

## **Gregorian Chant as Song of the Assembly?**

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- I. In every era “Church music” reflects the shape of our understanding of the liturgy and of the Church taken as a whole**
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### **Liturgical Languages**

#### **New Compositions for the repertoire in the vernacular: formation of the various players**

- I. In every era “Church music” reflects the shape of our understanding of the liturgy and of the Church taken as a whole<sup>1</sup>**
- 0. The concept of assembly that we use in the title of this paper is not found in these terms in the Dictionary of the Liturgy. It corresponds to a now widely accepted usage where the term assembly designates primarily that part of the assembly in the liturgical sense that corresponds roughly to the laity who celebrate in the liturgy; that is, those who have no special role to play in the liturgy, even though they participate, as members of the Body of Christ, in his priesthood.
- 1. In the primitive Church, the concepts of liturgy and participation of the assembly, in the above indicated sense, were influenced by the fact that in the early centuries celebrations took place in a domestic setting<sup>2</sup>, and the liturgical action was strictly tied in its forms and substance to the practice of private and family prayer. The principal concepts by which the primitive Christian community constructs its identity and its celebration are those of *ecclesia* and *koinonia*: that is a community of the called. The consequences for the chant are obvious. The music consisted of Psalms of the Hebrew tradition and hymns, as urged by the Apostle Paul<sup>3</sup>, both in liturgical celebration and in ordinary life: before meals, before going to bed, etc.  
The liturgy entered into the ordinary life of every Christian and the Hebrew tradition of chant was carried on with the singing methods in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thomas Schumacher, *Kirchenmusik als integraler Bestandteil der Liturgie? Zum Status 40 Jahre nach Beginn des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils*. Institut zur Förderung der Glaubenslehre – Stiftung – München 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:46-47 and 20:7-8.

<sup>3</sup> Eph 5:18; Col 3:16.

vogue at that time. To accompany such music the Hebrew world provided instruments, at least until the fall of Jerusalem. Numerous hymns were created which took their place alongside the psalms and served to illuminate and revivify the faith of the early Christians (the biblical hymns, for example, have come down to us)<sup>4</sup>.

2. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christianity becomes the religion of the State and people who no longer have the same strength and vibrancy of faith convert to it *en masse*. It becomes necessary to differentiate from pagan society and from the old religious practices of the classical world, for which a substitute had to be sought. In particular:
  - The prohibition against the use of musical instruments was accentuated, because of the magical-sensual function such instruments played in the pagan rites
  - The structure and sacrality of the liturgy replace the existing pagan notions of sacrality
  - Clearly assigned and exclusive roles are established in the liturgy.

It is at this time that the strong differentiation in the primitive assembly, which justifies the restricted sense of the term used in this work, is beginning to emerge. From this time forward lay participants in liturgical celebrations will be called "the people" or "the faithful" or even "the laity"<sup>5</sup>. Etheria, telling of her trip to Jerusalem, speaks of: "rites" of initiation (mysteries), places marked off by railings, roles reserved for categories of persons who perform certain types of fasts, etc.

Her testimony also points to the formation of a musical repertoire in Jerusalem, because she speaks of hymns and acclamations, which are sung by all the people<sup>6</sup>. In Milan, Ambrose is developing a whole repertoire of hymns for the liturgy, with a catechetical purpose, which will have the admiration of Augustine<sup>7</sup>, great popular success and numerous imitators<sup>8</sup>. This aspect was lost when the languages in which the hymns were composed were no longer spoken by the people<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Clement of Alexandria: *Stromata*, 7,7, MPG 9, 469.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g.,: "Nam singulis diebus ante pullorum cantum aperiuntur omnia ostia Anastasis et descendunt omnes monazantes et parthenae, ut hic dicunt et non solum hii, sed et laici praeter, uiri aut mulieres, qui tamen uolunt maturius vigilare". *Aetheriae peregrinatio ad loca sancta II*, n. 24, ed. Augustin Arce in *Biblioteca de autores cristianos*, p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> "At ubi autem illa perlegerit, fit oratio, benedicuntur cathecumini, item et fideles...", *ibidem*, n.33, p.286. "Sane Domenica die per Pascha post missa lucernario, id est de Anastase, omnis populus episcopum cum ymnis in Syon ducet", *ibidem*, n.39, p. 300.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine: *Confessions*, 9, cap. 6-7: PL 32, 769.

