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Gregorian Chant

A Barometer of Religious Fervor
in the Catholic Church

BY

STEPHEN THUIS, O.S.B., M.Mus.



GRAIL PUBLICATIONS

St. Meinrad

Indiana

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GREGORIAN CHANT

*A Barometer of Religious Fervor
in the Catholic Church*

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PREFACE

The Archdiocese of St. Louis
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All will be happy to learn that there is a demand for a reprint of the treatise on Gregorian Chant by Dom Stephen Thuis of St. Meinrad's Abbey. The revival of appreciation of the Sacred Liturgy is necessarily accompanied with renewed interest in the liturgical music of the Church. Furthermore, as the author illustrates, the measure of appreciation of Gregorian Chant has always been a true measure of the religious fervor of the Church.

This volume comes from the hallowed walls of the great Abbey of St. Meinrad, where for almost one hundred years the Chant has been sung with ever-increasing beauty and perfection. Here one finds Gregorian Chant in a perfect setting and at its best. Within these sacred precincts the gifted author received his early training, and here he spent many years as instructor and choirmaster. For a number of years, he has also conducted special schools and

institutes of Chant at various Universities, and has been associated with both the Pius X School and the Gregorian Institute of America.

It is our opinion that this new edition of Dom Stephen's treatise will be well received and that it will contribute much to the advancement of the cause of the Liturgy and its Sacred Chant.

✠ Joseph E. Ritter, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Saint Louis

June 3, 1951

FOREWORD

Gregorian Chant has been for centuries the official chant of the Catholic Church. If the Chant is an external expression of the beauty and sanctity within the Catholic Church—and thus part of the very life of the Church—one is led to expect that the Chant has shared, in the main, the same fortunes as have been the lot of the Church through the ages. That this has been the case, the writer has endeavored to show in the following pages. In fact it does not seem too much to say that the status of the Gregorian Chant during the centuries may be considered a barometer indicating the state of religious fervor in the Catholic Church at the time.

We might dwell on the argument based upon the very nature of the ideas concerned, by stating that just as, according to the theological axiom, the *lex credendi* becomes the *lex orandi*, so the *lex orandi* should be the *lex cantandi*—that is, just as the “rule of believing” becomes the “rule of praying,” so the “rule of praying” should be the “rule of singing.” This would result in the statement that that is the best form of church music which best corresponds

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to the *lex orandi*—the “rule of praying.” The next step would be to show that Gregorian Chant *is* the best musical expression of the prayer of the Church. But history confronts us with the interesting fact that periods of religious fervor have been periods in which Chant flourished, and that periods of falling off in religious fervor have been accompanied by the decline of Chant. In fact, a survey of the synchronous histories of the Church and Chant discloses a parallelism that is both striking and significant.

It is of interest to note that to-day we are experiencing a revived appreciation of the plain chant. This, then, would indicate, from the study of the history of the Chant, that we are in the midst of a reawakening of the religious spirit. From the same study one is led to believe that the extended use and perfected rendering of the Chant today will, in its turn, intensify the revived spiritual life of the Christian community.

A treatise such as this is usually liable to the charge of the construction of facts in accordance with a pre-conceived idea. It may be interesting to note how Paul Bekker, in his *The Story of Music*, anticipates this.

I shall probably be accused of “construing” the facts in my own way. I shall not dispute the accusation save to add that I know no presentation of history which is not a “construction” in this sense. Every scientific theory is a construction—we should not allow ourselves

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to be pleasantly misled as to the significance of alleged "facts." The question is not whether facts are construed, but what is the *quality* of the interpretation put upon them. If it leads to a creative attitude, there must be something alive in it, of which we must take heed, even though it may not have received academic sanction.¹

At the outset, the writer wishes to declare that he is not endeavoring to prove that Gregorian Chant should be used exclusively in our churches. Rather, in the pages that follow, Gregorian Chant is being considered as the supreme *model* of proper Church Music, and thus a sort of embodiment of the ideals of all proper Catholic liturgical music. That this is not an overstatement we trust is clear from the official language of the Church. Blessed Pius X, in his *Motu Proprio*, which has the force of law for the entire Catholic Church, lays down this norm:

Gregorian Chant has always been considered the supreme model of sacred music. Hence with every reason we lay down the following rule: the more closely a church composition approaches Gregorian Chant in movement, inspiration, and feeling, the more holy and liturgical it becomes; and the more it deviates from this supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple.

Here, too, the writer wishes to affirm that in treating of the traditional plain song he has not the least idea of condemning the other forms of music, secular or sacred. The enthusiastic devotee of the plain

¹ Bekker, *The Story of Music*, p. 14.

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chant can consistently be also an ardent admirer of the opera, as also of polyphony and the modern forms of church music. But as to music that does not possess the necessary requisites of liturgical music, he does insist that it remain in its proper place—and that it do not invade the sacred precincts of the sanctuary.

Just as we do not build a church on the same architectural lines as we do an opera house; just as Catholic priests do not wear, in the exercise of sacred functions, an evening dress with silk hat, leaving aside the magnificent church vestments used for centuries; so the sacred Liturgy of the Church would not bear to be musically clothed after the style of concert music, dances, and love songs.²

Before beginning the comparative study of the two histories—that of the Chant and the Church—it has been thought advisable to preface the comparison with an opening chapter including observations on the Chant in general. This, it is hoped, will serve to aid an appreciative understanding of the following chapters.

² Manzetti, *Church Music and Catholic Liturgy*, p. 4.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS ON GREGORIAN CHANT

MUSIC is the language of love. Hence the Church, as the Bride of Christ, has always sung the praises of her Divine Lover, Jesus Christ. Her praises, in turn, are the echo of that ineffable canticle sung in the Godhead from all ages. For the Eternal Word—Jesus Christ—is a divine canticle singing the Father's praise. This is the infinite hymn that ever sounds "in the bosom of the Father," the canticle that rises up from the depths of the Divinity, the Living Canticle wherein God eternally delights, because it is the infinite expression of His perfection.

But Christ does not separate Himself from His mystical Body—the Church. Before ascending into Heaven, He bequeaths His riches and mission to His Church. Christ, in uniting Himself to the Church, gives her His power of adoring and praising the Father; this is the Liturgy. It is the praise of the Church united to Jesus, supported by Jesus; or rather

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it is the praise of Christ, the Incarnate Word, passing through the lips of the Church. Dowered with the riches of Christ, the Church, His Bride, is introduced by Him into the palace of the King of Heaven, into the Father's presence, and there, united to Jesus Christ, she sings—as she will do until the end of ages—the canticle sung "in the bosom of the Father" by the Word, and brought by Him to earth.³

Since, then, a lover is wont to sing—*Cantare amantis est*, as St. Augustine says (*Sermo* 336, No. 1)—the Church has always made use of music, just as she has summoned to her service the other fine arts. But this music must be true art, as the sainted Pope of Sacred Music, Pius X, admonishes in his immortal *Motu Proprio* of 1903, on Sacred Music. To quote further from the *Motu Proprio*:

Sacred music, because it is an integral part of the Liturgy, participates in the same general purpose of this solemn Liturgy, that is: the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful. It enhances the beauty and splendor of the ceremonies of the Church. Since its chief function is to clothe with suitable melody the liturgical text presented for the understanding of the faithful, its own proper end is to make that text more meaningful for them. Through this means they can more easily be moved to devotion and better disposed to receive the fruits of grace coming from the celebration of the holy mysteries.

Sacred music must, therefore, possess in the highest

³ cf. Marmion, *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*, p. 297.

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degree the qualities which characterize the Liturgy. In particular it must possess *holiness and beauty of form*; from these two qualities a third will spontaneously arise—*universality*.

Sacred music must be *holy*, and therefore exclude everything that is secular, both in itself and in its rendition.

It must be *true art*. In no other way can it affect the minds of the hearers in the manner which the Church intends in admitting into her Liturgy the art of sound.

It must also be *universal* in this sense, that, although individual countries may admit into their ecclesiastical compositions proper forms native to each, still these forms must remain so subordinate to the general character of sacred music that no hearer of another nation might be disturbed thereby.

These qualities are found most perfectly in Gregorian Chant, which is the proper chant of the Roman Church—the only chant inherited from the ancient Fathers. Jealously guarding it these many centuries in her liturgical books, the Church directly proposes it to the faithful as her own music and prescribes it exclusively for some parts of her Liturgy. Happily, recent studies have restored this chant to its original purity and integrity.

For these reasons Gregorian Chant has always been considered the supreme model of sacred music. Hence with every reason we lay down the following rule: *the more closely a church composition approaches Gregorian Chant in movement, inspiration, and feeling, the more holy and liturgical it becomes; and the more it deviates from this supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple.*

This traditional Gregorian Chant must be fully re-

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stored to the functions of divine worship. It must be accepted with certainty that the sacred Liturgy loses nothing of its solemnity when the Chant alone is used.

That Gregorian Chant is really the ideal form of liturgical musical expression has been admitted by some of the finest musical minds. As Bewerunge writes:

Melodies that have outlived a thousand years and are at the present day attracting the attention of so many artists and scholars need no apology. It must be kept in mind, of course, that since the language of plain chant is somewhat remote from the musical language of today, some little familiarity with its idiom is required to appreciate its beauty. Its tonality, its rhythm, as it is generally understood, the artistic reserve of its utterance, all cause some difficulty and demand a willing ear. Again, it must be insisted that an adequate performance is necessary to reveal the beauty of plain chant.⁴

Paul Bekker, a non-Catholic writer, in his *The Story of Music*, which reviews the history of all music from the viewpoint of the secular musical historian, pays the following tribute:

Gregorian plain song, an achievement of the first rank not only in music but in general culture, is the great contribution of the first ten centuries of Christendom. . . . The Gregorian Chant is not at all primitive, but can only be regarded as a great, far-reaching, and inherently rich artistic and cultural expression.⁵

⁴ Bewerunge, "Plain Chant," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, 148.

⁵ Bekker, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 65.

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We recall how Halévy, although a Jew, has called the Chant "the finest religious music in the world." Mozart's statement, "that he would gladly exchange all his music for the fame of having composed the Gregorian Preface," sounds almost hyperbolic. Berlioz, who himself wrote a grandiose Requiem, declared that "nothing in music could be compared with the effect of the Gregorian *Dies Irae*." Gevaert considers the most characteristic quality of the Chant to be the fact that it never grows stale, "as though time had no power over it."⁶

It is a mistake to foster the idea that we today have progressed from the ancient Gregorian Chant, and that consequently it is to be looked upon with disdain. It is a distinct creation of musical art, just as polyphony and modern music. As Bekker points out:

Development in the sense of progress, of higher degree or improvement, I cannot admit; at least not in works of art, in which I find only the metamorphosis of ceaselessly working forces. The concern of history, therefore, lies not in presenting events themselves, but in making intelligible the laws and forces which determine their transformation. In these laws and forces life itself is at work, while events are merely the effects of their activity. . . . I beg the reader to keep in mind as the basis for all further discussion of different periods in history that the forms of art never develop, they can only change; that the music of all times is artistically,

⁶ Gietmann, "Music," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, X, 649.

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absolutely, ever the same; that it always reflects the nature of the people who created it; and that *we*, finally, have no reason to believe that the intellectual and artistic capacities of the people of former centuries were not at least as high as our own.⁷

The mistake is very frequently made in regard to Gregorian Chant of considering it simply as a thing in itself. The musical critic, Bekker, has understood this excellently.

