51 over the course of six poetic lines because the musical settings of the Conception Abbey Psalm Tones are more flexible than the 1963 Gelineau Psalm Tones. This flexibility extends well beyond these two particular verses. In Figure 20 we can see that every stanza of Psalm 51 in the 1963 *GP*, as expected, was set to one rhythmic pattern, in this case, a four-line stanza pattern. Verses 3 and 4, as a result, could only be set to four poetic lines. By contrast, the flexibility of the Conception Abbey musical formula allowed the *RGP* translators the flexibility to group their stanzas into any set of four, five, or even six lines.

Figure 20. Comparison of stanzaic organizations of Psalm 51

5. Conclusion

From this brief case study, two instructive themes emerge, explicitly and implicitly. Bible translators would do well to keep these two themes in mind, especially when translating Hebrew Psalms to be sung**. First, in verbal discourse that is organized to be sung**, as with both of the Grail Psalms translations, we must remember that **speech rhythms, poetic rhythms, and musical rhythms inextricably interact.** The dynamic and formal constraints of these rhythms may at one moment be complementary and at another moment conflicting. The satisfactory resolution of conflicting constraints is achieved at one moment by adapting or privileging the constraints of any one of these rhythmic phenomena to, or over, the constraints of any one or both of the others. To arrive at principled resolutions to conflicting constraints, translators – like those of the *RGP* translation – should clearly understand and establish the actual, practical use and functions of their translation. Second, and contingently, **great care must be given to commissioning a competent and interdisciplinary team of translators for any biblical poetry project.** In the case of the *RGP*, the practical responsibility of choosing whether or not to adapt or privilege any one of a translation project's competing constraints primarily rested with Abbot Gregory Polan and the Benedictine monks of Conception Abbey. Abbot Gregory and his community were given this responsibility because the larger Catholic community of which they were a part recognized that Abbot Gregory – monk, scripture scholar, translator, musician, and composer – possessed the requisite ecclesial, liturgical, biblical, translational, musical, and cultural competencies to do so.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the theme of "translating poetically organized discourse to be sung." The 2010 English translation of the Hebrew Psalms,

entitled *The Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter* (*RGP*), is present-
ed as a case study. The Hebrew Psalms, for the most part, were composed
to be sung, yet more often than not, they are translated to be read. Such
translations are primarily characterized by the absence of poetic rhythm,
despite the plain evidence and significance of poetic rhythm in the He-
brew. The *RGP*, on the other hand, privileges the rhythmic dimension of
the Psalms. As a result, the *RGP* is said to be remarkably "adaptable to
the exigencies of different musical settings," and more importantly, emi-
nently singable. Nonetheless, the challenges of translating and formalizing
a text according to a given rhythmic principle are in practice formidable,
for when translators set out to feature a lyric's rhythmic dimension, its
semantic, rhetorical, and syntactic art is often found lacking. This article
examines some of the principal reasons the translators of the *RGP* chose
to re-emphasize the Hebrew Psalms' rhythmic art and, more importantly,
how those translators negotiated some of the more problematic translation
challenges that ensued from that choice.