<sup>8</sup> So also St. Ephrem (c. 306 – 373) at Edessa and Romanus the Hymn-maker (c. 490 – c. 560) at Constantinople.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of Ambrose there was not yet a widespread prohibition against singing for women: "The psalm is sweet at any age, it speaks to men and to women. Old people sing it, and put aside the rigidity of old age, young people sing it without risk of sensuality, girls, without wavering in their innocence". *Commentary on Psalm 1*.

There is a first separation between altar and faithful; the more important rites are hidden from the eyes of the people in a variety of ways, until by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century even the canon of the mass is pronounced in a low voice. With the phenomenon of an excessive hierarchization, in the Church as well as in the liturgy, the chant begins to be distributed among groups in function of their roles. Monks assume great importance. There is a specific role reserved for the faithful, but this becomes gradually reduced with the passage of time. In particular the prohibition regarding women will be reaffirmed, with the sure exception of female monasteries<sup>10</sup>, but also of choirs of virgins<sup>11</sup>, as well as children's choirs. In any case, the liturgy became the business of the clergy, while the people were spectators.

3. Until the 6<sup>th</sup> century, while the monasteries devote themselves to and develop the Divine Office, the essential roles, as far as the Mass is concerned, are taken by the priest (or bishop) and by the faithful.

From the 7<sup>th</sup> century on the schola cantorum or the choir (of clerics) also have a very precise role. The following table, given in Christoph Hellmut Mahling, *Die Ausführenden der Kirchenmusik in Mittelalter*<sup>12</sup>, says it all:

Chants	Execution
Introit	- Schola; antiphonally by two half-choirs
Kyrie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gallican liturgy: (3) children</li> <li>- Roman liturgy at the time of St. Gregory: clergy, and people respond</li> <li>- Ordo Romanus I,II: schola, with response of the clergy (perhaps also the people)</li> <li>- Ordo of St. Amand: schola and Regionaries (sub-deacons)</li> <li>- Ordo of St. Amalar: schola</li> <li>- Herard. of Tours 858: all</li> <li>- From 10<sup>th</sup> century on: schola; with tropes</li> <li>- From 13<sup>th</sup> century on: polyphony; in northern Europe, people respond</li> <li>- Outside of Mass, for processions and funerals, by the people</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem: *Protocatechesis* 14, MPG 33, 356 and Isidore of Pelusium: *Epistulae* 1, 90, MPG 78, 244, citing 1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:12.

<sup>11</sup> "choros virginum instituit docuitque odas sublimibus spiritualibusque sententiis compactas, de Cristi Nativitate, Baptismo..... effecitque ut puellae foederis ad ecclesiam cunctis solemnibus Domini festis, et martyrum celebritatibus, diebusque dominicis convenirent. Ille vero, velut pater et spiritus citharoedus in medi aderta, docebatque modos musicos et modulandi carminis leges..." In *Acta S. P. N. Ephraemi syriaca, Venezia, Gerardi, 1756, v. 2. pp.35-36.*

<sup>12</sup> In K. G. Fellerer, *Geschichte der Katolischen Kirchenmusik, Kassel, 1972-76. (abbr. GKK)*

- As surrogate for people who do not know how to sing the psalms: already Egeria, but also the synod of Riesbach Freisingen, 799, Herard. of Tours and Hardouin V, 454.

Gloria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Originally by the people, intoned by the bishop or priest; likewise later in small churches and in the area of Rome</li><li>- Then by the clergy around the altar, intoned by the bishop or priest</li><li>- From the 10<sup>th</sup> century on, with tropes</li><li>- Around 1140 in Rome: schola</li><li>- England: 5 children; the first 8 words of response 1, then the whole choir</li></ul>
Gradual (responsory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- From 1 to 4 soloists of the schola, with people responding, later the schola responds</li><li>- 13<sup>th</sup> century: polyphony</li></ul>
Alleluia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- One or more soloists of the schola with response of the people, later of the schola</li><li>- 13<sup>th</sup> century: polyphony. Highly elaborated</li></ul>
Tract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Soloists without response (taking the place of the alleluia in Lent)</li></ul>
Sequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Soloists (children) sing the text, the choir of clergy the melismas; perhaps with dramatic alternation; probable use of instruments</li></ul>
Credo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- In Spain after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Council of Toledo (589), and in France, intoned by the priest, then the clergy and people (Mansi IX, 993)</li><li>- From 1014 in the Roman Mass: intonation by priest or bishop, then sung by clergy. (VI, XI Ordo romanus, Migne PL CCXVII, 830)</li></ul>
Offertory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Schola, first antiphonal, then responsorial (elaborate melodies)</li></ul>
Sanctus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Gallican liturgy: people</li><li>- Roman liturgy in France: clergy and people together</li><li>- Pontifical services in Rome: orig. people, but then clergy (Ordo romanus I, II, and V)</li><li>- Carolingian reform: people and clergy together (Ordo romanus XV) Trope version and then polyphony: Chor. Rom 15<sup>th</sup> cent.</li></ul>
Pater noster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Gallican liturgy: clergy and people together</li><li>- Roman liturgy: essentially clergy, later clergy and people together</li></ul>
Agnus Dei	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Schola (Ordo romanus I); perhaps originally also the people</li></ul>