I repeat, we cannot sufficiently beware of looking at the music of that time as a thing in itself. When we think of music to-day, we think involuntarily of music for its own sake, as a concert, the performance of a symphony or chamber music. But this kind of music only came about with the shaping of modern life. To men of ancient times music was conceivable only in connection with some event, whether worship, dance, or recitation of poetry. The *word* was the most powerful influence in giving such music form.⁸

It is the text, then, that is the important factor in the ancient ecclesiastical music.

Since its [sacred music] chief function is to clothe with suitable melody the liturgical text presented for the understanding of the faithful, its own proper end is to make that text more meaningful for them. Through this means they can more easily be moved to devotion and better disposed to receive the fruits of grace coming from the celebration of the holy mysteries.⁹

⁷ Bekker, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁸ Bekker, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁹ Pope Pius X, *Motu Proprio*.

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Edward Dickinson, who, though not a Catholic, has written very sympathetically of the cause of sacred music and its ideals, says:

The Chant melodies are no mere musical accompaniment; they are the very life breath of the words. The text is so exalted in diction and import, partaking of the sanctity of the sacrificial function to which it ministers, that it must be uttered in tones especially consecrated to it.¹⁰

What, then, it might be asked, really constitutes the liturgic ideal in sacred music? To answer this fully would be beyond the scope of this paper. Yet some idea of this will aid greatly in the proper understanding of the following pages. In the first place, there is the intimate relation between the liturgical text and the music, as spoken of above. The music has blossomed forth from the text, which it adorns and to which it is always subservient. But this alone does not explain the ideal of church song.

Objectivity, absence of the stress and stir of individual passion, a comprehensive expression of an exalted spiritualized state of feeling which befits the whole conception of worship—this is the motive which properly gives to church music its characteristic tone. The music is an element in the office of prayer, and in prayer, as in all liturgic acts and uses, the Church rejects a highly realistic portrayal. The Church in its arts subjects the literal to the ideal, the particular to the general, the definitive to the symbolic. In the cru-

¹⁰ Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church*, p. 94.

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cifix, for example, to quote Jakob, "Christ does not appear in a strained, contorted position, with painfully disfigured countenance, with wrenched arms, with naked writhing body, streaming with blood; . . . but His earnest loving face, encircled with the nimbus and crowned with thorns, is in repose, the arms are straight, the body decently clothed, and free from an athletic coarseness as well as from emaciation" . . . "The phrase 'emancipation of the individual from cramping fetters,' " says the same writer, "is not heard in the Church. Art history teaches that the Church does not oppose the individual conception, but simply restrains that false freedom which would make art the servant of personal caprice or of fashion." In the same manner ecclesiastical music, according to the medieval ideal, is the expression of the whole inner life of the Church directed toward the eternal, not the utterances of single passionate moments or of arbitrary individual determination.¹¹

The older music is the praying priest at the altar, expressing the deepest devotion in solemnly measured, rubrically directed actions, whereby the particular is merged in the universal, the individual and personal disappear.¹²

Incidentally, is it because of these same considerations that the organ, which of all instruments least obtrudes the personal character of the performer into the divine services, is regarded as the ideal instrument for ecclesiastical music?

¹¹ Dickinson, "Medieval Church Music," *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XXIV (April, 1899), 158-159.

¹² Ambros, *Geschichte der Musik*, III, 29.

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Gregorian Chant is essentially prayer sung—not merely music rendered. It is prayer first, music second. Here we see the difference from so-called “religious music,” which is so often confounded with liturgical music. By “religious music” here is meant music which has a certain atmosphere of devotion: such as the “prayer scences” in the operas, as the oratorios, as some “Masses” of the masters, like Bach and Beethoven. “Religious music,” be it ever so beautiful and artistic, is not necessarily liturgical music. Liturgical music is prayer; “religious music” is the expression of the personal emotional reaction in the soul of the individual. In church the composer and singer are there to pray, not to force their own personal mood on others; they are there to aid the faithful to follow devoutly and to realize deeply the sublime liturgical Action at the altar—they are not there to direct attention to the choir loft.

The priest at the altar is re-enacting the greatest Drama the world has ever known—and undoubtedly with deep emotion. Yet he does not make wild grimaces, does not dishevel his hair, does not utter groans and piercing laments. Such belong to the opera. But here all is idealized, and the individual—with his devotional intensity not at all suppressed, only restrained, restrained from individual caprice and arbitrariness,—is merged into the universal. The exact ceremonies and rites of the Mass serve as an aid and expression of religious feeling, at the same

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time preventing the most sacred of rites from degenerating into whimsical and arbitrary show. God is here; and the music—like the priest at the altar—must observe the gravity and reserve proper before the King of Kings, even though its suit and burden be of the most urgent nature. This is as it should be, even before a mere earthly monarch; how much more so, then, before the Real Presence of the unspeakable God Himself, before Whom the very angels tremble.

Before taking up the actual comparison of the two histories—that of the Chant and the Church—the writer takes the liberty of mentioning here a difficulty that frequently suggests itself in regard to the plain chant. Many a well-intentioned person complains of an absence of relish for Gregorian Chant. Such a one may, possibly, find it of benefit to ask himself the three following questions. “In the first place, am I really certain that I have ever heard Chant properly and artistically sung?”—You would not judge a Beethoven Sonata by its treatment at the hands of an inexperienced school boy. “Secondly, am I actually capable of judging according to the standards of ideal liturgical music?”—We have suffered much from mal-education, especially in the sphere of church music. In the world of music at large, not every listener appreciates Bach and Beethoven. “Finally, do I really love prayer?”—Gregorian Chant is prayer

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sung: it is prayer first, music second. Pray the words as you sing—and then judge.

We shall now proceed to consider the various periods of the history of the Chant in relation to the history of the Catholic Church at large. It will be well to recall the words of Dickinson, in writing of the early Christian music:

It [the music of the early Church] was an outgrowth of the conditions of the age, of the necessities of devotional expression, and of that peculiar genius of Catholicism that has made every external phenomenon symbolic of the spiritual life within. The Catholic Church develops, but, in essence, she does not change. *The history of her music is likewise typical of her whole history.*¹³ (Italics added.)

¹³ Dickinson, "Music in the Early Christian Church," *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, XXIII (1898), 110.

Chapter Two

FIRST PERIOD

The Beginnings of Chant until 600

TO the student of the history of Gregorian Chant the first great epoch is naturally the reign of St. Gregory the Great (590—604). His name it is that has been given to plain chant. For one, however, who is interested in the comparative study of the history of the Chant and the history of the Catholic Church, there is much of importance during those memorable first six centuries of the Christian era. Standing on those ancient hills of Rome and, with Gregory, the noble "Last of the Romans," looking back in a sweeping glance over those first six centuries, he sees how the infant Church leaves the hands of her Divine Founder beautiful in the radiance of her baptismal innocence; he sees, too, how, as she grows, she is bathed and strengthened in the crimson blood of her glorious martyrs; he notes her formation and organization, her development of doctrine, her difficulties—and yet all preparing her for the great expan-

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sion under him who was to be called "The Father of the Christendom that was to come," Gregory, the first of that name to mount the throne of the Supreme Pontiffs.

During the same period, in the world of sacred music, the student observes the forces at work which are to develop into that finished product of the liturgical song, Gregorian Chant. Meager as are his sources of knowing the exact nature and content of the music of the early Christian Church, he knows that the Church *did* sing; and the music that developed during this formative period furnished St. Gregory with the material for that masterpiece of liturgical musical expression, the Roman plain chant, which has been characterized as religious music in its baptismal innocence, as religious music in its highest and most intense form. Cast by Gregory, after this formative period, into a definite mold, the Chant would be prepared to set out upon its mission of diffusion, as it accompanied the monastic missionaries to new fields of conquest.

Little indeed is known of the exact nature of the music of the early Church. We cannot forget, however, that Jesus Christ Himself has consecrated sacred chant by using it at that most solemn of events, the Last Supper (Mt. 26:30). Then, too, St. Paul exhorts the early Christians to the singing of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles" (Col. 3:16).

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A late Roman archeologist tells us:

The inscriptions of the Roman Catacombs give little clue to the character of the chant used in the services of the Church during the time of the first persecutions. From this, however, we may not infer that there existed no definite form of liturgical chant in the Christian communities before the time of Constantine, who enlarged the opportunities of public worship. The letter of the Roman Governor Pliny to the emperor Trajan (c. A. D. 103), the authenticity of which is unquestioned, indicates clearly that the Christians of Bithynia and Pontus were accustomed to chant the psalter or the praises of Christ, Whom they revered as God, at their services in alternate choirs.¹⁴

"The Christians," the Governor writes, "are in the habit of meeting in the early hours of the morning in order to sing a hymn to Christ as unto God." The Province of Bithynia supplies us with yet another document scarcely less important than Pliny's letter. The inscription is an epitaph "to the memory of a young man, beloved and esteemed of all men . . . he trained all the faithful in the chant of the sacred psalms and the reading of the holy books. He now sleeps in a holy place, under the protection of Christ without spot." This inscription takes us approximately to the end of the second or the beginning of the

¹⁴ De Waal, "Liturgical Chant in Early Christian Rome," *American Ecclesiastical Review*, LXVI (1922), p. 465.

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third century, but it shows that the chanting of psalms was then an already traditional practice.¹⁵

If the epigraphy of the catacombs does not express this fact, it is due to the necessarily brief and concise form of lapidary records. The Christians who buried their beloved dead in the hidden subways of the great city were satisfied to express their faith, like their affectionate relationship, in briefest manner and in symbols understood by their brethren. . . . The sepulchral inscriptions of the fourth and succeeding centuries, while the *loculi* of the subterranean cemeteries were still being filled with the remains of the children of the martyrs, give here and there interesting glimpses of the practice of the early Christians in the matter of the liturgical chant.¹⁶

In view of the fact that there was at times a certain amount of reluctance in admitting music or singing as part of the Liturgy, it is of interest to examine somewhat closely the writings of the early Fathers. But, in the first place, we must not forget the Hebrew element in the music of the early Church. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that the faithful continued to attend the Jewish public devotions. For their private meetings they made use of the same psalms and melodies that they had sung in the temple or synagogue; for there was no need for them to procure new tunes. Hence, we naturally associate

¹⁵ Benedictine Monks of Buckfast Abbey, "Ecclesiastical Chant," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, XXVIII (1927), 723.

¹⁶ De Waal, *loc. cit.*, p. 466.

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the melodies used for the hymns, psalms, and canticles, of which St. Paul speaks to the Ephesians and Colossians, with those used in the temple at Jerusalem, or in the synagogues of the Diaspora.

Then, also, there was the Greek element among the converts of the early Christian Church. And the Greeks certainly brought with them a high regard for the sacredness of music. For they could not forget the example of their revered philosophers, who treated music with an almost superstitious reverence. Listen to Plato: "Music, I imagine, ought to end in the love of the Beautiful. . . . The movement of sounds, so as to reach the soul for the education of it in virtue (we know not how), we call music." And he requires of the instructors of youth that they carefully discern the good music from the evil, and hymn and sing that into the souls of the young, calling them forth to pursue the possession of virtue, by means of likenesses.¹⁷

But now to return to the references of the Fathers concerning singing in the early Church. The author of the "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," that sublime interpreter of sacred rites, teaches: "The sacred chants produce, in those who recite them in holy dispositions, an aptitude of either receiving or conferring the different sacraments of the Church."¹⁸

¹⁷ Plato, *Republica*, III.

