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The Dies Irae: A Historical, Textual, Topical And Metrical Analysis

Daniel Shea
Carroll College

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THE DIES IRAE:
A HISTORICAL, TEXTUAL,
TOPICAL AND METRICAL ANALYSIS

A THESIS
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THE DIES IRAE:
A HISTORICAL, TEXTUAL,
TOPICAL AND METRICAL ANALYSIS

BY
DANIEL BERNARD SHEA

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT
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[Signature]
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CHAPTER I
THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEQUENCE
The sequence is the liturgical hymn of the mass occurring on festivals between the Gradual and the Gospel. It is a Trope, i.e., a verbal amplification of a passage in authorized liturgy, whose embellishment is so lengthy as to dwarf the liturgy to which it is attached. A sequence usually begins with an independent introductory sentence or an alleluia; then follow several pairs of strophes, each pair with its own melody ending with an independent sentence of longer or shorter form. Each pair of strophes is composed of strophe and antistrophe agreeing in the length and number of syllables, later also in rhyme and rhythm. It was usually executed by an alternating choir of men and boys. F. J. E. Raby outlines the characteristics in their full development as follows:

1. Rhythm is regular and is based wholly on the word accent, with occasional transpositions of stress, especially in the short line which ends the strophe.
2. The caesura is regular and should occur at the end of a word.
3. The rhyme is regular and at least two syllabled.
4. The sequence measure, par excellence is the trochaic line of eight syllables, repeated one or more times, and followed by a trochaic line of seven syllables. The initial independent strophe is rare, and the recognizable parallelism hardly distinguishes the composition from a hymn.

That the sequence started from the Alleluia is certain, but the manner of origin and various phases of development before the versus ad

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2 Clemens Blume, "Prose", *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, (1911) p. 482.
sequentias (which are the immediate predecessors of the sequence) are obscure. The recognized authorities, Blume and Bannister, in the Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevii trace the probable development as follows:

1. The starting point is the Alleluia preceding the versus alleluiaeticus with its melisma (i.e., a melodious succession of notes on the concluding a). This succession of notes was called sequentia (that which follows); synonymous terms are jubilus, jubilatio, neuma, melodia, melisma, and sequela.

2. The length of the melisma necessitated its being divided into several parts (incisa, musical phrases). Each division was called sequentia or clausula, and the whole succession of subdivisions was called collectively sequentiae; the divisions allowed the singers time to take a breath and to alternate.4

3. The next important advance was made when some of the divisions of the melody or sequentiae were provided with a text; this text, versus ad aliquot sequentias, preserves the proper meaning of the word sequentia. For the purpose of illustration:

"Fulgens praeclia"
The first three divisions of the jubilus are here without any text; they are pure melody sung to the vowel a: a text is then provided for the fifth division and its repeat; this is again followed by a on which the melody was sung; a text has been composed for the eighth and twelfth divisions as for the fifth; the ending three divisions of the melody are without any text.5

(4) The versus ad aliquot sequentias soon developed into the real sequence; a text was now set to all the sequentiae without exception. The proper title for such a melody with its text (without rhythm, meter and rhyme) is sequentiae cum prosa, a title found in the old French sources. As the text (prosa) became more prominent,

5Blume, op.cit.
the use of the term \textit{prosa} or \textit{prosula} for both melody and verse was
natural. France adapted and retained this term, \textit{prosa} or \textit{prose},
Germany used \textit{sequentia} or \textit{sequenz}, the \textit{sequence} is the accepted
term in modern English.\textsuperscript{6}

As the divisions of this melody, with the exception of the
introductory and closing one, were usually repeated by the alternating
choirs, there also arose the double strophes. These long pieces
of melody were subdivided into smaller divisions, shorter musical
phrases with short half-phrases, so that the whole of the melody
was divided into a number of short musical phrases of different
lengths. As the text had to follow this peculiarity, the strophe was
divided into different verses of different lengths. Under these circum-
cumstances it was natural that neither rhythm, meter nor rhyme were
taken into consideration. On the whole then, the \textit{prosa} was true
prose, except for the fact that the antistrophe had to be as long as
the strophe.\textsuperscript{7}

The first writers of the sequences were also bound by another
restriction which prevailed without exception in \textit{versus ad sequentias}
and also frequently observed in later times; the \textit{jubilus} of the Alleluia
built on the concluding \textit{a} was prominent in the text not only in the
strophes but often all the verses ended in \textit{a}. This is seldom observed
in those of German origin. An example of the peculiarities is a part
of the \textit{Eia recolamus}, once a favorite Christmas sequence:

\textsuperscript{6}Jos. Smits Van Waesberghe, \textit{Gregorian Chant}, trans. W.A.
G. Doyle-Davidson (Stockholm: Continental Book Company, A.B.
(N.D.), p. 47.

\textsuperscript{7}Blume, \textit{op. cit.}, 483.
There are unpaired and unsymmetrical sequences, but they are relatively few and are short. Sequences composed without antistrophes were later rewritten to conform to the parallel form sequence. As the sequence developed this way, viz. by adapting a text to an already existing melody, it was natural in time that sequences were composed with a melody of their own, often not following the Alleluia-Jubilus form. This led to a freer treatment of the text bringing into the compositions symmetry and rhythm depending not on the quantity of the syllables, but simply on the accent of the word.

Like rhythm, assonance, the precursor of rhyme, was also gradually introduced; verses began to end with the same or equivalent vowel (e and i, o and u). This gradually led to sequences which were rhythmical, rhymed, and uniform in construction, contrasting greatly with those of the first epoch which had almost exclusively the character of prose. None of the old form has been preserved in the liturgy today.

(5) The transition in form occurred from the end of the tenth century to the beginning of the twelfth when the new style reached its perfection. Many sequences of the transitional style remain; a good example is the Easter sequence composed by Wipo, the Burgundian, about 1045, which is still used:

8Blume, op. cit.
Victimae paschali laudes immolent Christiani

Agnus redemit oves, Christus innocens Patri
reconciliavit peccatores.

Mores et vita duello conflixere mirando
dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus.

(6) The final phase of the development is seen in the sequences of the second epoch already described, in which uniformity of rhythm, purity of rhyme, and strict regularity in structure characterize the verses, although the strophes still show variety. The present sequence for Corpus Christi, composed by St. Thomas Aquinas in 1263, may serve as an example:

Lauda Sion salvatorem Lauda ducem et pastorem
Quantum potes, tantum aude, Quia major omni laude
In hymmis et canticis Nec laudare sufficies.

Two of the three other sequences which remain in the liturgy, "Veni Sancti Spiritus" and "Stabat Mater Dolorosa" show even greater symmetry in all strophes. Many of the sequences of the second epoch show, despite their uniformity, variety in the structure of the strophes, but in all the connection with the original Alleluia-Jubilus is lacking.

From what has been said it will be seen that there are two classes of sequence melodies: (1) Those which originally formed the Alleluia-Jubilus, melodies to which a sequence text was later composed; (2) those which originated simultaneously with the text. Not every sequence has its own melody; often several sequences were written to the same melody and same plan. In such sequences the melody was identified by some distinctive word, the title. About

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10 Blume, *op. cit.*, 483.
300 titles have been found in the old manuscripts for sequences of the first epoch and the transitional period. As the connection of the sequence with the Alleluia and its versicle gradually disappeared, and as novelty arose, the use of title increased.

Formerly the origin of the sequence was thought to be at St. Gall and Notker Balbulus its inventor. But now other conclusions have been drawn. Proses did not originate in St. Gall and Notker was not the inventor, although he was the first and most prominent exponent in Germany. The origin goes back to the eighth century in France stemming from the interest in liturgical music stimulated by Charlemagne. Notker prefaced to his own Liber Sequentiara, a letter addressed to Luitward, bishop of Vercelli, which states, that soon after the destruction of the monastery of Jumeiges by the Northmen in 851, a monk from that community visited St. Gall, bringing his choir book. He observed that long melodies were written under the words, versus ad sequentias. But finding the verses difficult, he composed texts of his own, a single syllable for each musical note. He perfected them under the guidance of his masters, Iso and Moengal, the Irish Monk. Notker did not create a new liturgical genre but improved the form of the sequence, established its vogue in Germany and brought his monastery renown. It is difficult to say exactly which sequences are to be attributed to

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13Messenger, op. cit., p. 37. 14Young, op. cit., p. 183
15Raby, op. cit., p. 211. 16Young, op. cit., p. 185.
Notker, which came from St. Gall or other German abbeys or dioceses. But all evidence up to now shows that France was the original home of the *versus ad sequentias* and the *sequentia cum prosa*.