Trope version, then polyphony

Communion - Originally soloist and people; then schola (responsorial chant)

4. Gregorian chant<sup>13</sup> develops in tandem with the evolution of the society. There are diverse phenomena to which we shall return: tropes, sequences, songs (cantiones)<sup>14</sup>, liturgical dramas. One finds in this period a discreet use of the vernacular in the peoples' parts<sup>15</sup>. But we also have documents of the hierarchy (ceremonials) whose aim is to safeguard the liturgy, now understood as a rite, in which form has a role equal at least to that of substance<sup>16</sup>.

The faithful are often excluded from the liturgy altogether, but there exist paraliturgical forms in which they can express themselves even in the vernacular: processions, sermons. However, there are cases, later condemned, where liturgical chants alternate with cantiones or tropes.

The role of the religious orders (monks of Cluny, Franciscans, etc.) is important in two respects: the evolution of Gregorian and paraliturgical forms<sup>17</sup>. Translations of Latin hymns were used in these orders for certain occasions of the liturgical year.

Hymns and the songs, although religious in content and popular in character, required a certain musical skill on the part of the solists, but were of course excluded from the liturgy.

With the introduction of the schola, a complete separation is effected between liturgy and music. As witness to this phenomenon we report that in 1291 Wilhelm Durandus writes that the words sung by the schola must also be said by the clergy<sup>18</sup>. Church music becomes something superimposed on the liturgical action and, naturally, becomes still more remote from the people.

5. At this point music is developing in the direction of polyphony. On this point, the bull "Docta sanctorum"<sup>19</sup> is a bit ambiguous, because, on the one hand, it seems opposed to the introduction of polyphony into the liturgy and, on the other, it exalts its beauty when it may be recognized as "cantus ecclesiasticus (planus)". Note that liturgical chant is designed to excite the devotion of the faithful<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The term Gregorian chant normally refers to what would better be defined as "liturgical chants of the Roman Church". Cf. E. Cardine: *Appunti di storia del canto gregoriano*, Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra, Roma, 1972, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> The term "cantiones" is employed in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries for songs with a spiritual text which do not belong to liturgical chant in the strict sense.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Fellerer et alii *Neue Formen*, in *GKK*, p. 272 ff.

<sup>16</sup> G. Ciliberti: *Oltre la Docta sanctorum*. In *Atti del convegno "L'idea papale di liturgia nel corso dei secoli"*, Roma 29/11 – 1/12 – 2006, which is due to be published soon.

<sup>17</sup> W. Suppan, *Das geistliche Lied in der Landessprache*, in *GKK*, p. 353-359.

<sup>18</sup> W. Durandus, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, 1291, cited in Thomas Schumacher *op.cit.*

<sup>19</sup> John XXII *Docta sanctorum partum*, 1324/25. It is to be noted, however, how the documents of present Popes, beginning with Pius X, reflect some of the fundamental principles already stated in this bull.

<sup>20</sup> "Inde etenim in ecclesiis Dei salmodia cantando praecipitur, ut fidelium devotio excitetur" *Docta sanctorum partum*.

6. The Council of Trent addresses the issue of music only by way of indicating abuses that are to be avoided. In the meantime, the liturgy is becoming ever more the affair of the clergy and the spectator people are left only with the sacrament of the Eucharist in its aspect of "mysterium tremendum". The participation of the people is understood in the personal-private sense and manifests itself, in parallel with the liturgy, with the recitation of the rosary or other "devotions". Literal translations of the liturgical texts are regarded with suspicion; paraphrases are employed for popular devotion. All of these aspects are found, for example, in a 1753 prayer book<sup>21</sup> which, even if from a much later time, represents a paradigm that continued from the Council of Trent right up to Vatican II. Popular devotions are developed, and hymnals in the vernacular are compiled, first by Protestants and then by Catholics (16<sup>th</sup> century). The songs of the Cantuale di Magonza (1605), which were used by the faithful after the elevation, at the Agnus Dei and at communion time, were not understood as liturgical songs<sup>22</sup>; those of the Slovak Cantus Catholici (1655), which included songs for the liturgy and for catechesis, also used paraphrases of liturgical texts. New texts were even composed in the vernacular for the Gregorian melodies of the Ordinarius, always with the intention of being more accommodating to popular sensitivity<sup>23</sup>.

