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The Gregorian Chant

P. E. Kretzmann

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Diese Ausführungen über die Lehre von der Reue bieten, wie der Leser gemerkt haben wird, nichts Neues. Diese Sache ist des öfteren in unsern Zeitschriften eingehend behandelt worden. Aber wegen der herrschenden Verwirrung müssen die altbekannten, in dem zwölften Artikel der Augustana und der Apologie klar dargelegten Sätze immer wieder eingeschränkt werden. Wollen wir unser Amt als evangelische Prediger recht ausrichten, so dürfen wir dem Geseß nicht zuschreiben, was allein das Evangelium ausrichten kann. Es bleibt dabei — um wieder mit den Vätern zu reden —: „Die vom Geseß ohne gleichzeitige Handhabung des Evangeliums und vor dem Glauben gewirkte Sündenkenntnis und Reue ist von Bitterkeit, Born und Haß wider Gott und sein heiliges Geseß durchtränkt. Es ist nicht etwa der Anfang der Gotteskindschaft, sondern eine fleischliche, knechtische Reue, wie sie sich eben nur in einem unwiedergeborenen, Gott feindlichen Menschen finden kann, und an welcher darum auch Gott kein herzliches Wohlgefallen zu haben vermag.“ (Lehre u. Wehre, 63, 274.) „Das Geseß macht Sünde und Übertretung im Gewissen des Sünders lebendig und füllt das Herz darum mit Angst, Furcht, Born, Schrecken der Hölle. So weit führt das Geseß den Menschen — bis in die Hölle. . . . Wie also das Geseß in die Hölle führt, so führt das Evangelium wieder heraus und versetzt die Sünder in den Himmel. . . . Erst Sünde, dann Gnade. Erst Tod, dann Leben. Erst Schrecken, dann Trost. Durch die Hölle führt der Weg zum Himmel.“ (Lehre u. Wehre 33, 158 ff.)

Th. Engelber.

The Gregorian Chant.¹⁾

What is the origin of the so-called Gregorian Chant? That is the question asked by Dickinson in his splendid monograph on music in the Western Church. He himself interestingly expounds his question: "There is hardly a more interesting question in the whole history of music; for this chant is the basis of the whole magnificent structure of medieval church song and, in a certain sense, of all modern music, and it can be traced back unbroken to the earliest

1) Books and articles chiefly consulted: *Music in the History of the Western Church*; Alt, *Der kirchliche Gottesdienst*; Von der Heydt, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchenmusik in Deutschland*; Rietschel, *Lehrbuch der Liturgik*; Gevaert, *Les Origines du Chant Liturgique de l'Eglise Latine* (German: *Der Ursprung des römischen Kirchengesangs*); Lyra, *Martin Luthers Deutsche Messe*; Wyatt, *St. Gregory and the Gregorian Music*; Hurley, *Gregorian Chant*; Holly, *Elementary Grammar of Gregorian Chant*; Haberl (tr. by Donnelly), *Magister Choralis*; also works by Briggs, Palmer, Frere, Gatard, Helmore, Lang, Newton, Terry; and article in *America* by John La Farge and articles in the *Commonweal* by Donovan and by Bonvin.

years of the Christian Church, the most persistent and fruitful form of art that the modern world has known." (P. 109.)

The actual historical question still offers difficulties to some investigators, many of whom simply refer to the tradition that Gregory the Great (b. 540; Pope 590—604) reformed the plain-song of his day. This tradition rests upon the testimony of John the Deacon (ca. 872), who wrote a biography of Gregory I, of Leo IV (847—855), of Hildemar (between 833 and 850), of Walafrid Strabo (807—849), and of others. As Wyatt summarizes the tradition, Gregory's work consisted in compiling an antiphonarium from various sources, the musical material being chiefly that of the Ambrosian Chant; yet he not only edited and adapted old melodies, but provided new ones for the new texts with the help of his *Schola Cantorum*.