The French centers were St. Martial, Luxeuil and Moissac; the German centers were Metz, Murbach, Lulda, Echternach and St. Florian; but St. Gall surpassed all the other schools as the center of hymns and sequences.\(^\text{17}\) To what extent France made its influence felt can not be determined, but at the end of the tenth and especially in the eleventh century sequences were very widespread and popular in all countries of the West. The twelfth century witnessed the perfection of the sequence as a liturgical form.\(^\text{18}\) Some were found in a given country and were a local product; others were the common liturgical property of all the West. There are also two particular groups to be distinguished; such as were used only in France, England and Spain, and such as were used in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. These sequences are classified as Gallo-Anglican or German-Italian. Between the countries belonging to the one class there existed a free exchange of sequences, while sequences belonging to the other class were rarely introduced.

Of the composers only a few names have been preserved. After the great Notker Balbulus of St. Gall (d.912), the first rank is taken by Ekkehail I of St. Gall (d.973), Abbot Berno of Reihenua (d.1048), Hermann Contractus (d.1054), and Gottschalk of Limburg (d.1098). If the honor of the invention of the sequences belongs to


France, the honor of bringing sequences to perfection during the first epoch belongs to Germany.

During the second epoch in the Abbey of the Canons Regulares of St. Victor in Paris the sequence with rhythm and rhyme reached artistic perfection, joining splendor of form with depth and seriousness of conception. The new style was met with an enthusiastic reception. The sequences of Adam of St. Victor came into use almost everywhere and found eager and frequently successful imitation. The Rev. John M. Neale, who first introduced the sequence to English readers, would consider Adam of Saint Victor the greatest Latin poet, not only of medieval, but all ages.

And though Thomas of Celano in one unapproachable sequence distanced him, and the author, whoever he were, of the "Verbum Dei Deo Natum" once equalled him, what are we to think of the genius that could pour forth one hundred sequences, of which fifty at least are unequalled save by the "Dies Irae"?

In France almost all sequences of the first epoch were supplanted by the later ones. A considerable number ascribed to Notker remained in use as late as the fifteenth century. England produced some contributions while Italy fell behind in the second epoch. The two sequences, however, still in use, "The Stabat Mater Dolorosa" and the "Dies Irae", are the works of two Italian Franciscans, their composition being with some certainty assigned to Jacopone do Todi (d. 1305) and Thomas of Celano (d. 1250).

Sequences, like hymns, declined in the fifteenth century,

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19Blume, op. cit., p. 486.

20John M. Neale, Medieval Hymns and Sequences (London: Joseph Masters, 1863), p. IX.
reaching their lowest stage of decadence where they had most flourished in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Some were written so carelessly that the Carthusians and Cistercians were praised for not admitting any of them.²¹

Over 500 sequences of varying value have now come to light. In 1570 at the council of Trent, Pius V numbered only four sequences in the new Roman missal which came into common use throughout Europe.²² They are: "Victimae Paschali", at Easter (attributed to Wipo, chaplain to Conrad II.), eleventh century; "Veni Sancti Spiritus", at Pentecost (attributed to Pope Innocent III); "Lauda Sion", at Corpus Christi (by St. Thomas Aquinas); the "Dies Irae", in masses of the dead (by Thomas of Celano, d. circ. 1250). A fifth sequence "Stabat Mater", in the two masses of the Seven Dolors, was added recently. Other sequences are found in the missals of religious orders - e.g. one for the feast of the Holy Name in that of the Franciscans.

The sequence form was also used in the secular poetry especially in satire where it showed its superiority. The secular form was known as a modus, which like the sequence was inseparable from its musical accompaniment.²³ The secular form existed from the eleventh century, performed by Provencal Troubadours and the Northern French Trouveras who developed from wandering min-


²³ Messenger, op. cit., p. 43.
The Cambridge Songs, compiled in the middle of the 11th century in Germany, is a collection of forty-nine sequences which are partly secular and even humorous in content. They are simple in structure, two sets of paired stanzas showing the perfection in musical technique which the Middle Ages attained. Vernacular influence upon the sequence is negligible; Germanic and Celtic influence is rare; French and Spanish and Early English vernacular lyrics appear later. The contrasting styles of strophic and antistrophic singing resulted in the sacred drama, e.g., the St. Nicholas plays incorporate the sequence form into their structure.25

Thus has the sequence form taken its origin in the liturgical usages of the early medieval period and influenced so extensively all metrical compositions in the Latin literature of the period.

25 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR AND TEXT
The "Dies Irae" is the name by which the sequence of the Requiem Masses is known. The title is derived from the opening words of the first verse: Dies Irae, dies illa.

The authorship of the sequence cannot be determined with absolute certainty. Once its fame had become widespread, it became the subject of disputes between rival monastic orders. The authorship has been ascribed to St. Gregory the Great, (d. 604); St. Bernard of Clairvaux, d. (1153); St. Bonaventura, (d. 1274); Latinus Frangipani, a Dominican, also called Malabranca, (d. 1296); Thurston, Archbishop of York, (d. 1140); Felix Hammerlein or Malleolus of Zurich, (d. 1457); Augustinius Bugellensis, (d. 1490); Humbert, fifth master general of the Dominican Order, (d. 1274); and Matthew of Acqua-Sparta. 2

An elimination of many of the authors can be achieved by an approximate determination of the date of writing. The date has been set between 1253-55 because the "Dies Irae" is contained in a Franciscan missal whose calendar omits the name of St. Clare, who was cannonized in 1255, and whose name would have been inserted in the manuscript were it of a later date. The missal text of the sequence is found, with slight verbal variations, in a thir-


teenth century manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale at Naples. 3

From this discovery it can be seen that Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thurston antedate the sequence and that the sequence antedates Bugellensis and Hammerlein. John Bonaventura, Latinus Frangipani, Humbert, Matthew of Acqua-Sparta are eliminated because there is not a witness for any of these earlier than the sixteenth century.

It is also argued that the "Dies Irae" may have no single authorship but may have been the condensation of the poems of different men of different ages. There is not only a resemblance between it and other judgment hymns which antedate it but also an occasional identity of expression extending at times to whole lines. But there is no definite proof for this position, and opposing it there is that unity which is more than a mere orderly arrangement of thought from different authors. 4 Because the "Dies Irae" appeared in Italian Missals first, and in the Missals of other nationalities only at later dates, the author is an Italian.

Thomas of Celano has been declared the author with practical certitude from the following information: Bartholomew Albizzi of Piza, (d. 1401), in his Liber Conformitatum, written in 1385, to show by forty points of comparison that St. Francis of Assisi conformed to the Savior, speaks of Thomas in this way:

Locum habet Celani de quo frater Thomas, qui mandato Apostolico (i.e. by order of Pope Gregory IX) scripsit


sermone polito legendam primam beati Francisci et prosam de mortuis, quae cantatur in missa "Dies Irae," ect., fecisse dicitur.  

Sextus Senensis, a very learned Dominican, but also very zealous for his order, in his Bibliotheca Sancta, Venet., 1566, called it an "uncouth poem", uncoditus rhythmus. This points to a Franciscan origin; the rivalry between the Dominicans and Franciscans was well known. A resolution was adopted by the Dominican Order at Salamanca in 1576 that this sequence should not be used in Masses for the dead as being contrary to rubrics. Even Lucas Waddingus in his Scriptores Ordinis Minorum, 1650, whom others cite as an authority to prove authorship other than Thomas, mentions twice that Thomas is the author.  

The extraordinary religious fervor and devotion which characterize the early history of the Franciscan Order may be considered as an argument of probability for the authorship of Thomas of Celano. The other two hymns ascribed to him, though far inferior in merit, are by no means destitute of poetic talent. Many a poet has risen once, under the power of inspiration, far above the level of his ordinary works. But when his "Sanctitatis nova signa" and the "Dies Irae" are compared there is this similarity:

Sanctitatis nova signa
prodierunt laude digna
mera valde et benigna

Preces meae non sunt dignae
sed tu bonus fac benigne
ne perenni cremerigne.


7Schaff, op. cit., p. 147.
These conclusions are followed by Ramback, Mohnike, Finke, Lisco, Daniel, Mone, Koch, Palmer, Trench, W. R. Williams, Coles, and nearly all the modern writers on the subject. Mohnike, after careful consideration of the question of authorship, arrives at the conclusion: "Thomas of Celano must be regarded as the author of the "Dies Irae" until - which scarcely can be expected - it can be irrefragably proven that another composed it."8

Thomas was born at Celano in the further Abruzzi, near Lake Lucino, about 1200. He was one of the first disciples of St. Francis and joined the order probably in 1215. Later, while in Germany, he became custos of the convents at Worms, Mayence and Cologne. Before September, 1223, Thomas returned to Italy and was a close companion and friend of St. Francis. After Francis' canonization (July 16, 1228) he wrote his "Vita prima" or First Life of St. Francis, by order of Gregory IX. Between 1244 and 1247 he compiled his "Vita secunda", which is a supplement to the first, by commission of the minister general of the Franciscan Order, Crescentius. About ten years later Thomas wrote treatises on the miracles of St. Francis and the life of Saint Clare of Assisi. In addition he wrote "Fregit victor virtualis" and "Sanctitatis nova signa," sequences in honor of St. Francis.9

The oldest known form of the "Dies Irae" which is contained in the Roman Missal is that which is contained in a Dominican Missal written at the end of the fourteenth century for use at Pisa.