¹⁸ Migne, P. G., III, 431.

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St. Chrysostom (d. 407) exclaims: "David formerly sang in psalms, also we sing today with him; he had a lyre with lifeless strings, the Church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone, indeed, but with a more accordant piety."¹⁹

St. Jerome tells us how the shepherds sang the psalms of David whilst tending their flocks in the fields of Bethlehem, and in the story of St. Paul, the first hermit, we read that St. Anthony buried the Saint, chanting hymns and psalms in accordance with the Christian tradition. It might be remarked here that St. Benedict (d. 547), the Patriarch of Western Monasticism, in his Rule, takes it for granted that his monks know the psalter by heart; if not, time is appointed to learn it.

The work of St. Ambrose (d. 397), who is known as the "Father of Ecclesiastical Music," is too well known to need elaboration here. The Milanese Chant is called after his name "Ambrosian." He it was who introduced the singing of hymns into the West from Syria as an important safeguard against the hymns of the heretics. He is the great forerunner of St. Gregory the Great.

Passages from the Fathers and early Christian writers on sacred music might be multiplied. We

¹⁹ Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church*, p. 55.

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must not, however, leave the sayings of the Fathers without mentioning one further fact: they are insistent on jealously guarding the purity and unworldliness of the music destined for Christian worship. St. Jerome (d. 420) is the author of an exhortation that might well be written in letters of gold in every church today:

Let the servant of God sing in such a manner that the words of the text rather than the voice of the singer cause delight, and that Saul's evil spirit may depart from those who are under its dominion, and may not enter into those who make a theater out of the house of the Lord.²⁰

Clement of Alexandria (d. about 215), writing at a still earlier period, warns against unchaste and artificial tone sequences, as also undiatonic melodies and frivolous songs.²¹

Gerbert tells us that already in the fourth century the ecclesiastical music became more artificial than it had been in the infant Church.²²

Instrumental music was strenuously opposed in the churches. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the fact that Christians use only one instrument—the word (voice). "A Christian maiden," says St. Jerome, "ought not even to know what a lyre or a flute is, or what it is used for."²³ The association of instruments

²⁰ Opera Omnia, Migne Edit., VII, 652.

²¹ Migne, P. G., VIII, 443.

²² *De Cantu et Musica Sacra*, Praef. Tom. I, p. 240.

²³ Opera Omnia, Migne Edit., I, 686.

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with superstitious pagan rites, and especially with the corrupting scenes habitually represented in the degenerate theater and circus, explain in large part such a prohibition.

But we must leave St. Augustine (d. 430), that prince of the patristic writers, to conclude for us the opinions of the Fathers as to ecclesiastical music. The conflict in his soul is so naively told, and his final conclusion of such import to the cause of Church music that the writer trusts the quite lengthy passage is justified here. St. Augustine admits openly the delight he took in the kind of chant which was used at Milan about the time of his conversion: "How did I weep at Thy hymns and canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of Thy sweet attuned Church! The voices flowed into mine ears, and Thy truth distilled into my heart, whence the affections of my devotion overflowed, and tears ran down and happy was I therein."²⁴ There can be no question that Augustine was deeply stirred by the sense of the words so sweetly sung, though the melody added to the persuasiveness of these words. But fifteen years later, when he lays bare his heart before the whole world, he admits that at times the melody itself holds his spirit, and he feels a certain uneasiness by reason of it. He almost betrays a desire to put back the clock,

²⁴ Migne, P. L. XXXIII, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, IX, 6.

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by returning to the very plain and almost monotonous chant which was used at Alexandria under the great Athanasius. He regretfully admits that the melody, of which the word of God is the life and soul, at times captivates his emotions, especially when sung by a sweet and well-trained voice. However, his mind dwells more on the sacred text than on the melody which causes the word of God to sink so sweetly into the ear, and from the ear into the heart. Augustine declares that

our minds are more holily and fervently raised unto a flame of devotion by the holy words when thus sung, than when not; for the several affections of our spirit, however great be their variety, have their own proper expression in the notes of music; by some hidden sympathy with the melody they are stirred up by music and singing.²⁵

The holy Doctor goes so far as to style this gratification of the emotional part of our being "a contentment of the flesh." In his anxiety to avoid such sensual gratification, both in himself and in others, he is in danger of falling into another extreme: At other times, shunning over-anxiously this very deception, I err by too great strictness; and sometimes to such a degree as to wish the whole melody of sweet music which is used to David's Psalter banished from my ears, and the Church's too; and that mode seems to me safer, which I remember to have been told me of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, who made the reader

²⁵ *Ibid.*, X, 33.

FIRST PERIOD—UNTIL 600

of the psalm utter it with so slight an inflection of the voice that it was nearer speaking than singing.

But this extreme and puritanical mood would not last long, for he goes on to say:

When I remember the tears I shed at the psalmody of Thy Church, in the beginning of my recovered faith; and how at this time I am moved, not with the singing, but with the things sung, when they are sung with a clear voice and most suitable modulation, I acknowledge the great use of this institution.²⁶

He finally grants that the weaker members, at least, of the Church are greatly helped to devotion by the fuller melodies used in the West rather than by the severe monotone of the East; hence, though not committing himself irrevocably, he approves the custom of singing in church.²⁷

Although the name of St. Thomas Aquinas does not belong to this period, the doubts of St. Augustine recall the views of the Angelic Doctor on singing in church. Consequently this may be the best place to mention his teaching. St. Thomas says that it is useful to sing in church, because when we sing we linger over the text, which, consequently, has a chance of sinking in more deeply than when we lightly glide over it in all too glib recitation:

If the singer chant for the sake of devotion, he pays more attention to what he says, because he lingers

²⁶ Ibid., X, 33.

²⁷ Benedictine Monks of Buckfast Abbey, *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, XXVII, 615.

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more thereon. . . . The same applies to the hearers, for, even if some of them understand not *what* is sung, yet they understand *why* it is sung, namely for God's glory; and this is enough to arouse their devotion.²⁸

Here the great theologian supplies an answer to the difficulties experienced by those who are ignorant of Latin. St. Augustine had made the same remark, although in his day the faithful knew and spoke Latin. "The faithful sing, and, if they understand but little, they yet believe that something good is the subject of their song."²⁹

Thus, during these first six centuries the Chant had been developing and securing for itself a secure place in the Liturgy of the Church. "Having been brought into touch with two civilizations and two forms of art—the Hebrew and the Greco-Roman—with exquisite tact she (the Church) borrowed from each what best suited her ends."³⁰ Or, as it has been popularly expressed, the music of Holy Mother has originated in Hebrew sources, has passed through Greek channels, and was finally cast in the Roman mold.³¹ The Chant of the Church was now ready for the master hand of St. Gregory.

It was, therefore, in the first six centuries, when the Church was organizing and drilling her forces for her victorious conflicts, that the final direction of her music,

²⁸ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, xci, ad 5.

²⁹ Migne P. L., XXXV, *Tractatus in Joannem*, XXII.

³⁰ Benedictines of Stanbrook, *Gregorian Music*, p. 4.

³¹ Huegle, *Catechism of Gregorian Chant*, p. 56.

FIRST PERIOD—UNTIL 600

as of all her art, was consciously taken. In rejecting the support of instruments and developing for the first time an exclusively vocal art, and in breaking loose from the restrictions of antique meter which in Greek and Greco-Roman music had forced melody to keep step with strict prosodic measure, Christian music parted company with pagan art, threw the burden of expression not, like Greek music, upon rhythm, but upon melody, and found in this absolute vocal melody a new art principle of which all the worship music of modern Christendom is the natural fruit. More vital still than these special forms and principles, comprehending and necessitating them, was the true ideal of music, proclaimed once for all by the Fathers of the Liturgy. This ideal is found in the distinction of the church style from the secular style, the expression of the universal mood of prayer, rather than the expression of individual, fluctuating, passionate emotion with which secular music deals—that rapt, pervasive, exalted tone which makes no attempt at detailed painting of events or superficial mental states, but seems rather to symbolize the fundamental sentiments of humility, awe, hope, and love which mingle all particular experiences in the common offering that surges upward from the heart of the Church to its Lord and Master This grand conception was early injected into the mind of the Church, and has been the parent of all that has been most noble and edifying in the creations of ecclesiastical music.³²

³² Dickinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

Chapter Three

SECOND PERIOD

600—1300

CHURCH music had sufficiently developed during the first six centuries of the Church to be ready for a definite and lasting mold. This it was to receive from a pope who still belonged to the old classical world that was fast passing away, from St. Gregory the Great. In its finished form the Chant would now set out on its era of diffusion and perfection. But before following the Chant on its conquest, we must first take a hurried view of the condition of the Church during this period.

The Church had been, for six hundred years, preparing her forces for new and greater conquests; and now her intrepid missionaries would set out with renewed zeal to carry to many and distant lands the gospel of civilization and salvation. First, we have St. Gregory sending to England St. Augustine, the monk who was to change "the Angles into angels," and

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thus become the Apostle of that land. Other monks of St. Benedict were active elsewhere. The great St. Boniface (d. 755) was effecting the conversion of Germany; St. Willibrord (d. 738), that of Holland. The blessings of the true faith were being brought to the Saxons; then later to the lands of Denmark and Sweden, to Moravia, Bohemia, Russia, Poland, and Hungary. Determined to show their gratitude to the Church that had brought them the treasures of civilization and of the true Faith, the newly converted barbarians knew of only two ways to do so: to deal vigorous blows to the enemies of the Church, and to make large donations to the Church and her poor. Yet this very generosity became a danger. As a result of their generosity, the rulers of the new Christian nations began to feel a right over the Church, the spiritual and temporal were confounded, no longer was there rendered to God what belonged to God, and the evils of lay interference became manifest; and yet the Church finally emerged from out of all this more powerful than ever before, and we have the glorious Ages of Faith, culminating in the "Thirteenth, the Greatest of Centuries." Having torn herself away from the "embrace of feudalism, which desired to make of her a religion of camp chapels and connect her with its fleeting destinies," the Church now "presided at the birth of communes and universities, she covered with her prestige Gothic art and scholasticism, she saw saints ascend the thrones of France and of

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Castile. And during two centuries, the twelfth and thirteenth, she became the supreme authority of Western Europe, the oracle of the Christian world.”⁸³

And what of the history of the Gregorian Chant? The Chant was experiencing, in large part, the fortunes of her whom it was serving so well. Despite difficulties it was, like the Church, reaching the zenith of its perfection and glory until it became the musical oracle of the Christian world.

The Chant was borne by the missionaries to the newly converted lands, thus extending its domain until it permeated every phase of musical activity and reigned supreme, not only in the realm of sacred music, but, in fact, of all music. Difficulties developed, it is true. As familiarity with the Church had led to interference, so in the Chant world familiarity with the chants now led to a desire for novelty, which resulted in interference with the traditional rendering of the sacred melodies. In the government of the Church at large, much of the havoc of this time was due to the confounding of the spiritual with the temporal; in the world of music, the havoc to the Chant would be due largely to the fact that the new *musica mensurabilis*—which was, of course, a perfectly legitimate development—was being confounded with *musica plana*; and the theorists were endeavoring to

⁸³ Kurth-Day, *The Church at the Turning Points of History*, p. 85.