In the ambit of the Protestant Reformation, the liturgy of the word had of course taken precedence over that of the Eucharist and, at the same time, in the conception of the liturgy and of the church, the people assumed a prominent role. Consequently, we have the use of the vernacular language and the development of a popular (choral) chant.

Reacting to the "degeneration" of the liturgy in this sense, which, while making it more vibrant, emptied it of certain contents, the Counter-Reformation seeks to preserve the contents by hardening the forms and, by so doing, cutting off all active participation of the faithful. In one case we have the proliferation of popular chant, to the point that it takes on the role of protagonist (the great musicians will then step into this experience), in the other, the maintaining of a professional music, cut off from the participation of the people and from the liturgical action. In this latter case too the great musicians will intervene.

The humanistic conception of the sacred text and of its link with the Word of God will lead in music as well to a search for the original melody according to criteria marked by rationality more than by historical research<sup>24</sup>. It was thought that Gregorian was equally an inspired music. For this reason people took it for

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<sup>21</sup> *Orazioni cristiane, ovvero tutti gli esercizi ordinari del cristiano con un ristretto di sua fede del rev. Padre Giovanni Croiset, Venezia, Baglioni, 1753.*

<sup>22</sup> W. Suppan *op.cit.*

<sup>23</sup> V. Dufka, *Cantus Catholici, thesis ad Doctoratum in sacram liturgiam. Roma 2007, to be published soon.*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M Wald, *Philologie am Heiligen Geist – Zur Programmatik der Koral reformen aus dem Geiste des Humanis*, In *Atti del convegno "L'idea papale di liturgia nel corso dei secoli"*, Roma 29/11 – 1/12 – 2006, soon to be published.

granted that they could recover an “original Gregorian” in simple forms, deprived of embellishments. And even these could be emended in cases where they departed from the prosody and meter of classical Latin. This was the attitude that was behind the 16<sup>th</sup> century editions of the repertoire, such as for example the *Graduale di Gardano* (1591)<sup>25</sup>, the *Medicea* (1614), etc., which however never rose, with the exception of *Medicea*, to the role of official editions (perhaps also for financial reasons). In these efforts, there was also the explicit attempt to stop the break-up of the Church by a return to “authentic” origins<sup>26</sup>. Fifty years later Maffeo Barberini, when he became Pope under the name of Urban VIII (1623-1644), maintaining in a certain sense his ties with philological research, undertook once again the imposing task of reforming ancient music and its texts, correcting it always in view of establishing a more unified tradition. All of this had nothing at all to do with the people of God<sup>27</sup>. There were in existence, outside the liturgy, religious songs that could be used in paraliturgical, catechetical, dramatic situations for the use of confraternities – that is, music for assembly surrogates in liturgy surrogates. Thus, we find hymns of various kinds, little religious songs and also, later, the repertoire of songs sung in connection with Eucharistic Congresses.

7. With the Baroque period, church music, increasingly disconnected from liturgical action, becomes at times pure spectacle<sup>28</sup>. The production of the great Masses has begun, which will continue into the following centuries, right up until Vatican II.

8. Manuscript illumination underscores the pedagogical dimension of the liturgy, especially in the moral field, while romanticism brings out its aesthetic aspect; as a consequence, popular participation continues to remain passive.

9. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century two extremely important reform movements of church music begin, almost contemporaneously:

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<sup>25</sup> *Graduale Romanum iuxta ritum Missalis novi, ex decreto sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restituti. Cum additione Missarum de sanctis, ut in praecepto S. D. N. Xisti papae patet. Nuperrime impressum et a multis erroribus, temporis vetustate lapsis, magno studio ac labore multorum excellentissimorum emendatum. Una cum Kyriale, Hymno Angelico, Symbolo Apostolorum ac modulationibus omnibus, quibus utitur sacrosancta Ecclesia Romana.*

<sup>26</sup> In this context, Glareanus writes the *Dodekachordon*, 1547.