8 Schaff, Ibid.

9 Ferdinand Heckmann, "Thomas of Celano", Catholic Encyclopedia, XIV (1911), 694.
There are slight variations between the two texts, e.g., spargens of verse 3 and cum of verse 4 are replaced by spargit and dum, but these differences are attributed to transcription and not true meanings.

Two other versions similar to the Roman texts, Paris and Metis, exchange the third line of stanza one, "Teste David Cum Sibylla" for "Crucis expandens vexilla". These are late revisions easily seen as adaptations of the original text.10

A marble slab at the base of a crucifix in the Church of St. Francis at Mantua was engraved with a copy of the hymn prefaced by five stanzas, which many scholars have thought, on the basis of the great age of the church, to be authentic. The text remained there until the church and convent of St. Francis were suppressed in 1797, the year of the French occupation of Mantua. After the Church was desecrated and the convent turned into a military arsenal in 1811, no trace of the stone could be found. The conjecture that this text is the original form of the hymn or at least comes nearest to it derives some support from the fact that certain other hymns were abridged or altered for the Missal and Breviary (e.g. St. Bernard's "Jesu dulcis memoria"). But this consideration is overruled by the date of the church which is a century younger than the first published version.

When it is compared to the Roman text the five unique stanzas of this version condemn themselves. In verse 3 the inversion of the scriptural text, the poverty of the rhyme, and weakness of the thought, are faults not consistent with the "Dies Irae". The author of the eighteen original verses of the "Dies Irae" took the quotation from

10 Julian, op. cit., p. 295.
Zephaniah as a text and placed it at the head of his composition, but the inversion, "Dies illa, dies irae" is a play upon words to which an imitator alone would turn. Some of the elisions and hiatuses are strangers to this missal text. In the following the variant readings of the Mantuan text are underlined.

Mantuan

1A Cogita, Anima fidelis,
Ad quid respondere velis,
Christo venturo de coelis,

2A Quum deposcet rationem
ob boni omissionem
ob mali commissionem

3A Dies illa, dies irae,
Quam conemur praeventire,
obviamque Deo irae,

4A Seria contritione,
Gratiae apprehensione,
Vita emendatione.

Roman

1 Dies irae, dies illa
Solvet saeclum in favilla:
Teste Petro cum Sibylla.

2 Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!

3 Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulcra regionum,
Coget omnes ante thronum.

4 Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura
Judicanti responsura.

5 Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus judicetur.

6 Judex ergo cum censebit
Quidquid latet, apparebit,
Nil inultum remanebit.
7 Quid sum miser tunc disturus; Quem patronum rogaturus, Quum nec justus set securus?
8 Rex tremendae majestatis, Qui salvandos salvas gratis, Salva me, fons pietatis!
9 Recordare, Jesu pie, Quod sum causa tuae viae; Ne me perdas illa die!
10 Quaerens me, venisti lassus; Redemisti crucem passus: Tantus labor non sit cassus!
11 Juste judex ultionis, Donum fac remissionis Ante diem rationis.
12 Ingemisco, tamquam reus, Culpa rubet vultus meus: Supplicanti parce, Deus!
13 Qui Mariam absolvisti, Et latronem exaudisti; Mihi quoque spem dedisti.
14 Preces meae non sunt dignae; Sed tu bonum fac benigne, Ne perenni cremer igne.
15 Inter oves locum praesta, Et ab haedis me sequestra, Statuens in parte dextra.
16 Confutatis maledictis Flammis acribus addictis, Voce me cum benedictis!
17 Consors ut beatitatis Vivam cum justificatis; In aevum aternitatis.
18 Lacrymosa dies illa, Qua resurget ex favilla, Judicandus homo reus: Huic ergo parce, Deus.
Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem, Amen.  

The second rival of the received text is found among the poems of Felix Hammerlein, (Malleolus) of Zurich, a distinguished ecclesiastic of his time, a member of the Councils of Constance and Basel, and a reformer of various abuses, who ended his life (1457) in the prison of the Franciscan convent of Lucerne. Among several poems which he composed in prison was found a "Dies Irae" which was published from the manuscripts of the public library at Zurich by Meister, Mohnike and Lisco.

The Hammerlein text opens like the received text which it follows, with some verbal variations, until stanza 17, at which juncture it adds seven stanzas. The seven stanzas are but weak repetitions of the former verses detracting from the power of the original seventeen stanzas. In the following the variant readings of the Hammerlein text are underlined:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hammerlein</th>
<th>Roman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 Dies Irae, dies illa  
Solvet saeculum in favilla:  
Teste David cum Sibylia. | Dies irae, dies illa  
Solvet saeculum in favilla:  
Teste David cum Sibylia. |
| 2 Quantus tremor est futurus,  
Quando judex est venturus,  
Cuncta stricte discussurus! | Qunatus tremor est futurus,  
Quando judex est venturus,  
Cuncta stricte discussurus! |
| 3 Tuba mira spargens sonum  
Per sepulcra regionum,  
Coget omnes ante thronum. | Tuba mirum spargens sonum  
Per sepulcra regionum,  
Coget omnes ante thronum. |

11(Anon), Seven Great Hymns of Medieval Church (New York: Anson F. D. Randolf, 1868), p. 49.

12Analecta, p. 296-270.
4 **Mens stupescit** et natura,
Cum resurget creatura
Judicanti responsura.

5 Liber scriptus **tunc docetur**.
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus judicetur.

6 **Judex ergo cum sedebit**, 
**Quidquid latet comparebit**, 
Nil inultum remanebit.

7 **Quid sum miser tunc dicturus**, 
**Quem patronum rogaturus**, 
Cum vix justus sit securus?

8 Rex **tremendae majestatis**, 
Qui salvandos salvas gratis, 
**Salva me**, fons pietatis.

9 **Recordare, Jesum pie**, 
**Quod sum causa tuae viae**, 
Ne me perdas illa die!

10 **Quaerens me, Fuiisti lapsus**: 
Redemisti **cruce passus**; 
**Tantus labor non sit cassus!**

11 **Juste judex ultionis**, 
Donnum fac **remissionis** 
Ante diem rationis.

12 **Ingemisco, tamquam reus**, 
Culpa rubet vultus meas: 
**Suplicanti parce, Deus!**

13 **Qui Mariam absolvisti**, 
Et latronem emendasti; 
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.

14 **Preces meae non sunt dignae**; 
Sed tu bonus fac benigne, 
Ne perenni cremer igne.

15 **Inter oves locum praesta**, 
Et ab haedis me sequestra, 
**Statuens in parte dextra.**

16 **Ne coniungere maledictis**, 
Flammis **acribus addictis**, 
**Voca me cum benedictis!**
17 Oro supplex a ruinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis;
Gere curam mei finis.

Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis;
Gere curam mei finis.

18 Lacrymosa dies illa,
Quum resurget ex favilla,
Tam quam ignis ex scintilla.

Lacrymosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favilla,

19 Judicandus homo reus:
Huic ergo parce, Deus,
Esto semper adjutor meus!

Judicandus homo reus:
Huic ergo parce, Deus.

20 Quando coeli sunt movendi,
Dies adsunt tunc tremendi,
Nullam tempus poenitendi.

Per Jesu Domine,
Dona eis requiem. Amen.

21 Sed salvatis laeta dies,
Et damnatis nulla quies,
Sed daemonum effigies.

22 O tu Deus majestatis,
Alme candor trinitatis,
Nunc conjunge cum beatis.

23 Vitam meam fac felicem,
Propter tuam genetricem,
Jesse florem et radicem.

24 Praesta nobis tunc levamen,
Dulce nostrum fac cutamen,
Ut clamenum omnes. Amen.13

From these several considerations and comparisons of texts,
it is clear that the received text of the Roman Missal merits unqual-
ified acceptance as the best and most authentic text. To this conclu-
sion, however, is added a prudent reservation that admits of some
slight modifications of the original in the present authorized text.

12Schaff, op. cit., pp. 149-153.
CHAPTER IV

TOPIC
The Medieval period is not the intellectual waste land which, until quite recent times, it was once thought to be. True, the period differs greatly from its classical predecessors, but nevertheless it is deserving of much consideration in its own right. No longer will the Middle Ages be considered merely a barren interval between the Classical and Renaissance periods. The thirteenth century, the culmination of this period, is an age of vitality. It is the age of great scholars like St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and Alexander of Hales; it is the age of literary men like the authors of the Arthur Legends in England and the author of El Cid in Spain; it is the age of great church men like St. Francis and St. Dominic; it is the age of the play and collision of the great forces of the times — the Papacy, the Empire, the Crusades, the Mendicant Orders and the Inquisition which give evidence to the spirit of energy and movement. The thirteenth century had seen the founding of the great universities, the great cathedrals of Rheims, Chartres and York, the democratic spirit and the establishment of legal rights in this century thru the Magna Charta, the first English Parliament and English common law. The Middle Ages are not the backward times as they have been suspect in the opportunities which they gave for the expression of intellectual and artistic faculties.