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treat both on the same basis, to the detriment of the latter. However, this decadence belongs rather to the subsequent period. The confusion of the spiritual with the temporal led to the neglect of the spiritual, though there was no great upheaval as yet; but the way was being prepared for that. The confusion as to the new music and the Chant led to the neglect of the old, though there was no serious harm to the Chant as yet; but the seeds of decay were being slowly sown. In fact, after the year 950 the compositions that were being produced were in part inferior to the earlier ones as regards simplicity, naturalness, and warmth of feeling; nevertheless, the Gregorian Chant continued to hold its sway as the universal musical language of the one universal Church. Furthermore, it was the monastic hearths that preserved and fed the sacred fire of Christian fervor; likewise it was the monastic homes of the sons of Benedict that preserved and fostered the sacred Chant, for without them the Chant would have been lost to the succeeding generations. And if St. Benedict, through his Order, can be said to have saved Christianity, he can also be said to have preserved the Chant; just as his sons of a later day, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were to be the principal agents in the restoration of that exquisite traditional plain song.

For the writer on the Chant it is not enough to review the interesting parallelism between the his-

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tory of the Catholic Church and the history of the Chant during this period: St. Gregory, the most important name connected with the Church's official music, must have his meed; also we must treat somewhat more at length the spread of the Roman Chant.

If, as one historian says, Gregory deserves far better than either Brutus or Boethius the title of Last of the Romans,³⁴ certainly not the least of his services rendered to the Church and art was his work on the Chant which was later to bear his name. As the first pope drawn from that Order which has always cherished the *Opus Dei*—the Divine Office—the Liturgy—as the most sacred charge consigned to her zealous care by her founder, Benedict of Nursia, Gregory would be expected to give largely of his solicitude to the Liturgy—and what is inseparable from the Liturgy—the Chant. As to the Liturgy, we know, among other things, that the Canon of the Mass is still the same as when it left his hands a masterpiece at the end of the sixth century.

In the Middle Ages the legend long prevailed that Gregory one night had a vision in which the Church appeared to him in the form of an angel, magnificently attired, upon whose mantle was written the whole art of music, with all the forms of its melodies and notes. The pope prayed God to give him the power of recollecting all that he saw; and after he awoke,

³⁴ Stebbing, *The Story of the Catholic Church*, p. 161.

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a dove appeared, who dictated to him the chants which are ascribed to him.³⁵

St. Gregory was, above all, the practical Roman; he had that broadness of vision that characterized the Roman lawgiver. His parents, as is known, belonged to the Roman nobility; he himself had been Prefect of Rome, when he renounced the honors and pleasures of his station to become a lowly monk. His activity in regard to the Chant—and this in particular concerns us here—may be summed up in the words of an early writer: "Multa subtrahens, pauca convertens, nonnulla vero superadiciens"—removing much, altering little, and adding some. This is to say, as far as we can judge, St. Gregory composed few of the melodies, if any; but he pruned and fashioned existing material, and together with his school of musicians characterized by "a keen perception for strict form, for proportion in the parts, and for delicacy, rich variety, and tenderness of melody," brought forth those melodies that for many centuries have been, and still are, the admiration of the greatest musicians.³⁶

According to an ancient writer, St. Odo, the second Abbot of the renowned Abbey of Cluny, who died in 942, the real merit of St. Gregory's labors lay in the fact that he suited the melody to the text in a

³⁵ Montalembert, *The Monks of the West*, I, 391.

³⁶ Johner, *A New School of Gregorian Chant*, p. 181.

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really wonderful manner. The holy Abbot Odo is delighted how, for example, Gregory, by the melodies, summons us in the Introits of the Mass to the celebration of the Divine Mysteries as with the trumpet call of a herald; how the Alleluia is filled with sweet joy; how in the nocturnal Responses he seems to admonish us to throw off the fetters of drowsiness and to watch; and the like. The original Latin follows:

Ex quo probatur, quod S. Papa Gregorius plus omnibus per divinam gratiam hujus artis industriam sit adeptus. Nam si perpendas, valde mirabile est, quod in nocturnis responsoriis somnolentorum more graviter et dissolute ad vigilandum nos exhortare videtur; in antiphonis vero plane et suaviter sonet; in introitis (leg. introitibus) vero quasi voce praeconia ad divinum clamet officium; in Alleluia suaviter gaudet; in tractu vero et gradalibus plane et protense humiliataque voce incedere videtur. In offerendis vero et earum versibus, maximeque in Communionibus, quantum in hac arte valuerit, patefecit.³⁷

Enriched with this melodic treasury, the Choral now set out into the world. Gradually it penetrated throughout Italy (with the sole exception of Milan, where the Ambrosian Chant held sway), then Gaul, Spain (where, however, it found opposition on the part of Mozarabic Chant), but especially England (which received the Chant simultaneously with the true faith), and Germany.³⁸ Especially was Charle-

³⁷ Migne, P. L. CXXXIII, 785.

³⁸ Johner, *Der Gregorianische Choral*, p. 24.

SECOND PERIOD (600 to 1300)

magne, King of the Franks, its great patron; he at once commanded the introduction of the Roman Chant books into his entire kingdom.

The missionaries sent from Rome took the Chant with them. Augustine made his first entry into Canterbury amid the melodies of the Roman Chant—the Chant that was to be loved and sung in that land for well-nigh a thousand years, until the Reformation, by brute force, silenced those cherished melodies. "Every monastery founded in the savage forests of Germany, Gaul, or Britain became at once a singing school, and day and night the holy strains went up in unison with the melodies of the far distant sacred city,"—Rome.³⁹

Before concluding this period, it will be of interest to the student of Gregorian Chant to read what has been called the Papal Motu Proprio of the ninth century. It is given here almost in its entirety, for it is significant in that it shows the uniform practice of the Church at that time; also in this that the ninth century, the date of the letter, is the date of our oldest manuscripts for the Chant, upon which is based our present Vatican edition. The Letter is from Pope St. Leo IV to a certain Honoratus, Abbot of a monastery in the neighborhood of Rome.

A quite incredible story has reached our ears. . . . It is averred that you have such an aversion for the

³⁹ Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church*, p. 117.

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sweet Chant of St. Gregory, and the system of singing and reading which he drew up and bequeathed to the Church, that you are at variance in this matter, not only with this See, which is so near you, but also with almost every church in the West, and in fact with all those who use the Latin tongue to pay to the King of heaven their tribute of praise and song. All these churches have received with such eagerness and such devoted affection the aforesaid system [traditio] of Gregory that, although we have communicated the whole to them, they are so delighted that they leave us no peace with their inquiries about it, thinking that there must be more of the same remaining still with us. It was indeed the holy Pope Gregory, that great servant of God... who with great labor and much musical skill composed this Chant which we still sing in the church, and even elsewhere. It was his desire to rouse and touch the hearts of men, so that by the sound of these highly elaborated strains [artificiosae modulationis sonitu] he might draw to church not only ecclesiastics, but also those who were uneducated and hard to move.

I beg of you not to allow yourself to remain in opposition to the Church, the supreme head of religion, or to the other churches mentioned, if you desire to live in entire peace and harmony with the universal Church of God. For if, which we cannot believe, you have such an aversion for our teaching and the system of our holy Pontiff that you will not conform in every point to our rite, whether in the chanting or in the lessons, know that we shall reject you from our communion, since it becomes you to follow the wholesome practice which the Roman Church, the Mother of all and your Mistress, does not disdain, but has eagerly embraced and steadfastly adheres to. Wherefore we command you under threat of excommunication, that

SECOND PERIOD (600 to 1300)

in chanting and reading in church you follow no other system than that which Pope St. Gregory bequeathed to us, and which we hold fast.⁴⁰

Thus we see that during this period, the Chant spread throughout the Christian world until it became the universal musical language of the Church of God. This was the zenith of its glory—which it has never known since. In some of the monasteries it reached its height in the so-called “*laus perennis*,” in which bodies of monks, relieving each other at stated watches, maintained an unbroken office of song by night and day. To quote Dom Ambrose Kienle:

Plain song lived by the Liturgy and in the Liturgy. Day by day its melodies were sounding from midnight till after sunset in numberless cathedrals and abbeys. The Divine Office was sung throughout, and that by a numerous choir, for most of the abbeys contained over a hundred monks; and the singers were men who looked upon the Divine Office as a sacred work, the highest of vocations, and the supreme object of their lives. The monasteries were thus the privileged land, the native soil, as it were, of plain chant. Its daily performance, combined with profound knowledge and deep appreciation of the liturgical Chant, gave the monks a greater opportunity of entering more fully into the spirit of Gregorian Chant than is possible for us to-day.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Benedictine Monks of Buckfast Abbey, “Ecclesiastical Chant,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, XXVII, 738.

⁴¹ Gatard, *Plainchant*, p. 42.

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As Dom Gatard adds,
What is true of the monasteries is also true of the cathedrals and collegiate churches, where the Chant was a living tongue, where no pains were spared to obtain cantors who could carry it out with the utmost possible degree of perfection.⁴²

Thus the entire Christendom prayed and sacrificed and sung as one immense, united family. And the common musical idiom uniting all their voices into one mighty and irresistible chorus of divine praises was the Chant of Gregory the Great.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Chapter Four

THIRD PERIOD

1300—1517

IT is not a pleasant task to turn from the glory of the thirteenth century, when religion entered into the whole life of the age. The First Jubilee had just been celebrated in Rome in 1300 amid magnificent pomp. In this year of boundless enthusiasm, the power of the Church seemed at its height, and the Pope seemed to be almost more than a mere man. And yet the Supreme Pontiff soon had reason to realize the significance of the traditional ceremony on the day of his coronation when tow is burnt at the foot of the Pontifical throne and the Pope is addressed in the memorable words: "Holy Father, thus passeth the glory of this world."

Only two years after the triumph of the Great Jubilee, the Pope (Boniface VIII) was seized in his own palace by the mercenaries of the "Most Christian King" (Philip the Fair, King of France), and the attempt was made to crush the Roman See. This

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was a forcible beginning of this era of decadence. The framework of medieval Christendom was showing unmistakable signs of decay. Three great forces were at work: the so-called Humanism, emphasizing a freer and more general culture; Nationalism, a keener sense of a separate national existence, as opposed to the common bond of union among nations of the preceding centuries; and a new Spirit of Discovery, striving after new conquests of knowledge.⁴³ The Renaissance was soon to make itself manifest, though what really took place was not so much a revival of learning as a flowering out of the learning of preceding centuries. And, of course, there was much of good and bad in the Renaissance.

Thus as we gaze over this period, we see the marked decline of the Middle Ages; the weakening of the Papal power; the "captivity" of the Popes at Avignon, in France; the great Schism of the West; and, finally, the incipient ravages of the pagan Renaissance, and the need of reform in the Church's Head and members. The seeds of decay were indeed being sown, and deeply so, thus paving the way for the convulsion of the world of religion—and the political world, as well—in the so-called Reformation of the sixteenth century.

In the domain of ecclesiastical music, again the

⁴³ Stebbing, *The Story of the Catholic Church*, p. 377 ff.

THIRD PERIOD (1300 to 1517)

Chant is suffering quite the same fate. The novelties of diaphony, or organum, and of discant caused no small amount of confusion as to the right mode of treatment of the non-metrical music, the traditional Chant; and the Chant suffered. In fact, the Chant was preparing for its downfall, even though the melodies themselves were not altered until the end of the sixteenth century. The serious break with the past, in music as in religion, was to be reserved for the sixteenth century.