<sup>27</sup> B. Schrammek, *Il riflesso delle delibere papali in ambito liturgico sulla musica sacra a Roma ai tempi di Urbano VIII*, in *Atti del convegno “L’idea papale di liturgia nel corso dei secoli”*, Roma 29/11 – 1/12 – 2006, soon to be published.

<sup>28</sup> See for example the report of 1639 of a French musician, cited by Helmut Huckle, *Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft*, p.156. “At the Mass for the feast of St. Louis in the national church of S. Luigi de’ Francesi in Rome, which was celebrated in the presence of 23 cardinals, the French visitor ascended the platform. There he was received with applause by the musicians and invited to demonstrate his abilities. After the third Kyrie a theme was played on the organ and he improvised on it with the viola to the marvel of all, such that the cardinals requested that he play a second time following the Agnus Dei. This time another, more rapid theme was offered to him, and he straightway composed variations on it in numerous rhythms and tempos.”

- the effort to return to the schola tradition to strengthen the bond with Rome on the part of the French church, with the foundation of the Abbey of Solesme by Dom Guéranger (1837);
- the beginning of Cecilianism (1868) with the establishment, through the efforts of F. X. Witt, of the Cecilian Association

The first has as its goal to restore the beauty of the ancient Roman liturgy, while the second revisits classical polyphony, but also symphonic music, in view of a liturgical usage. But what we have here remains a clerical liturgy, not actively involving the faithful.

10. We have to wait for the *motu proprio* “Tra le sollecitudini” of Pius X (1903), directed primarily to Italy, but also to the whole Church, under the influence of the Jesuit Angelo De Santi, founder of the Istituto di Musica Sacra in Rome and president of the associazione italiana of St. Cecilia, to find a truly new step forward.

For the first time, after so many centuries, there is talk of “active participation” in the mysteries and in the public prayer of the Church. The *motu proprio* begins with the usual statements on decorum and devotion of the faithful who “assist” at the holy sacrifice, statements already present in the “*Docta Sanctorum*” and in other documents, but goes on to speak of the common prayer of the Church in the public and solemn liturgical offices<sup>29</sup>. Moreover it mandates for music used in the liturgy sanctity, goodness of form and universality. These qualities are to be found to a supreme degree in Gregorian chant as used in the liturgy, and so, if a more active participation of the people<sup>30</sup> is desired, as indeed it is, they must know how to sing Gregorian chant<sup>31</sup>. For polyphony, of course, a *schola* would be required, which denies admission to women “since they cannot perform a liturgical office”. Measures are taken to insure that the music does not become a spectacle; music that tends to the theatrical, the choir being hidden from view, is prohibited, while even a “modern” music is allowed. The use of the vernacular is practically excluded from the liturgy.

The first solution that naturally presents itself is that of constructing a “simple” repertoire of Gregorian chants, so that it can become the common patrimony of the faithful. We will see in a few moments what was to be the fate of such an endeavor. From 1909 on, based on the invitation to active participation of the

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<sup>29</sup> “maintaining and promoting the decorum of the House of God in which the august mysteries of religion are celebrated, and where the Christian people assemble to receive the grace of the Sacraments, to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, to adore the most august Sacrament of the Lord's Body and to unite in the common prayer of the Church in the public and solemn liturgical offices.” *Tra le sollecitudini*, *Introduzione*.

<sup>30</sup> “... in which the faithful assemble for no other object than that of acquiring this spirit from its foremost and indispensable font, which is the active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church.” *Tra le sollecitudini*, *Introduzione*.

<sup>31</sup> “Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the 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.” *Tra le sollecitudini*, *Istruzione sulla musica sacra*, II,3.



people contained in the *motu proprio*, a variety of movements are launched (e.g. Maria Laach), which will lead even to the translation of the liturgical texts.

As an example of this new direction, we can cite “Il manuale del parrocchiano cantore”, understood explicitly as a manual for collective participation in the chants of the liturgy, originally published in Turin, in 1913, and which enjoyed notable success, if one thinks of the numerous editions and re-printings it enjoyed. This manual contained a good part of the liturgy sung in Gregorian with the corresponding score. Here we find a genuine translation of all the Mass texts and not simply a more or less faithful paraphrase, as we saw for example in the 1753 volume cited above<sup>32</sup>.