With the defeat of Frederic Barbarossa at Legnano, freedom had been given to the Lombard cities of Italy. To Italy had fallen that task which had fallen to Charlemagne's France, the leadership of Europe in the progress of civilization in the arts, religion and letters. The Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries
would not have had the artistic and literary accomplishments which it enjoyed if the times had not been prepared by the previous three centuries. And from this thirteenth century, the crown of the medie­val period, has come the magnificent poem, - which is the subject of this present thesis, - the "Dies Irae" — surely one of the most dazzling jewels in that crown and an abiding proof of the literary achievement of that time.

The "Dies Irae" itself rest upon a biblical foundation; its contents are taken chiefly from the prophetical descriptions of the Old Testament, from the eschatological sermons of Christ, from the teachings and references of the Apostles concerning the consumation of the world. For his immediate source the author obtained a suggestion from the opening chapter of the Book of Sophonia. Sophonia wrote during the reign of Josia (640-609 B.C.) as a protest against the worship of false gods and a condemnation of the pro-Assyrian court ministers who served as regents during Josia's minority. At this time when old idolatries reappeared and men worshipped sun, moon, and stars, Sophonia announced the impending judgment. The "Dies Irae" is based on the classic description of the Day of the Lord as an overwhelming disaster (1: 2-18). The verses in which the adaptation is most evident are 15-16:

Dies irae, dies illa, 
Dies tribulationis et angustiae, 
Dies clamitatis et miseriae,

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The argument for the text of Sophonia is well founded because it is used also as the **Responsorium** which is sung at the absolution after the Mass for the Dead.

The author may have been influenced also by two later works; the first (a) is a tenth century judgment hymn containing the text of Sophonia, the other (b) is a manuscript from the twelfth or thirteenth century:

(a) Dies irae, dies illa, 
Dies nebulae et turbinis, 
Dies tubae et clangoris,

(b) Lacrymosa dies illa, 
Qua resurgens ex favilla, 
Homo reus judicandus,

Because the author pictures the Day of Judgment as near at hand, and speaks of it as a living witness, there is conjecture that in addition to the text of Sophonia, he was inspired to write after hearing of the calamity which befell Celano, a town across the Apennines from Rome and not far from the hereditary dominions of Frederick II. It was one of the first to suffer in the battles between the Pope and the Emperor. In 1223 it was forced to surrender by the Count of Acerra, Thomas Aquinas, warlike uncle and namesake of the great theologian. The inhabitants were compelled to flee while the town was burned leaving only the Church of Saint John among the ruins. To punish further their disloyalty to the Emperor, the people were scattered to Sicily, Malta and Calabria, from whence

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4Campbell, "Masterpiece," p. 413. 
they returned to rebuild after their enemy's death.

How old Thomas of Celano was when this calamity occurred there are no means of knowing, nor whether it had anything to do with his becoming a Franciscan monk; but it is not unlikely that the sight or the memory of the devastation may have suggested or given color to his immortal hymn.

In writing the "Dies Irae" the author had a twofold purpose: first, to describe the awesome features of the Last Judgment; second, to stir the Christian to work and prayer to be delivered from its terrors. To achieve the desired results the poem is divided into two major sections: the first six verses are a poetic description of the Day of Judgment. They picture with remarkable brevity and detail the judgment scene of the Scriptures.6

The "Dies Irae" incorporates in its Judgment description all facts known of the judgment from the prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles and Christ himself. The general judgment will occur at the end of the world, but there is no accurate indication when it will occur. The judgment will take place on earth before it is destroyed by fire. The place of the judgment on earth is uncertain. Joel speaks of the gathering together of all nations into the valley of Josaphat. Some interpret this to mean the valley located a short distance from Jerusalem, but the word "Josaphet" is correctly translated "Jehovah judges" signifying any place where God renders judgment. The Judge will be Christ as both God and man. He comes as a stern judge who

shall demand a reckoning from those whom he has redeemed concerning the proper use they have made of the grace of redemption. Appearing in the heavens and seated on a cloud, he will be surrounded by Angelic hosts who will be sent with a trumpet and a great voice, and will "gather together the elect from the four winds, from the farthest bonds of the heavens."

On the day of judgment the judge will permit the men and angels who are gathered about his throne to participate. St. Paul speaks of the elect as aiding Christ, "Know you that the saints shall judge the world?" As promised by Christ in Saint Matthew, the Apostles will be seated on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel. St. Thomas Aquinas conjectures that by this participation the greater saints will make known the sentence of Christ to others.

The judgment will embrace all; good and bad, forgiven as well as unforgiven. This will not pain nor embarrass the saints but add to their glory as the repentance of St. Peter and St. Mary Magdalen. There will be an organic reconstruction of the body long before disintegrated and the reuniting of it with the soul. The body cooperated with the soul in good and evil actions and now it is rewarded or punished even as the soul.

The scriptures mention certain events which are to take place before the final judgment: (1) General preaching of the Christian Religion; (2) Conversion of the Jews; (3) Return of Henoch and Elias; (4) A great apostasy; (5) Reign of the anti-christ; (6) Extraordinary perturbations of nature, wars, pestilences and famine; (7) Universal conflagration; (8) Triumph of Resurrection to awaken the dead; (9) Sign of Son of Man appearing in Heavens. These signs are not intended to
serve as indications of the exact time of judgment, for it will come when least expected. They were meant to foreshadow the Last Judgment and keep the end of the world present to the minds of the Christians but without useless curiosity or fear. Whether or not Thomas of Celano supposed the end of the world was near with the major conversion of the then-known world, the Black Plague, the Inquisition, natural disasters, and Frederick II as possibly the anti-christ is not definitely known, but it is open to fanciful speculation by some.

Thomas had as a basis for his hymn both New and Old Testament references. The Day of the Lord on which the nations will be summoned to judgment is mentioned by Joel, Ezechiel and Isaias. The apostles give a prominent place to this doctrine; many passages of St. Paul exhort early Christians to keep in thought the Judgment as a guide to daily Christian living. In other passages of St. Paul and St. John it is called the Second Parousia, the Epiphany, or Appearance and the Apocalypse or Revelation. The New Testament refers to it also as: that day, the day of the Lord, the day of Christ, the day of the Son of Man, and the last day. The actual judgment scene will be found graphically portrayed in Matt. XXIV: 27ff; XXV: 31ff; Luke XXI: 25-27; Apoc: XX: 12-15.

The belief in the general judgment has prevailed at all times and in all places within the church. It is found in all the ancient

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creeds as an article of faith:

"He ascended into heaven. From thence He shall judge both the living and the dead," Apostles' Creed.

"From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead at whose coming all men must rise with their bodies and are to render an account of their deeds," Athanasian Creed.

"He shall come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead," Nicene Creed.

The first Jewish converts to Christianity brought with them the concept of the day of the Lord as pictured in the prophets and as steeped with mystery and wonder in pre-Christian apocalyptic literature. With these materials and the additional elements from Hellenistic and Oriental sources, the Church built up the great drama of graves opening at the sound of the trumpet, the resurrection of the body, and the appearance of all men before the Judge. The Jewish converts adapted their former beliefs to their new Christian religion. In the Jewish Prayerbook for the New Year and the Day of Atonement, a piyyut, a metrical liturgical hymn, is the center of the service. This prayer, called Unethang Togef, portrays the same terrors of judgment; for the New Year is considered the "day of writing" (judgment), and the Day of Atonement the "day of sealing it."9

David and the Sibyl testify together to the fire "which shall dissolve with fervent heat the elements, and the earth and the works therein shall be burned up". The fire is not a fire of total destruction but one of purification, changing only the present form of the earth. God, who destroyed the world before with the deluge, reserved fire

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as the great and final cleanser.\textsuperscript{10} David, the representative of the Old Testament prophets, himself gives witness to the Judgment in a distinct and specific treatment. In Psalms XCVI, CI and CII David prophesizes the destruction of the world and the coming of the Judge in righteousness.\textsuperscript{11} The Sibyl who is mentioned with David in prophecying the Judgment will be discussed in the following chapter.

The judgment scene is interrupted by a brief description of the \textit{liber scriptus} of stanza five. When the authors speak of the books at judgment, as in Daniel and the Apocalypse, they are speaking figuratively. This figure of speech was used by the author of the "Dies Irae" and calls for appropriate interpretation. When one book is mentioned it refers to God's omniscience as the record of all human actions; but if the reference is made to many books, it concerns the individual consciences of men. A correct understanding of this stanza brings out the omniscience and holiness of the Judge. The \textit{liber scriptus} is not the Bible as erroneously translated in one English version. The seating of the Judge in the sixth stanza is a token of his judicial authority and power, his majesty and dignity bringing hidden things of darkness into light.\textsuperscript{12}

Once he has finished the description of the Judgement Day to instill holy fear and consternation, the author begins a transitional verse before developing the thought and emotions of the judged. The remaining stanzas are lyric in character expressing the anguish of a soul present in spirit. The penitent in anticipation of the Judgment,

\textsuperscript{10}Nicholaus Gihr, \textit{Dies Irae} (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1927) pp. 22-32.