The three great forces at work in the Church were not without their effects also in the Chant world, though the sweeping change due to the Renaissance affected the other arts of poetry, painting, and sculpture many years earlier than it did music. Yet we already begin to notice how the arbitrary standards of Humanism will pronounce the austere yet powerful simplicity of plain song barbaric; Nationalism will develop its types of national music to the detriment of the universal music of the Chant; and the Spirit of Discovery will experiment with the Gregorian melodies as a *cantus firmus*, and the result will be a fatal effect on the rhythm of the Chant. These developments are not mentioned as condemnable in themselves. They are the product of their age. But just as in the sphere of religious fervor they were dangerous manifestations unless properly directed, so too in regard to Gregorian Chant—the medium of the

GREGORIAN CHANT—A BAROMETER

expression of that religious fervor—they would prove fatal unless properly guided.

As Dom Gatard, O.S.B., mentions, the decay in the plain song was, at this time, manifesting itself in regard to its execution; no one had yet thought of altering the melodies themselves.⁴⁴

From the fourteenth century forward the tradition begins to go down. The growing interest taken in polyphony caused the plain chant to be neglected. The books were written carelessly; the forms of the neums, so important to the rhythm, began to be disregarded, and shortenings of melismata became general. No radical changes, however, are found until we come to the end of the sixteenth century.⁴⁵

This period may be fittingly closed by quoting a Decree from the old Canon Law of the Church, from that part called the *Extravagantes Communes*. The Decree was given by Pope John XXII, in the year 1322, while he was at Avignon. It seems that some of the members of the clergy had been caught in the fashion of the musical novelties of the times and had begun to modernize the old sacred melodies by introducing unequal and strange time values, and other innovations. Of course, as a consequence the smooth execution and the well-tempered rise and fall of the sequences of notes were necessarily lost sight of. Pope John suspends from office for eight days such

⁴⁴ Gatard, *Plainchant*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ Beverunge, "Plain Chant," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, 146.

THIRD PERIOD (1300 to 1517)

offenders against the Chant.* The canon is interesting for several reasons. It shows the changes that were developing at that period in regard to the Chant. It shows, also, the importance attached at that time by the Church to her official Chant since she even suspends offenders from office. (We recall, too, the letter of Leo IV quoted in chapter III, which even threatens a non-conformist of the Chant with excommunication.) Finally, it is of importance for the fact that Pope John XXII has been quoted as condemning the use of discant in the Liturgy (e.g., Weimann, History of Church Music, p. 81). The Decree, however, reads at the end: "*non intendimus prohibere,*" i.e., the Pope concludes the Decree by stating he does not intend to forbid that at times, especially on feast days, other parts be added to the simple ecclesiastical chant (provided the chant remain intact), as, for instance, an octave, a quint, a quart, and such like.

** This document is given in the Latin original and English translation on page 72.*

Chapter Five

FOURTH PERIOD

1517—1850

WITH the so-called Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church received the most crushing blow she has ever sustained in the long history of her existence. The Chant, whose history had been largely that of the Church, was now again to share the same fate. The Church shook to her very foundations; but she did not fall: she was destined to live on. The Chant, too, seemed hopelessly crushed; but it did not suffer entire extinction: it too was destined to live.

When in 1517 Martin Luther affixed his list of theses to the church door in Wittenberg, he inaugurated a movement that was to tear whole nations from the bosom of that Mother who had cherished them as her children for centuries. Reform was needed; that cannot be doubted. But reform should come from within; reform from without is revolution. And this was revolution. Then followed the long years

FOURTH PERIOD (1517 to 1850)

of revolt throughout Europe. It is a depressing era of religious upheaval and apathy. As we glance over this period we see the wars, especially the religious wars; we note, too, the rationalistic deism, which originated in England, penetrated thence into France, and soon made its way into Germany; corrupt philosophic systems came and went; Febronianism and Josephinism boldly lifted up their heads and sapped the very vitals of the nations; Gallicanism and Jansenism wrought their ravages; Atheism, too, began its withering influence.—The Catholic student recalls in passing that such immortal musical geniuses as Mozart, Chopin, Liszt—sons of the Catholic Church—did not escape being entangled, at least for a time, in the insidious meshes of the then fashionable false enlightenment.—And despite the worthy endeavors put forth during this period in the religious world to reawaken Christian fervor, no great results seemed forthcoming.

Such, in brief, was the background of the history of Gregorian Chant from 1517 to 1850, and we are not surprised that the Chant suffers the same lot as its Mistress, the Church, to whose undivided service it had always devoted itself so intimately and unselfishly.

In the preceding period we had noticed at work a keener sense of Nationalism. Now society was to go still further. From the idea of a universal bond

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of interest, it had gone to a more pronounced sense of national existence; now it developed a spirit of exalted Individualism. This Individualism was at work throughout the entire machinery of society—in religion, in politics, in art, as in music. It is the exaltation of the *Ego* at the expense of the *Nos*. A questioning of authority—religious as well as civil—is a natural sequence. Among the reformers this instinct takes tangible form in the doctrine of the right of the Private Interpretation of Scripture. God's revelation was to be summoned before the tribunal of individual private judgment, and there judged.

This instinct of Individualism underlying the philosophy of the Reformation was no less marked in the world of music than elsewhere. To quote from a secular historian, Grove:

During the last decades of the sixteenth century a sweeping change came over music in Italy. . . . The spirit of the Renaissance, which had affected the other arts of poetry, painting, and sculpture many years earlier, gradually asserted an influence over music. . . . Each *individual* now desired to think and speak for himself, and was no longer content to be merged in the mass. Thus ecclesiastical music was gradually driven from the field by secular music; and choral or collective song by pure solo-song, which was the medium best fitted for the expression of the thoughts, emotions, and actions of *individuals*.⁴⁷ (Italics added.)

⁴⁷ Grove, *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Art., "Song," pp. 555-6.

FIFTH PERIOD (1850 TILL NOW)

Thus solo-singing becomes the normal expression of this individualistic tendency. It is interesting to note that the first recorded instance of pure solo-singing is supposed to have occurred in 1539—the very first years of the Reformation.⁴⁸

This spirit is entirely alien to that of the Gregorian Chant. The Liturgy of the Catholic Church is essentially a family worship, a common worship. The liturgical ideal—in music as elsewhere—tends towards a universal expression, an objective and impersonal expression, free from the stress and stir of individual passion. It is the blending of the individual into the universal: the individual is not lost, he is blended—I might say sublimated—into that wonderful, mystic but real, living Body of all the faithful whose Head is Christ. The Chant is the language of the Communion of Saints. Holy Mother Church will have her children pray, sacrifice, sing as one colossal united family, under the one common Father of all—“*Our* Father, Who art in Heaven”—not “*My* Father.”

Solo-singing, as manifested in modern music, with its strictly individual, emotional, earthly character, is the very antithesis of the liturgic ideal pervading the Chant. It is the product of the age of the Reformation. Even earlier part-singing has been characterized as “a blind revolt of the European mind

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

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against bondage to an antique and restrictive form of expression."⁴⁹

True enough, Dom Johner, O.S.B., takes care to deny the statement that solo-singing had not been used in the Church's ancient Choral.⁵⁰ We are well aware that the elaborate melismatic passages of the Gradual Responsory and the Alleluia Versicle are solo-chants. But the principle which produced the solo-chants as part of the Mass Chants in the sixth century is a far cry from that which called forth the solo-songs of the sixteenth century. In the ecclesiastical chants, the soloist is still merely the representative of the people—just as the priest, the officiating minister; he is not singing in the capacity of an isolated, detached individual.

It is at this time, too, (about 1600) that the opera makes its appearance. The fascination for the new operatic style, for the Italian aria, and instrumental art did much to wean the faithful away from the former love for the more austere and simple spiritual chants. Soon the opera began to invade the sacred precincts of the Church; and we begin the long line of operatic Masses that have so sadly marred the history of Catholic ecclesiastical music.

It is not, of course, the writer's intention to condemn these new manifestations of musical art, as the

⁴⁹ Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church*, p. 235.

⁵⁰ Johner, *Der Gregorianische Choral*, p. 9.

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solo-songs and the opera. They were genuine achievements, and destined to enrich the world's art beyond calculation. They were, however, manifestations of an unhealthy impulse in the world of ecclesiastical music, and could lead to serious aberrations in Church music; as they did. The opera did not, and does not, belong in the sanctuary of the Catholic Church.

Yet even here the Catholic Church has shown her wonderful power of adaptability to the conditions of the times and places in which she has lived. She has tolerated the new music that developed, provided of course that the basic principles of ecclesiastical art be not entirely lost sight of; and even today she gives modern music a place in her temples beside her official Chant and her polyphonic masterpieces.

Together with these forces at work in music, the influence of the pagan Renaissance worked probably the greatest havoc with the traditional Chant. Men who called the architecture of some of the most glorious monuments in the world "Gothic" in contempt; who looked with disdain upon the "dog Latin" of the Fathers of the Church; who went to the extreme of even refusing to read the Latin Bible itself because it was not Ciceronian—men such as these assuredly did not possess the refined insight to understand the spiritual beauty of the simple but powerful sacred Chants. Moreover, the rhythm was no longer understood. Accordingly these masses of notes without

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life, proportion, or plan must have seemed most tiresome. The elaborate passages were doomed to mutilation. The groups of notes on unaccented syllables were pronounced barbaric. And the scissors of the arbitrary esthetic standards of the Humanists began their destructive work. The Chant books now presented a mutilated, inartistic copy of what had been the grandest church music the world ever possessed. Can we wonder, then, that the Chant now rushed to its final decadence?

Thus the cooling of religious fervor attendant upon the disorders of the Reformation, the fascination for the new operatic style, and the sorry condition of the truncated Chant melodies prepared to consign the Gregorian Chant, once the glory of the early Christians and the Ages of Faith, to oblivion. The Chant was driven out of the churches to make way for the new types of modern church music.

Dickinson, writes of modern church music:

Modern church music, by virtue of its variety, splendor, and dramatic pathos, seems to be tinged with the hues of earthliness which belie the strictest conception of ecclesiastical art. It partakes of the doubt and turmoil of a sceptical and rebellious age, it is the music of impassioned longing in which are mingled the echoes of worldly allurements, it is not the chastened tone of pious assurance and self-abnegation. The choral song developed in the ages of faith is pervaded by the accents of that calm ecstasy of trust and celestial anticipation which give the mediaeval art that exquisite charm

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of naïveté and sincerity never again to be realized through the same medium because it is the unconscious expression of an unquestioning simplicity of conviction which seems to have passed away forever from the higher manifestations of the human creative intellect.⁵¹

The new music which now invaded the churches deprived the people of the last vestige of active participation in the sacred rites of the Church, a participation that had been their heritage for centuries—in fact, from the very rise of the Church's Liturgy. The congregation was reduced to the rank of mere on-lookers—not unlike their role in the theater. With the introduction of female voices into the choir, which now necessitated the rear choir loft (women were not permitted to sing in the sanctuary), the atmosphere of the theater in the church became still more marked; and only too often was the attention of the faithful drawn rather to the rear gallery instead of to the sacred mysteries being celebrated in the sanctuary.

This hunger of the laity for a more active participation in the divine service was understood by the propagators of the new religions and made use of.