But whatever the merits of Gregory I in the field of liturgies may have been, it seems certain that this particular improvement or adaptation of the plain-song of the Church is not to be ascribed to him. The exhaustive research work of Gevaert has definitely shown that "the compilation and composition of the liturgic songs, which was traditionally ascribed to St. Gregory I, is in truth the work of the Hellenic popes at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth centuries. The *Antiphonarium Missarum* received its definitive form between 682 and 715; the *Antiphonarium Officii* was already fixed under Pope Agathon (678—681)." It is a well-established fact that all this liturgical work was based upon the foundation laid by St. Ambrose, which was then expanded by Pope Celestine I (422—432) and by Leo the Great (440—461). To Ambrose must be ascribed the fixation of the first four Authentic Modes, the Dorian, the Phrygian, the Lydian (formerly often confused with the Eolian), and the Mixolydian, these responding to the modern keys of D, E, F, and G, respectively. Celestine has been called the founder of the antiphonal song in the Roman Church. And Leo the Great gave the song a permanent place by the establishment of a *Schola Cantorum* in the neighborhood of St. Peter's. Gregory the Great may have codified some of the liturgical material which he found in use,—for he was certainly a prominent figure in the field of liturgies and hymnology,—but beyond this his merit does not seem to have gone. Nevertheless the reputation given to Gregory by John the Deacon remained, so that the full complement of chants accepted in the Roman Church has borne his name to this day.

We next ask: *What is the Gregorian Chant, and how is it characterized by the leading students in the field?*

First of all, as to the word, or term, *chant*. "Chant," writes Dickinson (p. 98), "is speech-song, probably the earliest form of vocal music; it proceeds from the modulations of impassioned speech; it results from the need of regulating and perpetuating these modu-

lations when certain exigencies require a common and impressive form of utterance, as in religious rites, public rejoicing or mourning, etc." This, as will readily be seen, applies to religious chants of every kind, all of them being, in substance, recitations in music, the various keys serving to convey the particular significance of the respective emotion to be conveyed by the recital. On the basis of this understanding the Gregorian, Roman, or Choral Chant may be defined as a grave, diatonic unison melody, set to the rhythm of the words, without strictly measured time, and used by the Church in her sacred functions. It is called *cantus planus*, or plain-chant, to distinguish it as plain over against the polyphonic and rhythmical music used in harmonic settings. It is called *cantus firmus*, i. e., firm or fixed chant, in contradistinction to the accompanying counterpointed parts. It may be called a recitative melody if we think of melody as musical recitation of one voice. The melody was not fixed in the sense of being an unvarying and unvariable tune, for the medieval chanter claimed the privilege of adding to the melody whatever embellishment he might choose freely to invent on the impulse of the moment.

The Roman, or Choral, Chant has a repertory of eight regular psalm-tones, plus one irregular psalm-tone, the *tonus peregrinus*, and the number of Gregorian modes is fourteen. A psalm-tone consists, in its broad outlines, of an Introduction, a Tenor, or reciting-note (always on the Dominant of the Mode) and a Medial Cadence, followed by another Tenor and a Final Cadence. The twelve (theoretically fourteen) Gregorian modes are the following: Authentic Modes—Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian; Plagal—Hypodorian, Hypophrygian, Hypolydian, Hypomixolydian; later additions—Eolian, Ionian, Hypoeolian, Hypoionian. By mode is meant the method of using the sounds of the scale. The character of the mode is determined by changing the point of rest, sharpening and flattening, and thus varying the dominant, approximately as in our major and minor keys at the present time. The character of the mode may be *grave and solemn* (*Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede*), *mournful* (*Improperium expectavit cor meum*), *brilliant and commanding* (*In nomine Iesu omne genu flectatur*), *mystical* (*In voluntate tua, Domine, universa sunt posita*), *joyful* (*Filiae regum in honore tuo*), *devotional* (*Esto mihi in Deum Protectorem*), *expectant and hopeful* (*Dicite, pusillanimes, confortamini*). Each of the original eight modes has its own psalm-tone, and each psalm-tone requires a different division of the words. The antiphon is derived from the psalm-tone. It begins with an Intonation and rises gradually to the Dominant of the Mode, turns about that note in graceful melodic figures, and then falls gradually to the Final.

The Gregorian made use of only four leger lines, and the "notes"

were frequently no more than mnemonic signs, since the melody of the chants was passed on from generation to generation through the choristers' schools. According to our modern notation the Gregorian can be written in three clefs, or keys, the C clef, whose mark on the second line from the top corresponds to the note C in the modern scale, the F or Fa clef, and the B flat clef, whose note on the second line from the bottom corresponds to B flat on the modern scale. (For illustrations see Dickinson, Von der Heydt, Holly, and others.) The Gregorian Chant is thus distinguished from modern music by its scale line, which gives it these tonalities, modes, or tones.