\textsuperscript{11}Schaff, op.cit., p. 137. \textsuperscript{12}Campbell, op.cit.
pleads before a Savior of infinite mercy, who on Judgment Day, will be a Judge of infinite justice, before whom "scarcely the just will be secure".

The seventh stanza serves to connect the descriptive with the lyric part of the hymn. The Day of Judgment is pictured now as near at hand. Thomas has in mind the text of St. Peter, IV: 18, bringing home to us the lesson of the difficulty of saving one's soul. Final victory is assured only when the particular judgment of God is announced.

The twelve following stanzas fashion the emotions which a serious meditation on the Last Judgment will invariably awaken in a sinful and sorrowful soul. The prayers are now in the first person (8-17) pleading for pardon for the individual. Verses 18-19 are no longer a personal plea but a prayer for all the faithful departed.\(^\text{13}\)

The two titles addressed to Christ in verse eight, Rex Tremendae Maiestatis is a recapitulation of the first section of the hymn which recalled the second coming of Christ, in order to awaken and nourish in our hearts a salutary fear of God. Fons Pietatis anticipates the second part which refers to the first coming of Christ and is primarily designed to revive and strengthen confidence and hope in the heart of the sinner. The heart that is inspired by hope is no longer checked by fear, but courageously seeks grace and pardon from the goodness and mercy of God. The first coming of Christ is perfected and completed by His second; the anticipation of the second coming is meant to spur the Church Militant to make proper use of

His first coming. Line two expresses the idea of salvation by free grace pointing out that God is under no obligation to redeem.14

The next six stanzas (9-14) develop the thought of God's mercy. They comprise two divisions of three stanzas each. The last stanza of each division contains an appropriate prayer. The first division (stanzas 9-11) deals with the first basis on which an appeal of mercy may rest, the labor and sufferings of Christ. The sentiments of hope in this section arise from the ninth stanza. The title addressed to Christ, Jesu Pie, points out the confidence and affection the author has in Him. In line two:

Quod sum causa tuae vitae
the penitent considers himself as the object of the Redemption referring what was done for all humanity to himself in a special way, and as it were, claims it for his own person benefit.

The second division (stanzas 12-14) deals with the second basis on which an appeal for mercy may rest, the repentance of the sinner. Opening with a description of contrition in stanza twelve, the author proceeds to name two famous penitents whom Christ Himself forgave. Mary is the famous Mary Magdalen who bathed the feet of Christ, by whom she was freed from seven devils. Her act was a mode of expressing sorrow for her sins and asking his forgiveness. After giving public testimony that her sins were forgiven, He commended her for her faith and dismissed her in peace (Luke 48-50). Christ's crucifixion between two thieves shows more clearly that his passion and death were undergone for the sins of men, with sinners

and for sinners. The conversion and pardoning of the penitent thief shows the effectiveness of the death of Christ and its application to all, even the greatest sinners, provided they are willing to accept his pardon. The good thief Dismas rebuked his companion for demanding that Christ should save them. He prayed instead for a share in His Kingdom and received the assurance, "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." The two examples point out Christ’s willingness to forgive all sinners, provided they are willing to accept his pardon. The unrepentant thief indicates that not all sinners will have a share in the graces of the redemption. These repentant sinners produce a confidence in divine mercy in the hearts of a sinner now which guarantees the remission of all sins. The holy fear of damnation must be accompanied by the confident hope of receiving God's forgiveness.15 This section of the hymn appropriately closes with a direct plea to be delivered from hell:

Ne perenni cremer igne.

The fifteenth and sixteenth stanzas, in their content and partly also in their wording are taken from Scripture, from the prophetic description of Judgment which Christ Himself drew. The separation of the good, oves, from the wicked, hoedes, precedes the judgment. The right side for the oves has always been the favored and more honorable place which logically belongs to the elect. The right side indicates that happiness and salvation of the elect, while the left side typifies the misery and curse that shall rest upon the damned. This section concludes with the eternal, unchangeable, and

15 Gihr, op. cit. pp. 149-160.
immediate execution of the sentence with the "depart ye cursed" and "come ye blessed" of the Scriptures.

The emotions of the judged and the "emotions" of the Judge expressed in the hymn are worthy of consideration to further our understanding, and, therefore, our appreciation of the sequence. St. Augustine assures that on "that day of wrath, that dread day" the wrath of God, unlike the wrath of men, is not a passionate outburst of a disturbed irascible temper, but the calm apportionment of a just punishment.

Because they are not mentioned in the hymn it seems the penitent will not have the intercession and protection of the Mother of God, of the angels and saints, of his guardian angel, and of his patron saint. The hymn implies that it is vain to ask then for a patron or advocate. The help of the holy ones was available during the battle of life, but now divine justice alone reigns. The Church taught the penitent to ask for help during life and even to the hour of death, but no further, because the hour of merit has passed. God's mercy predominated over his justice during the days of man's earthly life, but on "that day" his justice alone will rule. The punishments of God for those on earth are punishments that lead to cognition, correction and conversion, to spiritual progress, often to salvation; on "that day" however the punishments of God are solely punitive, vindicative and final.16

The most expressive emotions of the judged are those of fear and terror. That fear does not exclude the tenderness of filial

confidence, but rather presupposes it or aims at it. That fear is the beginning of wisdom. The Church had as her task instruction of the barbarian people who had entered into the inheritance of Rome which now included Christianity. Before their eyes the Church held the terror of judgment and the fear of eternal punishment. No other message could help to influence their passions and the violence of their nature. But the terror that is there in this great judgment hymn of Thomas does not oppress the penitent, but brings forth a confidence and trust to surmount the obstacles to his salvation. It is not the terror of Peter Damiani of the eleventh century who, in his judgment hymn, expressed a wild terror in long and overladen detail. His ideal life in ceaseless preparation for death and judgment was one of scourging, penance and abstinence. In his De Laude Flagellorum he says:

What, I say, wilt thou do when thou shalt see Him, whose ignominy thou dost despise, sitting upon the fiery throne of judgment and judging terribly the whole race of men with justice? Then the sun shall be darkened, the moon not give her light, the stars shall fall from heaven, the foundations of the hells shall tremble, ... and thou, decked out with fair adornment, thou softly and shamelessly clad what shalt thou do amid these terrible things? With what effrontery, with what boldness of presumption shall thou hope to share in his glory whose reproach and ignominy thou didst disdain to endure?

But there is that charity which in its highest perfection casts out fear. In the midst of the awful terrors of the "Dies Irae" there is yet to be seen the confident prayer:

18Raby, op. cit., p. 252.
Huic ergo parce Deus
Pie Jesu Domine
Dona eis requiem.

The prayer in the first person ends; there is a change from
the petitioner; he has forgotten about himself. A plea for pardon is
now asked on behalf of all the faithful departed. The original poem
appropriately closed with the words: "Gere curam mei finis." The
last six lines break the unity and symmetry of the poem by differing
from the rest in rhyme and measure. The scheme of triple rhymes is
discarded in favor of rhymed couplets, while the last two lines use
assonance instead of rhyme and are moreover catalectic. The two
added stanzas were adapted from earlier works of the twelfth century.
The first four of the concluding six lines were found among a series
of verses on the responsory "Libera me, Domine." "Dona eis
Requieum" is likewise found in older hymns and missals. The origi­
inal verses of the responsory are written first, those of the "Dies
Irae" after:

Lacrymosa dies illa,
Qua resurgens ex favilla
Homo reus judicandus.

Lacrimosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favilla
Juditandus homo reus.

Mone, in his commentary, conjectures that the author of the hymn
himself appended these closing lines to his poem. Daniel and P.
Wakernagel are disposed to adopt this same view. But it seems more
probable that the original hymn closed with "Gere curam mihi finis,"
as already remarked, and that the remaining six lines, with their
different versification and the change from the first person to the
third ("huic" and "eis") were added later. They were added, it seems,
to bring the original hymn into harmony with the liturgical purpose it
The hymn is also known as "Prosa de Mortuis", "De Die Judicium", "In Commemoratione Defunctorum" but usually by the opening words "Dies Irae". The present use of the sequence is prescribed by the rubrics of the Roman Missal requiring the recitation of the sequence by the celebrant on the following occasions: (1) in the Mass of All Souls' Day (In commemoratione omnium fidelium defunctorum), November 2; (2) in funeral Masses (In die obitus seu depositionis defuncti); and (3) whenever in requiem Masses, only one oratio or collect, is to be said, namely in the anniversary Mass, or when Mass is solemnly celebrated on the third, the seventh, or the thirtieth (Month's mind) day after death or burial. In other requiem Masses (In Missis quotidianis defunctorum) it is said at the discretion of the celebrant. The Bishop of St. Brieuc, in reply to his request for a dispensation from singing it, was informed by the S. Congr. of Rites on Aug. 12, 1854, that the singers might omit some strophes in the Masses in which it is required, but the decision is not included in the new edition of the Decreta Authentica S.R.C, and therefore no longer recognized as acceptable.