The German hymn was a powerful instrument in the spread of the new doctrine, for it made it possible for the people to take part in the divine service in the vernacular: to form, as it were, an integral part therein. This psychological moment must be duly appreciated, if

⁵¹ Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

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we are to understand the saying of the Protestants that Luther's songs won over whole towns to Protestantism.⁵²

Attempts to save religious fervor as well as to save the Chant were not lacking in the Church; yet without much avail. The Council of Trent, which opened in 1545, was expected to stem the incursions of the Reformers. At this memorable Council there was manifested among the prelates a desire to see banished permanently from the Church all but Gregorian music, so little thought was there of any impending change or of dissatisfaction in official circles with the traditional Chant. The popular story has it that it was Palestrina who saved non-Gregorian music from being placed under the ban by the Fathers of the Council. At any rate, the Council was content to recommend to the bishops to banish from their dioceses all music wherein lascivious or impure elements were mixed, and left to them the responsibility of deciding the practical questions concerned with the singing of the Divine Office.

The necessity, however, of an improvement in the Chant books was evident. The new official edition of the Breviary and Missal only served to accentuate this necessity.

The reform of Missal and Breviary, initiated by the Council of Trent, gave rise to renewed attention to the liturgical Chant. But as the understanding of its peculiar language had disappeared, the results were disas-

⁵² Weinmann, *History of Church Music*, p. 66.

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trous. Palestrina was one of the men who tried their hands, but he did not carry his work through. Early in the seventeenth century, however, Raimondi, the head of the Medicean printing establishment, took up again the idea of publishing a new Gradual. He commissioned two musicians of name, Felice Anerio and Francesco Suriano, to revise the melodies. This they did in an incredibly short time, less than a year, and with a similarly incredible recklessness, and in 1614 and 1615 the Medicean Gradual appeared.⁵³

One writer observes: "In the Medicean edition the Choral bleeds at a thousand places."⁵⁴ Dom Gatard, O.S.B., tells us in regard to the official character of the Medicean Gradual:

Raimondi would have liked a Bull compelling the whole Church to use the new books, but all he was able to obtain was a brief commendation, in which the Pope was content to advise the Church in all lands to take them. Even then it seemed that this brief was found too laudatory, for it was not printed in the Preface to the first volume, which appeared in 1614, after Raimondi was dead: the publishers confined themselves to a reprint of the Privilege of 1608, which was not enough to make the edition official.⁵⁵

This book [Medicean Gradual] has considerable importance, because in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Congregation of Rites, believing it to contain the true Chant of St. Gregory, had it republished as the official Chant book of the Church, which position

⁵³ Bewerunge, "Plain Chant," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, 146.

⁵⁴ Mueller, *Archiv fuer Musikwissenschaft*, p. 127.

⁵⁵ Gatard, *Plainchant*, p. 51.

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it held from 1870 to 1904. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries various other attempts were made to reform the Gregorian Chant. They were well-intentioned, no doubt, but only emphasized the downward course things were taking. The practice of singing became worse and worse, and what had been the glory of centuries fell into general contempt.⁵⁶

These were dark days for church music. The need of reform was realized, not only by musicians within the Church, but by non-Catholic musicians as well, as we see especially from the writings of Mendelssohn and Wagner. That such musicians as Haydn, Mozart, Liszt, and Wagner esteemed the Gregorian Chant is known. As to the need of a reform, the words of Mendelssohn are of more than passing interest. "Were I a Catholic," he writes, "I would set to work at a Mass this very evening; and whatever it might turn out, it would, at all events, be the only Mass written with a constant remembrance of its sacred purpose. But for the present I do not mean to do this; perhaps at some future day, when I am older." He speaks, also, of sacred music as "subordinate to the sacred function, co-operating with the wax candles and the incense." And as we read more of his words, it seems a prophecy of the work of the Solesmes monks, the great restorers of the traditional Chant in the nineteenth century, who went back to the ancient manuscripts. Mendelssohn says, "The men are yet to

⁵⁶ *Bewerunge, loc. cit., p. 146.*

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come who will advance on the right road, and who will lead others onwards, or back to the ancient and right path; which ought, in fact, to be termed the onward path."⁵⁷

Richard Wagner, himself the genius of opera, attributes the decadence of Catholic music to the introduction into the churches of orchestral instruments and of operatic arias. He says further:

To the human voice, the immediate vehicle of the sacred word, belongs the first place in the churches, and not to instrumental additions or the trivial scraping found in most of the churches' pieces to-day. Catholic church music can regain its former purity only by a return to the purely vocal style. If an accompaniment is considered absolutely necessary, the genius of Christianity has provided the instrument worthy of such function, the organ.⁵⁸

As to the close of the period we have just been considering, Paul Bekker, the well-known German critic, says: "It [the nineteenth century] is an age without religion, even an irreligious age, and therefore an age of secular music. Church music exists but it is secular in character."⁵⁹ Later he has a passage which may be of interest to the Chant student:

Through the simplicity of his feeling Bruckner is the first to return to the expression of an impersonal, a uni-

⁵⁷ "H. S. B.," "Mendelssohn on Catholic Church Music," *The Cecilia*, XLV (1918), 40.

⁵⁸ Wagner, Richard, *Gesammelte Werke*, II, 337.

⁵⁹ Bekker, *The Story of Music*, p. 202.

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versal attitude. This it is which gives him his religious trend and gives his music its tranquility. [Note the Gregorian Chant's characteristic of an "impersonal, universal attitude," giving it its "tranquility" and religious character.] The religious longing was common to all romanticists; the more their intensely subjective attitude towards life and art estranged them from it, the more ardently they sought it. It appears in the early romanticists of literature who frequently embraced Catholicism. It appears in the romanticists of music as well, in Wagner, Bruckner, Brahms.⁶⁰

When the nineteenth century has reached half its course, the lover of true church music anxiously scans the dark horizon; and there gleams a ray of light that bids fair to bring a new and happier epoch in the history of sacred music. That will be the work of another chapter.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

Chapter Six

FIFTH PERIOD

1850—Present

IN the Catholic Church religious fervor may wane; but it never dies. All the forces of evil may unite to effect her ruin; but she has ever triumphed, because of that bountiful Holy Spirit Who has been given her by her Divine Founder, Jesus Christ. As our thoughts turn to the Chant of the Church, we recall the words of the French literary genius, J. K. Huysmans, in his remarkable novel, *En Route*. Durtal, the hero, has been listening to the chanting of the monks, as amid the darkness of the somber church they sing their Compline Office. Moved to the depths of his soul, with tears in his eyes, Durtal exclaims, "Ah, the true creator of plain music, the unknown author who cast into the brain of man the seed of plain chant, was the Holy Ghost!"

With the middle of the nineteenth century we note a marked reawakening of the religious spirit.

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The petulant child of the irreligious centuries had tired of wandering amid the labyrinths of Rationalism and Materialism and False Enlightenment: he yearned after repose—for rest to his unsatisfied heart. He had learned he must seek this from God. Hence, this period is characterized by earnest attempts to foster the reviving religious fervor, as well as by the attempts to further the revival of Gregorian liturgical song.

Pius IX, despite the troublous days of his long pontificate, took steps to better the condition of the Chant. The Sacred Congregation of Rites, believing the old Medicean Gradual to contain the true Chant of St. Gregory, had it republished as the official Chant book of the Church, and it appeared as the Mechlin Gradual edited by Pustet of Ratisbon, in 1871. In 1873 a Papal Brief granted a thirty years' monopoly of this edition to Pustet, which, however, according to Dom Gatard, was not made compulsory either by this Brief or by the Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1883.⁶¹ It cannot be denied that this thirty years' privilege was very unfortunate for the cause of the restoration of the Chant, for the Gradual was really "a sort of counterfeit skeleton but remotely akin to the Gregorian Chant as preserved by the Church up to that date."⁶² So long as

⁶¹ Gatard, *Plainchant*, p. 70.

⁶² Gatard, *Ibid.*

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this privilege lasted, the Holy See could not officially approve the Solesmes books, which above all contained the best version of the ancient melodies; but it was most unwilling to condemn them, in spite of all the efforts made with this object. Yet with all this, the Ratisbon edition may have served a real purpose.

Pius IX approved in 1870 the Society of St. Cecilia, which accomplished much good for the betterment of church music in Germany and elsewhere. Yet one cannot close one's eyes to the fact that the strenuous endeavors on the part of its zealous members to make the Ratisbon (Mechlin) Gradual supreme in the Chant world—all of course in good faith—served to retard the restoration of the ancient unabbreviated melodies of St. Gregory.

Leo XIII realized the sad plight of church music and strove earnestly to awaken interest in the cause of improvement, chiefly through the articles by the Jesuit Fathers in the *Civiltà Cattolica*. He frankly declared that, as far as he knew, there was only cockle in the field of church music. He warmly encouraged the work of the French Benedictines at Solesmes; but the final word of the Chant restoration was not to be the achievement of this venerable Pontiff. This was to be reserved to his sainted successor, Blessed Pius X.

"Instaurare omnia in Christo"—"To restore all things in Christ," the chosen motto of Pius X, gives

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the keynote to his activity. His it was to crown the revival both of religious fervor and true church music. His detection of the insidious errors of Modernism, and condemnation of the same, seemed to betoken a particular divine light. The return to the life-giving practices of the primitive Church by his decrees of early Communion for children, and of frequent, even daily, Communion for all, gave nourishment and a quickening to religious fervor in our age that had not had its equal for centuries.

But this remarkable Pope of the renewed fervor would not stop here. He would "restore all things in Christ;" and, accordingly, the official Chant of the Church, the Gregorian Chant, must be restored to its place of honor, and hence the text also must be restored according to the ancient manuscripts. He had been elected Supreme Pontiff on August 4, 1903, and one of his first cares was the liturgical Chant; for already on November 22, the feast of St. Caecilia, only three months after the beginning of his reign, he published the renowned *Motu Proprio* on Sacred Music, in which, although recommending the polyphonic masterpieces as well as approving proper modern church music, he gives the first place to Gregorian Chant, which alone of all music the Church has recognized as her one official Chant.