The appreciation which Von der Heydt gives to the Choral Chant is worth quoting: "Der Gregorianische Choralgesang, wie er im Laufe von zwei bis drei Jahrhunderten ausgebildet und fuer alle dem roemischen Papste unterstellten Kirchen verbindlich gemacht wurde, stellt eine in ihrer wuerdevollen Groesse, in der schlichten Einfalt der Melodiebildung und in dem unerschöpflichen Reichtum der musikalischen Formen bewundernswerte Leistung der christlichen Kirche dar. Der einstimmige Gesang bewegt sich, frei von allen Fesseln der griechischen Metrik, die bis dahin den Kirchengesang beeinflusste, in den mannigfaltigsten Figuren um einen Hauptton, und zwar so, dass nur die Tonfolge, nicht aber, wie wir es bei dem protestantischen Gemeindechoral gewohnt sind, die harmonische Bestimmtheit der Toene den Charakter des Gesanges auspraegt. Die Melodiefuehrung ist diatonisch, nicht harmonisch. Als Intervalle werden nur die Prim, Sekunde, Terz, Quarte und Quinte benutzt. Ein Rhythmus, der sich in Zahlen und Massen gleichmaessig wiederholter Zeitabschnitte darstellt, ist mit dieser Gesangsweise nicht verbunden; sie kennt nur den Rhythmus der ins Musikalische uebertragenen feierlichen Sprechweise. Die liturgischen Gesaenge wurden als *Accentus*-Stuecke, die im Sprechgesang vorgetragen wurden, und als *Concentus*-Stuecke, die in eigener Melodie und spaeter meist mehrstimmig gesungen wurden, unterschieden. Erlaeuternde und erweiternde Texte, die in den Gesang der Concentus-Stuecke (*Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei*) eingeschoben wurden, nannte man *Tropen*." (*Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchenmusik*, 14.) A sympathetic description is also that of Dickinson, who writes: "If we enter a Catholic church during High Mass or vespers, we notice that the words of the priest are delivered in musical tones. This song at once strikes us as different in many respects from any other form of music with which we are acquainted. At first it seems monotonous, strange, almost barbaric; but when we have become accustomed to it, the effect is very solemn and impressive. Many who are not instructed in the matter imagine that the priest extemporizes these cadences; but nothing could be farther from the truth. Certain portions of this chant are very plain, long series of words being recited on

a single note, introduced and ended with very simple melodic inflections; other portions are florid, of wider compass than the simple chant, often with many notes to a syllable. Sometimes the priest sings alone, without response or accompaniment; sometimes his utterances are answered by a choir of boys in the chancel or a mixed choir in the gallery; in certain portions of the service the organ supports the chant with harmonies which seem to be based on a different principle of key and scale from that which ordinarily obtains in modern chord progression. In its freedom of rhythm it bears some resemblance to dramatic recitative, yet it is far less dramatic or characteristic in color and expression and at the same time both more severe and more flexible. To one who understands the whole conception and spirit of the Catholic worship there is a singular appropriateness in the employment of this manner of utterance, and when properly rendered, it blends most efficiently with the architectural splendors of altar and sanctuary, with incense, lights, vestments, ceremonial action, and all the embellishments that lend distinction and solemnity to the Catholic ritual." (P. 95 f.)

The Gregorian Chant was of course in use when Luther began his reformatory labors. And since he was no foolish iconoclast, with a delight in overthrowing for the mere sake of destroying, he partly adopted and partly adapted the chant for use in the purified Church. His *Formula Missae* of 1523 retains much of the good or unobjectionable material, although he omitted the sequences, or tropes, as such. In his *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdienstes* he even included samples of the psalm-tones, not only for the introit, but also for the Epistle and the Gospel of the day, adding at the end of his suggested service an *Exercitatio oder Uebung der Melodien*. (St. Louis Ed., X, 226 ff.) Nor is it surprising that the majority of church orders followed Luther in this respect, particularly as long as Latin was in use in the services and the number of suitable hymns was still small. We can well understand that Johann Spangenberg's *Cantiones Ecclesiasticae* of 1545 and the *Psalmodia* of Lucas Lossius of 1553 were widely followed. It is even an indisputable fact that some of Johann Sebastian Bach's best choral compositions show the very number of the Gregorian mode on which he constructed his elaborate and beautiful harmonies.