As the "Dies Irae" is now a definite part of the Missa de Requie and must on certain occasions be recited by the celebrant, it could naturally be supposed that the hymn was originally intended for that use. Mone and Daniel state that the "Dies Irae" was intended for the funeral service. One commentator thinks that, as its whole theme is the Last Judgment, it may have been composed as a sequence

\[\text{Schaff, op.cit., p. 148.}\]
for the First Sunday of Advent. But the majority of writers seek the solution of the problem through studying the history and development of the sequence. There was no sequence in early times in the Mass for the Dead because the Alleluia which the sequence always followed and from which it developed, being a song of rejoicing, was not sung at the funeral service. From this it would seem most probable that the beauty and power of the hymn led the Church to break from the rule that the sequence follows an Alleluia necessarily. "The 'Dies Irae' was not written to fill a place, but when written it made a place for itself." 20

Therefore, it was originally intended for private devotion—a pious meditation on the Last Judgment, whose appeal lay in candid portrayal of the emotions of the penitent, who, when conscious of his guilt, is reminded of the all-knowing and just judge. Had the poem not been of such high quality, it would likely have remained in books of private devotion; but, its excellence being quickly recognized, it was adopted into the Liturgy as early as the second half of the fourteenth century. Pope St. Pius V made its use universal in the sixteenth century thru a rubric inserted in his version of the Roman Missal. Because it was later adapted for the requiem, stanzas 18 and 19 were added to bring it into harmony with the liturgical funeral services ending the hymn with a prayer for the deliverance of all the faithful departed.

The great hymns of the thirteenth century in general and the "Dies Irae" in particular are one of the most noteworthy bequests from

20 Duffield, op. cit., p. 247.
all the achievements of that century. These religious hymns are comparable only to the Hebrew psalms for their excellent expression of devotion of religious feeling. They present the beginnings of rhymed poetry, but have been acclaimed by modern critics as among the greatest poems that ever came from the mind of man. For many centuries they were the principal medium of congregational devotion.

New honors were added to the Latin language by these hymns which show the achievements of the Latin tongue in the hands of generations following the classical period. At least one distinguished philologist, Professor T. A. March, of Lafayette College, does not hesitate to say that Latin hymns represent an expression of the genius of the Latin peoples and Latin language, more characteristic than the classical poetry. He writes:

Those hymns were the first original poetry of the people of the Latin language unless perhaps those Latin critics may be correct who think they find in Livy a prose rendering of earlier ballads. The so called classic poetry was an echo of Greece, both in substance and in form. The matter and meters were imitated and the poems were composed for the lovers of Grecian art in the Roman Court. It did not spring from the peoples, but the Christian hymns were proper folk poetry, the Bible of the people their Homeric poems.21

In addition to the praise given the whole period for its outstanding hymns, the "Dies Irae" come in for almost extravagant praise in its own right. Daniel declares: "uno omnium consensu, sacrae poeseos summam decus et ecclesiae latinae Keilmelion pretiosissimum," and adds" "Quot sunt verba pondera, immo tonitura"; Mrs. A. E. Nott: "greatest of hymns"; Shipley: "greater than all inspired hymns"; Schaff: "The acknowledged masterpiece of Latin poetry and the most

sublime of all uninspired hymns"; Coles: "It would be difficult to find in the whole range of literature, a production to which a profounder interest attaches than to that magnificent canticle of the Middle Ages"; Germans call it, with reference to its majesty and antique massiveness, the gigantic hymn, Giganten hymnus.

Because of its popularity in all circles, the "Dies Irae" has a threefold distinction: (1) hymn most frequently used in Divine worship; (2) most often imitated, paraphrased or translated; (3) hymn more highly esteemed by the learned and cultured and the unlettered than any other Latin hymn.22

If its greatness can be isolated and attributed to one or more aspects of the hymn, most writers will include the intensity of the feeling with which its great theme is handled, and the form which commands the admiration of every man. The "Dies Irae" has painted a picture of vivid emotions from the description of the Judgment scene given therein, the trumpet of the archangel sounding through the open sepulchres, the dead being raised to life, the Son of Man seated in tremendous majesty on his throne, with the open Book of Deeds of the Ages, dividing the good from the bad, the spirit of the humble penitent pleading for mercy. The poem is divided into stanzas; each stanza consists of a triplet with a triple double rhyme. The trochaic dimeter of the "Dies Irae" is a powerful medium, said by some to be the inspiration of the spirit and form of Dante's Divina Commedia with its triplets and terza rima.

With no desire to minimize the excellence of the form and

and meter of the masterpiece, the popularity of the hymn does not rest wholly on its merits as a poetic composition. Apart from the poem itself, there is a strange awe and fascination with the theme alone. Death has always been looked upon with a reverential fear and curiosity. It is similar to the *Imitation of Christ* in its universal acceptance, both compositions discussing in the simplest and least conventional terms what is common in life and death to all men.  
In addition to the previous reason given for its universal enjoyment, Protestants added reasons why they enjoy the "Dies Irae". Because it was written in Italy by a Franciscan they accept the work with the following reservation:

In the Medieval Church we have the wine and the lees together - the truth and the error - the false observance, and yet at the same time the divine truth which should one day be fatal to it, side by side.  
An evangelical type of doctrine representing salvation as an act of the free grace of God is interpreted from this line: "qui salvandos salvas gratis." In the lines, "Quem patronem rogaturus, Quum vix justus sit securus," it virtually renounces the doctrine of the advocacy of the Virgin and the Saints, and takes refuge only in Christ. The "Dies Irae" is completely lacking in "Mariolatry", and present an exaltation of Divine mercy above human merit and pictures the souls free access to God without intervention of Church and priest.

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A testimony to its universal acceptance is its use outside the area for which it is generally intended. The "Dies Irae" produces a grand and terrible effect when Margaret of Goethe's Faust, coming alone and friendless, among worshipers purer than herself, recites several stanzas of the hymn as her sign of repentance. Uncle Tom's Cabin is hardly the place to look for such a hymn but two verses of a translation are found in that novel. Musicians capitalizing on its excellence have included Gounod who set the whole text to music in Mors et Vita; Colonna, Bassani, Verdi, Bruneau, Cherubini and Berlioz have used it also, but the most famous musical adaptation is Mozart's Requiem, D. Minor which he considered to be the culmination of his career, finishing it on his death bed.

The great number of translations is the most eloquent witness to its untranslatable beauty. No other poem has so often challenged and defied the skill of translators as the "Dies Irae". The dictionary of rhyme has nearly been exhausted upon it, and every new attempt presents points of resemblance to former versions. But the very fact that it is untranslatable will call forth new attempts proving that none of the translations comes up fully to the original. There are presently over 100 versions in German and 243 in English; translations also appear in French, Dutch, Spanish, Hebrew, and modern and Koine Greek. Martin Luther's "Ein feste Burg" of which there are 81 versions in English, can alone compare to it.26

All the English versions can be listed under two headings — translations and paraphrases, the imitations are not worthy of notation.

26Britt, op. cit., p. 205.
There are seven genuine translations into English, honestly reproduced in substance, and done into both the meter and the rhyme of the original — i.e. trochaic, with dissyllabic rhymed readings. The honor is shared by two Protestant clergymen and five Catholics, three of the latter laymen. Some translations are written in the easier and less effective iambic meter, others omit the dissyllabic rhyme, but others preserve meter at the expense of smoothness.

The earliest English translation was made in 1621 by Joshua Sylvester consisting of ten stanzas of six lines each with an irregular meter and simple rhyme; it was titled, "A Holy Preparation to a Joyful Resurrection". The earliest Catholic translation existant is from Daily Exercises of the Devout Rosarists published in 1657. The early Catholic versions were printed for private devotion while the Protestant versions were for public singing in church. The Earl of Rosecommon's version of 1674 is ascribed to Dryden, his close friend and associate, from discrepancies in publishing dates and its Catholic phraseology. It is reported that Dr. Samuel Johnson could never repeat the tenth stanza without being moved to tears. Sir Walter Scott's version, originally appearing in 1805, in the poem of the Day of the Last Ministral is the most widely known version among Protestants for its poetic feeling, simplicity of devotion. His first condensed rendering follows:

That day of wrath, that dreadful day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away.
What power shall be the sinner's stay?
How shall he meet that dreadful day?

When shrivelling like a parched scroll,
The flaming heavens together roll;
When louder yet, and yet more dread,
Swells the high trump that wakes the dead:
O, on that day, that wrathful day,
When man to judgment wakes from clay,
Be thou the trembling sinner's stay,
though heaven and earth shall pass away.\(^7\)

The greatest American translator was Abraham Coles of Scotch Plains, New Jersey. He prepared between 1874 and 1887 various versions, six of which are in the same trochaic measure and double rhyme, one in iambic triplets, the last in quatrains. Of him Orbey Shipley has said, "...... an American enthusiast having not only written (which was venial) but published (an unpardonable offense) no fewer than thirteen different versions." The Doctor added sin to sin, and his versions reached seventeen in number.