One of the first requisites, however, for a renewed

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appreciation of plain song is that we have the genuine artistic text of old. In this field of restoration many attempts had been made during the period we are considering. They were indeed praiseworthy. But quite evidently the isolated labors of one or the other scholar could not bring about the desired result. As M. Choïnard says:

The Religious Orders, who in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had so effectively helped to preserve and hand down to us unimpaired the monuments of Greek and Latin literature, were by their nature marked out to be the rebuilders of the great temple constructed by the Fathers of the Gregorian art. We find in them elements of success which we cannot expect in an isolated priest more or less involved in pastoral cares. Monks, on the other hand, can be told off in numbers by their superiors for this work of restoration: some living in the monastery studying the manuscripts which come to them from all quarters, others being sent to visit numerous libraries, able to pass whole weeks entirely occupied with the task entrusted to them. In this way work can be produced in accordance with a progressive scheme, subjected to the scrupulous oversight of a manifold control, and edited with perfect consistency.⁶³

Abbe Dabin points out yet another advantage: The Benedictine is not merely a worker with a fine equipment, he is by vocation, predestination, and business first and foremost a *singer*. . . . Now it is the same with the Chant as with virtue. If an ounce of practice is worth two pounds of theory, . . . one day in the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

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choir of a monastery will teach more, to him that hath ears to hear, than will the researches of the most learned students.⁶⁴

Accordingly, much of the glory of this work has been left to the Benedictine Monks of the Abbey of Solesmes, in France. The restoration of the Abbey of Solesmes in the nineteenth century reads like a romance; but we have not time to tell it here. Undoubtedly Providence was working out Its special plans. Dom Prosper Guéranger (1805-1875), the founder and first Abbot after its revival in 1833 (made an Abbey in 1837), had reintroduced the Roman Liturgy into France. By his labors in this field, he probably contributed more than any other to the solid religious revival of the nineteenth century. In his attempts to solemnize the Divine Office, according to the Benedictine ideal, he and his monks soon realized the entirely unsatisfactory conditions of the mutilated chants as had in the choral books in his day. This could not be the Chant that was the glory of the Middle Ages. A restoration was imperative; that was evident. He recalled the famous injunction of Charlemagne, when that monarch, in 787, noticed, while at Rome for the Easter solemnities, the differences that had developed between his singers in France and those of the Papal chapel. "Revertimini vos ad fontem Sancti Gregorii," he exclaimed to his singers—"Return to the source of St.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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Gregory." Accordingly, about 1860, Dom Gueranger deputed two of his monks, Dom Paul Jausions* and Dom Joseph Pothier, to make a thorough examination of the codices and to compile a Gradual for the monastery. After twelve years of close work the Gradual was in the main completed, but another eleven years elapsed before Dom Pothier, who on the death of Dom Jausions had become sole editor, published his *Liber Gradualis* in 1883. It was the first attempt to return absolutely to the version of the manuscripts, and, though capable of improvement in details, substantially solved the question. Dom André Mocquereau, Dom Pothier's scholarly and renowned successor, formed a regular school of critical research. A most valuable outcome of their studies is the *Paléographie Musicale*, giving photographic reproductions of the principal manuscripts of plain

* According to information given the writer, Dom Paul Jausions, O.S.B., was later sent to the United States to gather material for the life of his saintly uncle, Bishop Simon Bruté de Rémur, first bishop of Vincennes. However, he contracted typhoid fever; and his premature death at the age of 36, occurred in the Cathedral Rectory at Vincennes, September 7, 1870. His remains lie buried at Vincennes, Indiana. Entering the Order of St. Benedict, September 29, 1856, he was the first member of the Benedictine Congregation of France to follow serious studies of the Chant. (Cf. also Heckenlively, *Fundamentals of Gregorian Chant* (Desclée), p. 282.)

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chant, together with scientific dissertations on the subject, and *Le Nombre Musical Gregorien*, acclaimed as the greatest of all the works on Gregorian Chant. Dom Joseph Gajard, associated with Dom Mocquereau since the year 1911, has ably carried on this work of restoration at Solesmes Abbey.

Pius X heartily welcomed the labors of the Solesmes monks; and the Vatican edition, which was largely the fruit of their labors though printed at the Vatican itself, was made the official edition of the Chant of the Catholic Church, and its use binding upon all the faithful. The Gradual appeared in 1908, the Antiphony, in 1912, representing the fruits of almost incredible painstaking journeyings and research work on the part of the monks. (At times there were some two thousand variant readings of the old manuscripts.)

"Pius X has restored the Gregorian Chant," were the words of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1904. And as part of his program of "restoring all things in Christ," we cannot doubt that the extended use and perfected rendering of plain chant, so ardently desired by the Pontiff, will in its turn not only raise the level of religious music and enhance the dignity of Divine worship, but also intensify the spiritual life of the Christian community.

Twenty-five years after the celebrated *Motu Proprio* of 1903, Pope Pius XI integrally confirmed the pre-

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scriptions of Pius X by issuing, December 20, 1928, his solemn Apostolic Constitution, *Divini Cultus Sanctitatem*, on promoting with daily increasing fervor the Liturgy, Gregorian Chant, and Sacred Music.

Finally, because of the timeliness of the most recent pronouncement of the Church in this matter of Church Music, it is perhaps only proper that we quote here more at length the words of Pope Pius XII. In his great and comprehensive document, *Mediator Dei*, issued November 20, 1947, Pius XII sums up also the prescriptions of his illustrious predecessors. "As regards music, let the clear and guiding norms of the Apostolic See be scrupulously observed. Gregorian Chant, which the Roman Church considers her own as handed down from antiquity and kept under her close tutelage, is proposed to the faithful as belonging to them also. In certain parts of the Liturgy the Church definitely prescribes it; it makes the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries not only more dignified and solemn but helps very much to increase the faith and devotion of the congregation. For this reason, Our Predecessors of immortal memory, Pius X and Pius XI, decreed—and We are happy to confirm with Our authority the norms laid down by them—that in Seminaries and Religious Institutes, Gregorian Chant be diligently and zealously promoted, and moreover that the old *Scholae Cantorum* be restored, at least in the principal churches; this has

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already been done with happy results in not a few places.

“Besides, ‘so that the faithful take a more active part in divine worship, let Gregorian Chant be restored to popular use in the parts proper to the people. Indeed it is very necessary that the faithful attend the sacred ceremonies not as if they were outsiders or mute onlookers, but let them fully appreciate the beauty of the Liturgy and take part in the sacred ceremonies, alternating their voices with the priest and the choir, according to the prescribed norms. If, please God, this is done, it will not happen that the congregation hardly ever or only in a low murmur answer the prayers in Latin or in the vernacular.’ A congregation that is devoutly present at the Sacrifice, in which Our Savior together with His children redeemed with His Sacred Blood sings the nuptial hymn of His immense love, cannot keep silent, for ‘song befits the lover’ and, as the ancient saying has it, ‘he who sings well prays twice.’ Thus the Church militant, faithful as well as clergy, joins in the hymns of the Church triumphant and with the choirs of Angels, and, all together, sing a wondrous and eternal hymn of praise to the most Holy Trinity in keeping with words of the Preface: ‘with whom our voices too, Thou wouldst bid to be admitted.’

“It cannot be said that modern music and singing should be entirely excluded from Catholic worship.

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For, if they are not profane nor unbecoming to the sacredness of the place and function, and do not spring from a desire of achieving extraordinary and unusual effects, then our churches must [*oportet* in the Latin original] admit them since they can contribute in no small way to the splendor of the sacred ceremonies, can lift the mind to higher things and foster true devotion of soul.

“We also exhort you, Venerable Brethren, to promote with care congregational singing, and to see to its accurate execution with all due dignity, since it easily stirs up and arouses the faith and piety of large gatherings of the faithful. Let the full harmonious singing of our people rise to heaven like the bursting of a thunderous sea and let them testify by the melody of their song to the unity of their hearts and minds, as becomes brothers and the children of the same Father.”

The tribute of Edward Dickinson will form a fitting close to this period.

In the last few decades, probably as a detail of the reawakening in all departments of a study of the great works of older art, there has appeared a reaction of a renewed culture of the Gregorian Chant. The tendency toward sensationalism in church music has now begun to subside. The true ideal is seen to be in the past. Together with the new appreciation of Palestrina, Bach, and the older Anglican Church composers, the Catholic Chant is coming to its rights, and an enlightened modern taste is beginning to realize the melodious beauty, the

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liturgic appropriateness, and the edifying power that lie in the ancient unison song. . . . In the restoration of the plain song to portions of the ritual from which it has long been banished, we see evidences of a movement which promises to be fruitful, not only in this special sphere, but also, as a direct consequence, in other domains of church music which have been too long neglected.

The historic status of the Gregorian Chant as the basis of the magnificent structure of Catholic Church music down to 1800, of the Anglican Chant, and to a large extent of the German people's hymn-tune or choral, has always been known to scholars. The revived study of it has come from an awakened perception of its liturgical significance and its inherent beauty. The influence drawn from its peculiarly solemn and elevated quality has begun to penetrate the chorus work of the best Catholic composers of the recent time. Protestant church musicians are also beginning to find advantage in the study of the melody, the rhythm, the expression, and even the tonality, of the Gregorian song. And every lover of church music will find a new pleasure and uplift in listening to its noble strains. He must, however, listen sympathetically, expelling from his mind all comparison with the modern styles to which he is accustomed, holding in clear view its historic relations and liturgic function. To one who so attunes his mind to its peculiar spirit and purport the Gregorian plain song will seem worthy of the exalted place it holds in the veneration of the most august ecclesiastical institution in history.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church*, pp. 127-128.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

WE have followed the fortunes of Gregorian Chant, as also those of the Catholic Church, down through the long and varied vista of the centuries unto our present day. As is evident, much has been treated superficially; the nature of a dissertation such as this necessarily precludes any detailed consideration of events and ideas reaching over almost two thousand years. Yet we have seen, in the main, that the history of the Chant is largely the history of the Catholic Church. In fact, this need not surprise us. Is not the Chant part of the very life of the Church, an external manifestation of that throbbing, vital principle of sanctity and beauty within?

We are still in the somewhat early years of the plain chant revival. What will the future bring? We do not know. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that the Gregorian melodies "have maintained for centuries the inevitable comparison with every other

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form of melody, religious and secular, and there is reason to believe that they will continue to sustain all possible rivalry, until they at last outlive every other form of music now existing."⁶⁶

To Ernest Oldmeadow we are indebted for a beautiful observation on the Chant.

The oldest music of the world is the Chant of the Church—the Chant which she uplifts week after week, year after year, century after century, in every clime and nation, amid white men, black men, red men, bronze men, yellow men; under arctic darkness and under the equatorial blaze, in metropolis and in hamlet, in narrow shrine and vast basilica. It is in the self-same strain that the eager young priest in French Canada, the bearded missionary in Tibet, and the silver-haired Pontiff in Rome must all alike chant "Sursum Corda" and "Vere Dignum" and "Pater Noster."

Yet, while the Chant is the oldest of surviving music, it is also the youngest. It is old not in the sense that Gothic armor and Roman coins and Egyptian urns are old. It is old, like the sea and the mountains and the stars and the sun and the moon. It is old without being old-fashioned. It is old in nothing but years, for its heart is a fountain of beautiful and eternal youth.⁶⁷

Paul Bekker gives a conclusion from a study of the history of all music, a conclusion written without any thought of Gregorian Chant, which is of more than passing interest to the plain chant student.

⁶⁶ Dickinson, *Music in the History of the Western Church*, p. 100.

⁶⁷ *Our Sunday Visitor*, August 21, 1949, p. 2.

CONCLUSION

The nineteenth century was a period of *national music* and therefore, in accord with our picture of the wave-like progress of events, the new music will strive toward *universality*. The nineteenth century was a period of *secular* music and therefore, according to the same law, the new music will be the *cult* type—music with a universal spiritual appeal. The nineteenth century cultivated music in which the *emotional significance* of tone was paramount; the new music will instead reveal once more the *essential quality* of the tone itself. The music of the nineteenth century represented the last stage in the *harmonic expansion* of tone that was *instrumentally conceived*; the new music will represent the unified intensity of tone that is *vocally conceived*.⁶⁸ (Italics added.)

Not every one, perhaps, will agree with Mr. Bekker; but it may be remarked in regard to the present revival of plain song that the Gregorian Chant is characterized by its "universality"—it is of course "the cult type," with a "universal spiritual appeal"—the "emotional significance of tone" is not paramount—it is "vocally conceived."

In regard to the popularizing of the Chant, is it perhaps true what the late Dr. Wilhelm Middelschulte, internationally renowned organist and contrapuntalist, once said to the writer: "What the Catholic Church needs is a modern Bach to popularize these Gregorian melodies; he might do for the Gregorian Chant what Bach did for the German Choral"?

