

THE CHANT

THE CHANT

A SIMPLE AND COMPLETE METHOD

FOR

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

BY

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FOREWORD.

This book is compiled from personal notes of the author's Courses in Gregorian Chant and is published at the request of the students who attended them.

The lessons are left more or less in the form in which they were given, in the hope that such an arrangement will be helpful both to those whose duty it is to teach the Chant and to those who study alone.

Since the Course was originally given either to Choir Religious whose work is the chanting of Mass and the Divine Office or to members of teaching Orders in charge of Plainsong classes it will not cause surprise that a high standard of rendering is aimed at. It is the duty of all such to spare no pains to attain the greatest possible perfection in their rendering of the Church's song. Now it is unnecessary to insist on the fact that there is no royal road to perfection in the Chant and this Method does not claim to provide one. The only means to acquire perfection in this as in any other art is hard work based on sound fundamental principles, and the help of a good teacher. The principles on which this Course is built up are those of the late Dom Mocquereau O. S. B. They have stood the test of time and, intelligently understood, have produced many a fine Schola whose rendering of the Chant is a joy to the musician and at the same time not unworthy of the service of God.

The author has endeavoured to present these principles as simply as possible and in a purely practical manner following a carefully graded plan that can be adapted either for children or adults.

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East Bergholt,

Commemoration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, 1937.

QUOMODO CANTABIMUS CANTICUM DOMINI IN TERRA ALIENA ?

INTRODUCTORY LESSON.

Before starting on our Course it would be well that we should have a clear idea of its aim, so that in all these lessons and studies the true meaning of our subject should not be lost sight of.

Gregorian Chant, or "Plainsong", as it is familiarly known in this country, is as you know the official music of the Catholic Church. Although the Church *permits* certain other types of music she herself gives us one kind only, and that is the Chant contained in her official books and which she regards as the most perfect type of sacred music, knowing as she does, that these melodies were inspired by the Holy Ghost to be the ideal musical expression of the Liturgy.

Now what exactly do we mean by the Liturgy? A clear answer to this question will do much towards helping us to adopt a right attitude towards the subject we are going to study.

Let us then try to remember this simple definition. The Liturgy is the sacrifice of praise, *sacrificium laudis* offered to the Eternal Father by the Sacred Humanity of his Son, Jesus Christ. It is essential to keep in mind these two terms: *Praise — Sacrifice* for they sum up in themselves the aim and object of the Liturgy.

This will become quite clear if we remember that the whole of the created universe exists simply and solely for the glory of God. The very nature of God requires that He should be jealous of this glory which is due to the sum of His perfection. "*Ego Dóminus : glóriam meam álteri non dabo*". (Isa. XLII. 8). "Behold I am the Lord; I will not give my glory to another". Moreover this glory must be publicly acknowledged and praised by us, for to this end alone were we created. "*Pópulum istum formávi mihi; laudem meam narrábit*". (Isa. XLIII. 2). "I have made this people for Myself that they may tell forth my praise". But the hymn of praise which should have ascended from this earth, joining its harmonies to the sublime chorus of the angelic choirs was marred and interrupted after the Fall, and it was not until after 4,000 years of waiting, when the fulness of time was come, that the Word was made Flesh and brought to earth the perfect hymn of praise that from all eternity had resounded in the bosom of the Father. It has been well said that the Sacred Humanity became the temple in which henceforth this eternal hymn of praise would resound.

To the hymn of praise due to the majesty of the Glory of God must now be added sacrifice for sin, and He, the Word, becomes at the same time the Praise of Glory, and the perfect Sacrifice that

is to effectuate the great Atonement. He is at once the great High Priest, the Victim, and the Choir of worshippers.

In this stupendous act of worship we, who by our Baptism, constitute in very truth the Mystical Body of the Word, must of necessity take part. Our lips, when they join in the *official* worship of the Church, are no longer our own, but become truly the lips of the Mystical Body of Christ.

This then is the Liturgy : *the sacrifice of praise of the Incarnate Word continued on earth by His Mystical Body the Church.*

Looked at from this point of view many things become clear. The praise that the Church offers in her Liturgy is, never let it be forgotten, the praise that God Himself wishes to receive; the melodies in which she clothes the words of that Liturgy are, strange though it may appear to us, the very melodies that the Godhead delights to hear, for we *must* believe that the Word knows the mind of the Father¹ and that knowledge He imparts to His Bride, the Church. Our rightful attitude, therefore, as members of that Mystical Body, is to look at the question from *His* point of view, not from our own. Any other attitude is unthinkable.

We may receive many a surprise; we may be disappointed, repelled even by the form this official hymn of praise may take. How is it possible, we may perhaps ask ourselves, that God can be glorified by a type of music that seems to our ears so dull and insipid, music that does nothing to kindle those sweet feelings of devotion that make our worship so pleasing... to ourselves? Where is the swelling chorus, the subtle web of harmony, the caress of the strings, the strong call of the trumpets? Why not bring all this wealth of sound that the progress of music has made possible and lay it at the feet of our God? Surely thus He would be more fittingly honoured than by this bare line of melody which seems such a poor tribute to His majesty and glory.

To this very natural question there can be only one answer : " My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord". Since the Church tells us by the mouth of Christ's Vicar that here is the more perfect way, that this Chant of hers is the music she has chosen for the worship of Almighty God, we have only to bow and obey.