About the totality of the translations it has been said, "We can only wish that some acknowledged prince of poets, some Shakespeare or Milton, has essayed the task."

The text of the "Dies Irae" did not escape adaptation into political satire. About 1700 a Catholic priest showing his hatred of Protestantism changed this judgment hymn into a prophesy of the downfall of the heretical churches in Holland and England for which he hoped from the restoration of the Stuarts and the union of the French and Spanish crowns in the Bourbon family. A few verses of the text follow:

\[
\text{Dies Irae, dies illa,}
\text{Solvet foedus in favilla}
\text{Teste Tago, Scaldi Scylla.} (1)
\]

\[
\text{Quantus tremor est futurus,}
\text{Dum Philippus est venturus,}
\text{Has Paludes agressurus!}
\]

\(^{27}\)Shipley, "Fifty Versions of the Dies Irae", op. cit., pp. 52-53.
Hic fides refulgebit,
Vera fides refulgebit,
Nil Calvino remanebit.

Quid sum miser tunc disturus
Quem Patronum rogaturus,
Quum nec anglus sit securus?

Magne Rector liliorum,(2)
Amore, timor, popularum,
Parce terris Batavorum.

Preces meae non sunt dignae,
Sed, Rex magne, fac benigne,
Ne bomborum cremer igne.

Confutatis Calvi brutis
Patre, nato, restitutis(3)
Redde mihi spem salutis,

Oro supplex et acclinis.
Calvinissimus fiat cinis,
Lacrymarum ut sit finis.28

(1) Rivers in Lusitania and Belgium and rock at entrance to the straits between Italy and Sicily.
(2) Louis XIV of France in allusion to the fleur de lis, his armoral shield.
(3) James II of England, and his son, the Prince of Wales, expelled in 1688 by Parliament and William of Orange.

28 Schaff, op.cit., pp. 151-152.
The "Dies Irae" is an accentual (non-quantitative) rhymed, trochaic meter. To understand and appreciate this better, it is best to review briefly the periods of Latin poetry. The native expression of Rome in which L. Livius Andronicus wrote his Grammaticus was the Saturnian verse which existed as early as the third century B.C. The beat of each measure is dependent upon the word accent. Its schema is:

\[ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \]

or:

\[ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \]

Ennius then introduced the quantitative verse which earned for him the title, "Father of Latin Literature." The measures of the quantitative meter are determined by the quantity of the Latin syllables. The style is artificial to Latin, being adapted from the Greek. In the Middle Ages there is a return to the native expression based upon accent and not quantity.

In addition to accentual meter, the great hymns of the Middle Ages are distinguished from compositions of the classical eras by rhyme. Because of this some think that the use of rhyme in conjunction with Latin somehow lowers the dignity of the language of Cicero and Horace. Even after a system had been introduced based on different principles of versification, Greek meters, yet rhyme was so inborn in the language that it continually made its appearance. In

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spite of hinderances rhyme developed in Rome according to a natural pattern. Rhyme begins with Tiraden assonance, an arrangement in which groups of verses end in the same vowel. The later attempts at rhythmical expression started with alternating sentences of similar length, forming a system of parallelism of sound. The next step was a regular reocurrence of accents, irrespective of syllables, followed by verses restricted to a certain number of syllables as well as accents. In addition to the set number of syllables in each verse, the final stage involves a regular and complicated alternation of the quantity of these syllables.\(^2\) Rhyme was only with difficulty avoided by the writers who kept the ornaments of the qualitative meter, as in Virgil where it appears rarely, but in Ovid more frequently. Even Ennius who introduced the foreign system into Rome did not avoid internal and end rhyme in his *Andromacha*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Non cauponantes bellum} & \quad \text{Haec omnia vidi infammari}, \\
\text{sed belligerantes} & \quad \text{Priamo vi vitam evitari}, \\
& \quad \text{Jovis aram sanquine Turpari}\^3
\end{align*}
\]

The return to rhyme properly belongs to the third and fourth centuries. The first hymns that show distinctive adoption of rhyme are those of Hilary, Bishop of Portiers (d. 368).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jesus refulsit omnium} \\
\text{Pius redemptor gentium.}
\end{align*}
\]

St. Ambrose of Milan, who is known as the father of Western Hymnody, frequently used the simple iambic dimeter, the Ambrosian meter. When it is observed that rhymed Latin poetry developed


naturally from a simple to a more complex composition even while attempts were made to suppress it, no one should any longer assume rhyme to be the exclusive invention of any one people. Rhymed Latin poetry did not develop from the Arabs, Celts or Jews, but it is the natural result of the human mind. The weak and indistinct beginnings of rhyme, poor assonance and lack of skill in its use mark rhyme as an autochthonous development.

The trochaic dimeter, i.e., a two foot meter doubled with each foot composed of a stressed and unstressed unit was most popular with hymn writers of the Medieval Ages. Modifications of this basic meter are numerous; the stanza lengths range from one to ten verses with many variations in rhyme scheme. But the "Dies Irae" is the only example of stanzas of trochaic dimeters rhymed in triplets.

The "Dies Irae" is onomato-poetic; the frequent use of full tones for the endings is in full harmony with the thought and feeling of the sequence. They heighten and complete the effect upon both the heart and ear of the listener. Duffield declares that there is a wonderful wedding of sense to sound through the u assonance in the second stanza, the o assonance in the third and the a and i assonance in the fourth. A pleasing effect is achieved by the interchange of closed vowels (o,u) and open vowels (a,e,i) within each stanza. The internal sub rhyme of sedisti and redemisti is a tribute to the author because this is rarely achieved without a jingle effect. The adaption of the triple

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rhyme to the theme, says Daniel, impresses every reader like blow
following blow of a hammer upon anvil. These patterns are followed
until the eighteenth stanza when there is a marked change in the
construction of the verses. The three concluding stanzas discard
the schema of triple rhymes in favor of rhymed couplets ending in
imperfect rhymes of one syllable while all preceding rhymes are
trochaic. The last two verses differ greatly from all previous verses;
they use assonance instead of rhyme and are in addition catalectic.

Of the 243 versions in English over one-third of them have
a triple rhyming stanza. This is a tribute to the contention that the
triple rhyming trochaic dimeter is an integral part of the "Dies Irae"
and that translations should as far as possible conform to the meter
of the original. This is sometimes done at the expense of litteral-
ness, elegance, correctness of grammar and simplicity. This proves
to be a difficulty in translation because the original Latin uses long
participial forms and, therefore, requires more space in meter than
the equivalent English translation.
CHAPTER VI
CLASSICAL REFERENCES
Various attempts have been made to remove the Sibyl from the "Dies Irae" by replacing the original line, "Teste David cum Sibylla" with imitations. The changes vary from one word adaptations, "Peter", based upon 2 Pet. III, 7-11, wherein there is a more obvious prophecy about the destruction of the world by fire than in the Sibyl. There is another change which involves the complete line, "crucis expandens vexilla," which rest upon Matt. XXIV; 30, with the expectation that the apparition of a cross in the sky will signify the end of the world. These changes occur most often in Protestant versions of the poem; the Catholic variations are of the 18th century and easily recognized as imitations of the original. The Sibyl is omitted in Protestant versions because it is "repugnant to modern taste." But it is in perfect keeping with patristic and scholastic use of the Sibyl, the fourth Eclogue of Virgil, Nebuchadnezzar, and other heathen testimonies of the same kind, for apologetic purposes. It gives the idea of the judgment of the world a universal character, as being founded in the expectations of the Gentiles, Jews and Christians, and by the light of reason as well as the voice of revelation.¹ The Medieval painter carried on this tradition in placing the Sibyl along side the prophets of Israel to announce Christ; Michael Angelo's Sistine Chapel is among the more widely known.