Above all, liturgical singing must be restored to

⁶⁸ Bekker, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

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the people, as Popes Pius X, Pius XI, and Pius XII so earnestly urge. They must not continue to have to remain mere onlookers. And we hope for this as a result of a more intimate participation of the faithful in the ecclesiastical offices due to the present Liturgical Movement.—It is no little inspiring thought for the faithful to recall in singing that these identical melodies as sung today have been loved and sung with ecstatic joy down through the ages by the noblest souls that have ever graced this world of ours. Nay, as in our psalmody, it is even possible we are singing the same melodies that were used by the blessed Apostles and our Divine Savior Himself.

A saint of our own day well understood the evils of our time. With the heart of an intensely devoted spiritual father, Blessed Pius X would urge as "the first and indispensable source" of acquiring the true Christian spirit "the active participation in the most sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church;" and accordingly we hear his plea: "Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part in the ecclesiastical offices, as was the case in ancient times" (*Motu Proprio*). In this participation of the faithful in the singing is there not something more besides only the matter of obedience in complying with the ardent wish of Holy Mother Church? Even musically there

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is a beauty in the large ensemble of a chorus or a symphony orchestra, though some of the members are less well trained, which is not to be found in a smaller group of even expert soloists. But there is yet more than this. Congregational singing has a moving effect which is explained, I think, only by the fact that it is a symphony of *souls*—not merely voices. If, as one writer has said: "The voice is man himself, man in all his nakedness, projected from the visible into the invisible, ringing air, and the ear, by which we apprehend man as singing voice, gives us a much more sensitive impression of his being than the eye which sees but the actual body,"⁶⁹ and if, moreover, every soul before God is a distinct creation, possessing a particular beauty no other soul has ever known, then, I say, we have here a magnificent, thrilling, overpowering symphony of souls, rising up before the very Throne of God.

Finally, if, as we have seen from our comparative study, the appreciation of the Gregorian Chant went largely hand in hand with the state of religious fervor in the Church, and if we are now in the midst of a religious awakening, should we not expect a renewed interest in and love for the sacred Chant, which will in turn foster the revived religious fervor?—The world today is being torn asunder by the fruits of exalted individualism and exaggerated

⁶⁹ Bekker, *The Story of Music*, p. 74.

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nationalism. The remedy for these evils must be the restoration of the common bond uniting the world into one brotherhood under God, the common Father. The *I* must again be blended into the *we*. We must pray together, sacrifice together, *sing* together—as one united, common family under the one common Heavenly Father. And the sublime medium for this we find in the unison song of the Gregorian Chant, the official Chant of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church.

A scarcely more appropriate conclusion could be found than that of Dom Gatard, O.S.B., in his *Plainchant*.

All seems to point to a new future opening up for Gregorian music. Of course we shall not expect it to reign supreme and alone as in the Middle Ages; modern music has attained to a place in the Church which it does not intend to give up. Can plain chant at least hope for a seat of honor by the side of its rival? We have no hesitation in answering "Yes," for plain chant contains within itself all the elements of the Beautiful. The greatest musicians have not been able to resist the attractiveness of these compositions. . . . It would be a fascinating task to analyze the works of the great masters with the object of finding out what they owe (often unconsciously) to plain chant. And if they have been influenced by the liturgical melodies at a time when they were reduced to inanimate skeletons and sung without rhythm, what will it not be now that they have recovered the plentitude of their existence and the rhythm has restored them to life? Independently of its own internal merits, then, we believe that plain chant

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has a call to infuse a new life into religious music—we are not referring to what may be performed at sacred concerts, but to what accompanies liturgical services. In fact, it has in the highest possible degree all the factors which make for suitability in church music: it is in structure one with the liturgical text, so much so that it loses its meaning when divorced from it; it is impersonal, and for that reason supremely appropriate for expressing the feelings of a gathering; finally, it prays, and disposes the mind to prayer, and that is not the least of its qualities. Modern music has greater power over the emotions: it can excite them to anger, or to sacrifice; it can lull them to sleep in a sort of sensual apathy. Such conditions might perhaps be favorable for the celebration of pagan mysteries; but the intimate relationship with God, of which prayer consists, requires a balance of the faculties, to establish which Gregorian Chant is eminently suited both by the austere beauty of its melodies and by the restraint of its movement. No one has more vividly depicted this atmosphere of Gregorian Chant than Brizeus, a Breton poet of the nineteenth century, whose fragrant verses describe the scenes which cradled his infancy in the heaths of Amorica. We cannot close in a better way than by quoting him:

Up rose the song and up: while I prostrate,
Bent o'er my book, with bliss inebriate,
Trembling, the tears a-coursing from my eyes;
When, as if God Himself had reft the skies,
Installing me among the saints to sing,
I felt my very nerve with praises ring,
And, sinking in the tide of love and light,
Abased myself before the Infinite.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Gatard, *Plainchant*, pp. 64-65.

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Docta sanctorum Patrum decrevit auctoritas, ut in divinae laudis officiis, quae debitae servitutis obsequio exhibentur, cunctorum mens vigilet, sermo non cespitet, et modesta psallentium gravitas placida modulatione decantet. Nam in ore eorum dulcis resonabat sonus. Dulcis quippe omnino sonus in ore psallentium resonat, cum Deum corde suscipiunt, dum loquuntur verbis, in ipsum quoque cantibus devotionem accendunt; inde etenim in ecclesia Dei psalmodia cantanda praecipitur, ut fidelium devotio excitetur; in hoc nocturnum diurnumque officium, et Missarum celebritates assidue Clero ac populo sub maturo tenore, distinctaque gradatione cantantur, ut eadem distinctione collibeant, et maturitate delectent. Sed nonnulli novellae scholae discipuli, dum temporibus mensurandis invigilant, novis notis intendunt fingere suas, quam antiquas cantare malunt, in semibreves, et minimas Ecclesiastica cantantur, notulis percutiuntur; nam melodias hoquetis intersecant, discantibus lubricant, triplis et motetis vulgaribus nonnunquam inculcant, adeo ut interdum antiphonarii et gradualis fundamenta despiciant, ignorent super quo aedificant, tonos nesciant, quos non discernunt, imo confundunt; cum ex earum multitudine notarum ascensiones pudicae, descensionesque temperatae, plani cantus, quibus toni ipsi secernuntur ad invicem obfuscantur: currunt enim, et non quiescunt: aures inebriant, et non medentur: gestibus simulant, quod depromunt,

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quibus devotio quaerenda contemnitur, vitanda lascivia proपालatur. Non enim inquit frustra ipse Boetius, lascivus animus vel lascivioribus delectatur modis, vel eosdem saepe audiens emollitur et frangitur. Hoc ideo dudum nos et fratres nostri correctione indigere percipimus: hoc relegare, imo prorsus abjicere, et ab eadem Ecclesia Dei profligare efficacius properamus. Quocirca de ipsorum fratrum consilio districte praecipimus ut nullus deinceps talia, vel his similia in dictis officiis, praesertim horis canonicis, vel cum Missarum solennia celebrantur, attentare praesumat. Si quis vero contra fecerit, per ordinarios locorum, ubi ista commissa fuerit, vel deputandos ab eis in non exemptis, in exemptis vero per Praepositos seu Praelatos suos, ad quos alias correctio et punitio culparum et excessuum hujusmodi, vel similium pertinere dignoscitur, vel deputandos ab eisdem, per suspensionem ab officio per octo dies auctoritate hujus canonis puniatur. Per hoc autem *non* intendimus prohibere, quin interdum diebus festis praecipue, sive solemnibus in missis, et praefatis divinis officiis aliquae consonantiae, quae melodiam sapiunt, puta octavae, quintae, quartae, et hujusmodi supra cantum Ecclesiasticum simplicem proferantur; sic tamen, ut ipsius cantus integritas illibata permaneat, et nihil ex hoc de bene morata musica immutetur: maxime cum hujusmodi consonantiae auditum demulceant, devotionem provocent, et psallentium Deo animos torpere non sinant. Actum et datum. . . *⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *Extravagantium Communium*, Liber III, Tit. I, Cap. I.

The following is the translation:

* The learned authority of the holy Fathers has decreed that in the offices of divine praise, which are performed in the spirit of due homage, the minds of

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all should be attentive, the words should not falter, and with serene gravity the chanters should sing on in peaceful modulation; for "from their lips resounded sweet melody." Now, melody truly sweet resounds from the lips of the chanters when, while speaking to God with their words, they also speak to Him with their hearts, and thus by their singing arouse the devotion of others towards Him. It is for this purpose—namely, to arouse the devotion of the faithful—that the singing of psalms is prescribed in the Church of God; and for this same reason, the night and day offices, as well as the celebration of the Mass, are regularly sung by the clergy and by the people to melodies which are grave yet varied, so that whilst they are pleased with this variety, they also are delighted with their gravity.

But certain followers of a new school, giving great attention to the laws of measured time, are intent upon composing their own melodies according to a new system of notes, and these they prefer to the ancient music. The ecclesiastical melodies are sung in *semibreves* and *minimae*, and are struck with gracenotes; moreover, they break up the melodies by *hoqueti* [the "hochets" were probably a form of sighing or sobbing], they rob them of their virility by *discantus* [two parts], sometimes they mix in *tripla* [three parts] and *moteti* [middle voice] in the vernacular. This is done to such an extent that at times they completely ignore the basic principles of the Antiphonary and the Gradual, they have no knowledge of what they are building upon, they are ignorant of the Modes, which they do not distinguish between, nay, they even confuse them entirely. From the very number of these notes, the modest rise and tempered fall of the plain chant, which indicate the Mode, are all confused. Indeed, these men run without pausing, they intoxicate the ear without satisfying it,

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what they sing they imitate by gestures; and thus the desired devotion is completely ignored, and a forbidden frivolousness is introduced. Thus, not without good reason, Boetius has said: "Either it is a frivolous mind that takes delight in frivolous melodies, or a person by frequently hearing such music becomes effeminate and succumbs."

Consequently, We and our Brethren have realized for a long time that this condition of things requires correction; and now we make haste to prohibit, nay, completely to cast out and banish such things from the Church of God.

Wherefore, with the advice of these same Brethren, we strictly command that hereafter no one shall presume to attempt such things, or others of a like nature, during the above-mentioned offices, especially during the Canonical Hours or whilst the solemnities of Mass are being celebrated. If, however, any one acts contrary to this, he shall, by the authority of this canon, be punished by suspension from his office for eight days: this punishment to be applied by the Ordinaries of the places where these things have been committed, or by their delegates, in the case of those persons who are not exempt; for those who are exempt the punishment shall be applied by their Superiors or Prelates whose duty it is to correct and punish faults and excesses of this and similar kinds, or by their delegates.

By this, however, we do not intend to prohibit that occasionally, especially on festive days, during solemn Mass and the above-mentioned divine offices, certain consonant intervals be added to the simple ecclesiastical chant, provided these intervals are in accord with the melodies themselves, as, for instance, the consonance of the octave, the fifth, the fourth, and the like; but on the condition that the chant itself remain intact in its

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integrity, and that no change in the chant be made from music having the proper rhythm. We permit this especially since such consonances please the ear, arouse devotion, and prevent torpor in the minds of those who are chanting to God.

Done and promulgated at Avignon in the Ninth Year of Our Pontificate.