And yet we find a counter-current accompanying this movement. This is indicated in an interesting juxtaposition in an article by Georg Kempff of Erlangen. (*Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Vol. 57, 641 ff.) We shall reverse the order of two of his paragraphs, since this makes the discussion chronological. He writes: "Die bisherigen lateinischen Messgesaenge aus der Liturgie uebersetzt er [Luther] mit den Freunden im ganzen deutschen Dichterwald der Reformation. Das *Agnus Dei* ('O Lamm Gottes'), das *Benedictus* ('Gott sei gelobet

und gebenedeiet'), das *Kyrie* ('*Kyrie*, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit'), das *Gloria* ('Al' Ehr' und Lob soll Gottes sein') werden fuer die Gemeinde in Verse gebracht.²⁾ Das *Sanctus* setzt er in neue deutsche Form; das erste Hauptstueck des Katechismus wird gedichtet im Liede 'Dies sind die heil'gen Zehn Gebot,' und das *Credo* finden wir wieder im Choral 'Wir glauben all' an *einen* Gott.' Das *Paternoster* wird eine seiner ruehrendsten, schoensten Schoepfungen, 'Vater unser im Himmelreich'. . . . Luther wird der Schoepfer des Gemeindegesangs genannt. Was vorher der Priesterchor in freiem Rhythmus sang, sollte nun die Schar des grossen allgemeinen Priestertums selbst tun. Der Gemeinde widmete er den Edelstein aller Musikgattungen, den Choral. Die Abbildung des Bapstschen Gesangbuches zeigt uns, wie sehr Luther bis zu seinem Tode danach getrachtet hat, dass dieser Choral in einem wuerdigen Gewande den Kirchengaengern lieb und wert wuerde. Wie haben die Holzschnitte, die Randleisten, der kuenstlerische Druck der Worte und der Noten sich hier vereint, der evangelischen Christenheit ein Geschenk zu machen, das neben der Bibel [and the Catechism] das liebste Buch der Christen werden sollte! Deutsch sollte die Kunstsprache sein. Deutsch auch die musikalische Sprache der Choraale, wenn sie auch ihre Verbundenheit und Herkunft aus den Schatzkammern der alten Kirche nie verleugnen wollte."

This counter-current, which was evident in the gradual elimination of the Latin language and in the more extensive use of hymn-singing by the congregation, showed other divergences as well or inevitably led to them. When Roman Catholic composers began to arrange church music for several voices, as in the case of Orlandus Lassus in Munich († 1594) and Giovanni Perluigi da Palestrina in Rome († 1594), whose efforts in the field of counterpoint and rhythm combined with exactness of voice-placing a remarkable depth and tenderness of feeling, it was thought possible to utilize the work of these masters for evangelical church music. But as Von der Heydt notes: "Ein gutes Stueck der eigenartigen Wirkung dieser Musik geht dabei verloren. *Sie ist ebenso wie der Gregorianische Choral-gesang vom katholischen Gottesdienst schwer zu trennen.*" (P. 24.) In this connection he quotes a statement from a letter of Luther: "*Mihi prorsus non placet, notas Latinas super verba Germanica servari.*"³⁾

2) In addition to these chants we have parts of our regular liturgy, antiphons, responses, the prefaces, etc., according to the Gregorian tradition.

3) "It is true, the Church of the Reformation, in order to obtain tunes for congregational singing, did not limit itself to the folk-song, but appropriated also some of the melodious treasure of Gregorian song. But what it borrowed from this for congregational singing was recast according to the folk-song pattern." (Waldo S. Pratt, in *Schaff-Herszog Encyclopedia*, *sub voce* "Sacred Music.")