The Sibyl is the representation of the unconscious prophecies

¹Philip Schaff, Literature and Poetry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890, p. 137.)
of heathenism, with an allusion to the Sibylline Oracles of the destruction of the world. The word originates from the Doric Greek, ὡλο-πολλα-Θεοῦ-βουλή, the will of God. This is the name given to inspired prophetesses who are sometimes described as priestesses of Apollo, sometimes as his favorite wives or maidens. They are usually regarded as maidens dwelling in lonely caves or by inspiring springs giving poetic utterances while inspired. Their number and name are uncertain, varying from two or three to ten or twelve. The Erythraean Sibyl, Herophile, usually considered identical with the Cumaean, is the most famous. She journeyed from her home to Cumae where she lived for many generations in the Crypts under the Temple of Apollo. 2

Because ancient poetry and ancient religion were so closely connected in their causes, origin and development becoming for the most part identical, it was natural that elements of the ancient religion be introduced with the new poetry. Mythology, itself a poetical creation, occupied such a prominent place in the expressions, images and phraseology of the poetry that it was virtually impossible to sing of Christ and the saints without at the same time introducing Apollo, the Muses and Olympus. The purely poetical expression of the Mythology enabled it to throw off its religious character in the face of new ideals of Christianity while retaining its poetical value. Through this process pagan references made their way into Christian poetry. 3

The use of pagan references in the "Dies Irae" is not an


isolated instance, but is part of a gradual process of development. As early as the fifth century the verses of the Sibyl were recited in the churches on Christmas Day. Virgil’s Messianic Eclogue was often mentioned in the Christmas sermons. A Christian writer intended to parallel the Christian and heathen series, and show Christ’s testimony by both in this poem:

O Judaei Verbum Dei
Qui negatis, hominem
Vestrae legis, testis Regis
Audite per ordinem

Et Vos, gentes, non credentes
Perperisse virginem,
Vestrae gentis documentis
Pellite caliginem. 4

The Sibylline Oracles, supposedly written by the Erythraean Sibyl, are twelve books of pretended prophesies written in Greek hexameters. At a later date they were discovered to be composed partly by Alexandrian Jews, and partly by Christians, in the interests of their respective religions. The Sibylline Oracles were not so much subordinated to the more legitimate prophecy, as co-ordinated with it and the two were regarded as parallel lines of prophecy, the Church’s and the world’s. A passage of the manuscript follows wherein acrostics have been developed to further point out the cleverness of the authors:

1 Judgment shall moisten the earth with the sweat of its standard,
K Ever enduring, behold the King shall come through the ages,
S Sent to be here in the flesh, and Judge at the last of the world.
O O God, the believing and faithless alike shall behold Thee
Y Uplifted with saints, when at last the ages are ended.
S Sisted before Him are souls in the flesh for His Judgment.

X Hid in thick vapours, the while desolate lieth the earth.
P Rejected by men are the idols and long hidden treasurers;
E Earth is consumed by the fire, and it searcheth the ocean and heaven;
I Issuing forth, it destroyeth the terrible portals of hell.
S Saint in their body and soul freedom and light shall inherit;
O Those who are guilty shall burn in fire and brimstone forever.

Occult actions revealing, each one shall publish his secrets; 
*Secrets of every man's heart God shall reveal in the light.*

Then shall be weeping and wailing, yea, and gnashing of teeth; 
*Eclipsed is the sun, and silenced the stars in their chorus.*

Over and gone is the splendour of moonlight, melted the heaven. 
*Uplifted by Him are the valleys, and cast down the mountains.*

Utterly gone among men are distinctions of lofty and lowly. 
*Into the plains rush the hills, the skies and oceans are mingled.*

Oh, what an end of all things! earth broken in pieces shall perish; 
*Swelling together at once shall the waters and flames flow in rivers.*

Sounding the archangel's trumpet shall peal down from heaven, 
*Over the wicked who groan in their guilt and their manifold sorrows.*

Trembling, the earth shall be opened, revealing chaos and hell. 
*Every kind before God shall stand in that day to be judged.*

Rivers of fire and of brimstone shall fall from the heavens.

In these Latin verses the meaning of the Greek is correctly given, 
although not in the exact order of the lines as connected with the initial letters; for in three of them, the fifth, eighteenth, and nineteenth, where the Greek letter Υ occurs, Latin words could not be found beginning with the corresponding letter, and yield a suitable meaning. Therefore, if the initial letters of all the lines in the Latin translation are read in sequence, except those three in which is retained the letter Υ in the proper place, they will express in five Greek words meaning, "Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Saviour." But if the initial letters of these five words in the Greek, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ ζωός σωτήρ, are joined, they will make the word, Ἰησοῦς that is, "fish" in which word Christ is mystically understood, because "He was able to live, that is, to exist, without sin in the abyss of this mortality as in the depth of waters."

It is now difficult to realize that the following passage comes from St. Augustine, one of the keenest intellects of the Roman Empire:
For there were also prophets not of God himself and even in them are to be found some things which they had heard and uttered concerning Christ. So it is said of the Sibyl among others; which I would not readily believe but that a certain one of the Roman poets, the most famous of the Roman tongue, before saying of the renewal of the age things which seem to fit and agree with the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, prefixes a verse in which he says, "the last age of the Cumaean song is come". 5

A few still maintain this sort of explanation in a modified form; they contend that Virgil may have had some slight acquaintance with the Old Testament. The conception that there were pagan as well as Christian sources for the final catastrophe of the world found acceptance among the early Christian writers. The words of Virgil would be linked with any association of the Sibyl with Christian revelation: ultima Cumae venit iam carminis aetas, (Ecl. 4. 4), for, with the exception of St. Jerome, the Church Fathers had regarded the Fourth Eclogue as Messianic poem.

There is a tradition in Celano that Thomas belonged to the noble family of Adamucci. 6  If this is true, more than usual care would have been devoted to his early education, accounting for his knowledge of classical works. When Thomas of Celano associated in the same verse David with the Sibyl, he was but following the tradition which found expression in the literature and art of the period. At this time all previous history is recognized merely as a preparation for Christianity, and all the classics as subservient to the scriptures.

The not-so-obvious classical references in the "Dies Irae" point out the thirteenth century as the golden age of classical florilegia.


The ideas and phraseology from the part of many of the works of this century make it clear that a Christian humanism was flourishing in Italy. The Renaissance with its basis in literature and culture of classical antiquity did not suddenly appear but was the culmination of a gradual process in renewed interests in the classics.

It has been suggested that in composing the sequences the author carried over into the composition some recollections of his youthful reading of Virgil. The sounding of the trumpet (Aen. 2.98) and the coget omnes looking forward to the separation of the sheep from the goats (Ecl. 3.20,98) are familiar phrases to Virgil. The Rex tremendae maiestatis has been inspired by the King of Terrors whom Orpheus approaches in the Underworld. Both Virgil and Thomas represent Mors as a personification, but Virgil, possibly in a more Christian fashion than Thomas, pictures Mors not as death, but the giver of life itself. Some authors will even state the form seems to be derived from Thomas' study of Christian and classical authors because the sequence has a definite pattern in the nineteen stanzas; the first and last two are in the nature of a prologue and epilogue.

From the matter presented it is most easily seen that the Sibyl and the various interpretations attached to her do not detract from the poem, but add to it a special quality which enhances the power and beauty of the work.

7Ibid., p.451.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
My conclusions drawn from this study of the "Dies Irae" which I consider obvious, even though they are not so considered with a great degree of certainty by all authors, include the following:

1. The "Dies Irae" was originally composed as a pia meditatio and only later became part of the Funeral Mass.

2. The text of the Roman Missal is the most authentic of the three existing texts while the Mantuan and Hammerlein texts are later adaptations of the Roman Missal text.

3. Thomas of Celano is the author, a conclusion reached by literary comparison and historical proof.

In the field in which I worked I found that excellent work had been done by Paul E. Campbell and Hugh T. Henry on the topic of the "Dies Irae". The textual analysis by the German Jesuits, Clemens Blume and Guido Maria Dreves, was the most scholarly and complete of any available.

Adequate work was most notably absent in metrical analysis. The trochaic dimeter is nowhere to be found in any of the more eminent and respected prosodies of Latin. Because the trochaic dimeter is not recognized as a classical meter, all authors, whom I consulted, have found fit to omit any reference to it. This points out a seeming lack of scholarly interest in Medieval Hymns and Medieval Latin as a whole. The growth of the idea that Medieval Latin has inherent value and is not merely the corruption and demise of classical Latin has not become widespread enough, although it was reborn in the latter half
of the nineteenth century. By the time the "Dies Irae" was composed
Christian Latin poetry had developed for over a thousand years and,
having attained its perfection, it was not merely an imitation of a poor
classical style but the culmination of the Medieval Ages.

In pointing out the modes of its greatness, authors have
overlooked the "Dies Irae" as a work of art. It is eminent in this
field because it can be successfully interpreted to be in the realm of
the esthetic or fine arts, in which the creation of esthetic form and
emotional expressiveness are the sole objective of the work. Also,
it is a free fine art concerned with esthetic form and expression alone;
it is a dependent fine art combining esthetic form and utility as a
meditatio or as the Funeral Mass sequence.

Medieval Latin is not a subject, as many think, that can
be investigated and then forgotten, for although now past, new dis­
coveries and revisions are being made, as, for example, the refuta­
tion in the past fifty years of Notker as the inventor of the sequence.

Present liturgical changes bring up the perennial question
of translations. Accepting as a premise the basic postulate that the
true poetic expression in one language does not tolerate adequate
translation into a second language, I do not presume to criticize the
many attempts in English which have been made to reproduce the
stately cadence of the Latin trochees and the profound reflections
of our author. From my extensive study of this great poem and a now
long familiarity with it, I would but make an earnest and simple plea
— that the majesty and dignity of form of the original and its depth
and intensity of feeling be respected.

SIC CONCLUDITUR HOC MAGNUMOPUS! DEO GRATIAS!
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