Mere passive obedience however is not enough ; that is the attitude of a slave not of a child. If we are to show our loyalty to Holy Church then we must not be merely resigned to singing a bare minimum of Plainsong simply because she orders it. No, we must learn to love it, for

" We needs must *love* the highest when we see it",

Only so shall we be able to penetrate its real meaning and discover its

¹ Or, more forcibly, He *is* the Mind of the Father.

hidden beauty; beauty which is not of this world and to which our ears must be first attuned maybe.

To this end we must rid ourselves of many of our preconceived ideas as to what would be desirable in liturgical music and strive to sink our individuality in the mind of Holy Church. We must learn to restrain our craving for effect, to curb our modern love of harmony and endeavour to raise ourselves to a purer, more spiritual conception of chanted prayer. This may not be easy; to some it may mean real sacrifice, a complete consuming and offering up of one's own individual tastes. But let us not forget that in the Liturgy of earth Sacrifice holds an essential place and our Praise will not be complete without it.

Having thus placed ourselves in the right attitude towards our subject let us now consider what will be its distinguishing features.

You understand that from the very beginning of her career the Christian Church has sung, sometimes more, sometimes less, according to the exigences of external circumstances, but song there always has been. It is the irresistible impulse of the heart that adores to express its adoration in song, and in all the religions of antiquity worship and sacrifice have always been accompanied by singing. Already the Synagogue had an elaborate ritual music. The Christian Church, true Bride of Christ, could not be content with less.

But this music of the Church will never lose sight of the fact that its sole aim and object is the worship of the Godhead, *not the entertainment of the congregation*. It will not seek to produce in either singers or hearers pleasant thrills of devotion, to lift the soul on to the plane of emotional enjoyment. However elaborate it may become it will never cease to be Prayer. It is evident, therefore, that the Church's Song will never be, cannot be, what the world calls music.

Having in view to give greater majesty and solemnity to the words of the Liturgy¹, to remain prayer as well as song, it will consist largely in a more or less ornamented *Recitative*: the line of the text will stand out clearly, given without any repetition or mutilation, every syllable enunciated at the same time by all the singers.

It will of necessity be a *Unison* chant, thus maintaining a close connection with the voice of the officiating Priest and symbolizing unity².

¹ The text of the Liturgy consists mainly of the Psalms of David inherited from the synagogue, of mystical passages from Holy Scripture and of certain words of our Divine Lord Himself. All these texts are in prose, and the melodies that have grown up with them are the music of prose, not of verse, flowing in the free and subtle rhythm of speech.

² Moreover harmony, however beautiful it may be, and it can be very beautiful, is nevertheless a lower thing than unison for its beauty tends not to repose but to restlessness, either intellectual or emotional. The Holy See recognizes this in classing Polyphony in the second place.

Lastly it will be an *Antiphonal* Chant: the voice of the Congregation answers the voice of the Priest, one side of the choir answers the other, or Chanters and Schola alternate in the more elaborate music, thus typifying the divine intercourse of Christ and the Church, the voice of the Bride answering the voice of the Bridegroom.

We see then what will be the characteristics of true liturgical song: its inspiration: worship and sacrifice; its aim: the unceasing intercourse between the heart of the Church and the Heart of God; its manner: antiphonal recitative in unison.

Such a song, you will easily understand, is not merely a musical addition to the Liturgy, an afterthought, as all other music is, but it is the Liturgy itself, blossoming in melody.

The value of this liturgical song as an aid to true devotion you will be able to verify only from experience. You must learn to love the Chant, sing it well, steep yourselves in it in order to be able to realize its perfect suitability as a vehicle for Prayer, in order to realize too its function, stressed by Pope Pius X "to raise and form the heart of the faithful to all sanctity". No amount of lecturing or reading will give you that, you must experience it for yourselves.

As an art however, the Chant has its own rules, its laws just as any other science has and those rules we will now begin to study.



LESSON 1.

THE NOTES.

In every properly constituted organism we find two essential elements : matter and form, or body and soul. Of these two it is the material element that must exist first; it is, so to speak, a house built and prepared to receive a living inhabitant.

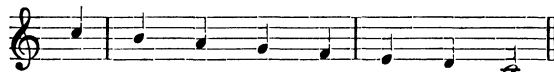
So it is with melody. We have first the matter, the actual sounds of which music is made. Next we have the modulation of sounds, i. e. the arrangement of these sounds, rising or falling according to a certain preconceived plan. This forms the body of the melody and as such it must be built up carefully, with solidity, otherwise its inhabitant will suffer.

Into this perfectly formed, but lifeless body, we then infuse the vital principle of Rhythm, which is to the modulation of sounds what the soul is to the body.

Our first step will therefore be to study the matter of melody, the sounds or notes and their modulation.

Starting from the very beginning and taking for granted that you have no previous knowledge of music of any kind, there is nevertheless one simple melody with which all of you must be familiar and of which you know the sounds or notes perfectly. For this melody is heard frequently in our country in the pealing of church bells and we will call it the scale of the bells.

Here let the instructor sing : —



O come to Church, O come to Church.

Let the class sing it over once or twice briskly and cheerfully; then the instructor should sing it again slowly, bidding the class listen attentively.

What do we notice about the construction of this little tune? It consists of two identical melodies sung to the same words, the one superposed above the other.

Listen again. It is like coming down a ladder. Are the rungs of this musical ladder at equal distance one from the other?