If we ask, then, *Why was the Gregorian Chant discontinued in practically every part of the Lutheran Church?* the answer may be found in the fact that the entire situation seems to make it foreign to the genius and spirit of the Lutheran Church. It is a significant fact that, whereas priestly vestments were retained in the Scandinavian countries (especially in Sweden) and in a few sections of Germany as well as in individual congregations, these being exceptional or sporadic cases, the Gregorian Chant was discontinued practically everywhere *as soon as the congregations had an adequate liturgy in the vernacular and a sufficient number of good hymns.* It was not merely Pietism and Rationalism with their concomitant liturgical deterioration which brought about this condition, but a resentment against everything that breathed hierarchical aspirations and a justified suspicion concerning the associations connected with a form of worship which was and is *emphatically stated to be a distinctive part of the Roman ritual.*

That this is actually the case can easily be verified by a reference to the status of the Gregorian Chant, especially during the last hundred years. It was in 1877 that Haberle wrote: "The Roman Catholic Church ever regarded the Gregorian *as her peculiar chant.*" (P. 11.) "Bound up as it has been with the ceremonial of the Catholic Church and *pervading her whole liturgical existence,* it becomes a witness to her unity." (P. 14.) Even before this book was published, in 1833, the Benedictines of the cloister Solesmes in the French department Nord had started the movement for a revival of the Gregorian Chant in all its forms, according to the best traditions of the Church. In connection with the centenary of the Solesmes Chant, John La Farge, S. J., wrote an article in *America* in which he not only describes the restoration of the chant through the efforts of the great Roman liturgiologist Gueranger, but also includes an appreciation of the chant, calling it "a great comforter or strengthener in this age of uncertainty and distrust, because it is a tangible, audible work of the Holy Ghost [?], the Comforter and Paraclete. . . . The words sung were *living* words, inspired by the Spirit of God, piercing heaven, and drawing down forgiveness and blessing upon mankind." He speaks also of a certain group of Catholics who "should lead in the popular usage of the chant and thus build a mighty stone into the temple of American Catholicism."

The emphasis contained in this article is no doubt due to the serious consideration which has been given to the liturgical movement in the Roman Church since the *Motu proprio* of Pius X, issued November 22, 1903, in which we read: "The Gregorian Chant has always been regarded as the supreme model for sacred music. . . . The ancient traditional Gregorian Chant must therefore be largely restored to the function of public worship, and everybody must take

for certain that an ecclesiastical function loses nothing of its solemnity when it is accompanied by no other music but this. . . . Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people."

It was on account of this *Motu proprio* that the Solesmes movement received such wide recognition, also at the time of its centenary last year, and that the Pius X School of Liturgical Music (College of the Sacred Heart, Manhattanville) has been mentioned so frequently during recent years. What Catholic writers think of the situation will readily be seen from a few quotations from recent articles. Thus Vincent C. Donovan wrote a few months ago in the *Commonweal*: "This question [*"What Is Plain-chant?"*] is in the air because of the movement to-day back to the full beauty of the liturgy. . . . There is the key to the appreciation of plain-chant. It is primarily and essentially a language of prayer in the Roman Catholic Church. . . . Gregorian Chant is a passport *viséd* by the Church to admit us into the very realms of the Spirit itself. It praises God and talks to Him in beautiful Latin prose of poetic content, not in the measured steps of verse, but the natural freedom of the rhythm of life. . . . The world to-day is becoming more and more conscious of the need of uniting as a community of brothers in God. To achieve this, we need unity of ideas. Only a simple, common language can effect the commerce of those ideas. Is not plain-chant an ideal one to effect a world transformation? Its very monody, its purely melodic nature, which plain-chant really means, is both a symbol and a means of unity. The structure of all its melodies, which sometimes flower like a Gothic cathedral, is based on the four simple cadences which comprise the *cursus* of classical oratory. . . . The eight tones, or scales, in one of which each cadence was written, reflect every human emotion, yet in their purity and simplicity are also a means of unity." Some six weeks before this article appeared, a "communication" was given space in the columns of the same magazine which referred to an "Apostolic Constitution" of Pius XI, published to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Motu proprio* of Pius X. Here we are told: "These qualities [sanctity, perfection of form, and universality] are to be found in the highest degree in the Gregorian Chant, which is consequently the chant proper to the Roman Church. . . . The ancient traditional Gregorian Chant must therefore in a large measure be restored to the functions of public worship." Many further expressions from Roman sources could be offered, but the material herewith submitted will probably suffice to show the strength of the Gregorian revival in the Roman Church. A further evaluation of the movement is a matter of the future.

P. E. KRETZMANN.