The liturgy should be open to all the people; for this reason, attempts are made to introduce the vernacular into the liturgical chant of popular hymnals. The development of these chant books is encouraged by church documents, such as the encyclical “*Musicae sacrae disciplina*” (1955), n. 20, but the necessity of the use of Latin is also reaffirmed. This ambivalence is also found in the attitude of Pius XII, in the encyclical “*Mediator Dei*” (1947), and in the greeting to the pastoral-liturgical congress of Assisi (1956), when the pressure for the use of the vernacular is becoming ever stronger.

11. The Second Vatican Council in its conjoined reflection on the Church and on the liturgy recovers in full the traditional conception of the church as a body made up of head and members. Christ is the celebrant par excellence, and the whole people of God participates in his ministry which effects redemption for all mankind. The liturgy is viewed as the summit and source of the Christian life<sup>33</sup>. The Church is “the sacrament” of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race (LG 1). And here is the novelty with respect to the primitive experience, which saw the Church gathered together in a community, but not so explicitly open to the world as sacrament of redemption. This entails that in the liturgy too the aspect of announcement be appropriately underscored and that in it too the community of the called “manifest to others the mystery of Christ” (SC 2).

Such a new conception should, we would argue, be reflected by liturgical chant. On the other hand, the same council (and the reflection that followed the council) views music not as an embellishment of the liturgy but rather as an integral and necessary part thereof. For the first time, after over a millennium, music ceases to be something that simply parallels the liturgy. In fact, church music was struck at its foundations by the reform of Vatican II.

We can draw a few conclusions<sup>34</sup>:

- we can no longer strive for a repertoire that is closed, or limited in style

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. the encyclical: *Musicae sacrae disciplina*, n.18.

<sup>33</sup> For a reflection on this theme and its repercussions in liturgical music, cf. A. Grillo, *Liturgia come “fons” e iniziazione alla fede: una (ri)scoperta nel suo percorso storico e nei suoi nodi teorici*, in *Notiziario dell’Ufficio Liturgico Nazionale*, aprile 2001, n. 14, p. 54-67.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Schumacher, *op. cit.*

- the sanctity (attention: not the *sacrality*) of the music does not depend on its ability to rival the stylistic genius of a certain epoch (even if this is to be taken into account) but on its close connection with the liturgical action
- the assembly cannot be systematically excluded from the chant
- the choir performs an important ministry, but it is also part of the assembly (understood in its true sense as convoked community): it is not primarily a group of musicians.

## II. Characteristics and evolution of the Gregorian repertoire

Gregorian chant is primarily a cultural gesture, but in the external form of its vocal realization, it belongs to the field of art. Its nucleus is formed in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries with the appearance of the schola<sup>35</sup>. Naturally, a variety of traditions were formed; but unification was then accomplished by force, for political reasons, under Charlemagne.

The medieval mentality imposed the view that the entire liturgy should be sung, because music ought to highlight the word, adhering perfectly to it. By word is meant the meaning of what is said, but also its expression in a very precise language, namely, Medieval Latin. A Latin which, besides having admitted “barbarisms”, had also lost the mensural structure of syllables, proper to classical Latin, and was based fundamentally on accents.

On the other hand, it had to be a chant fixed by tradition (and for this reason also vested with authority) and capable of releasing people from the bonds of passion, making them receptive to divine grace.

However, at the moment it moves from being a chant of tradition to becoming the common chant of the Church, it undergoes modifications: we are assisting at a hybridization of the Roman chant due to the various aesthetic tastes of French musicians. The authority of the tradition was saved through the legend of Pope Gregory (590-604).

The free rhythm typical of the “sung word”, initially entrusted to a tradition that was oral, and fixed, as far as possible, by a neumatic script, became obscured by the superimposed diastematic script, which favors a measured execution. The possibility of *writing* a melody, without having to memorize it, results in an excessive increase in the number of compositions. On the other hand, the very fact that melodies could now be situated spatially on a page was itself an essential tool for developing polyphony, with rhythmic constructions that were also of melodic plot. The first phenomena in this regard are the creation of tropes and sequences. To be noted is the fact that the accent of the words begins to lose a little of its importance and rhythm and rime, characteristic of the Romance languages, begin to make an appearance.

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<sup>35</sup> E. T. Moneta Caglio, *Lo Jubilus e le origini della salmodia responsoriale, Jucunda Laudatio*, Venezia, 1976-77.

Later, we will see Gregorian become a cantus fractus, cantus planus, etc., losing perhaps its most notable characteristics. It will even be used as a “tenor”, that is, rhythmic support for polyphony.

We have seen how, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an effort was made to return to a presumed “golden age” of Gregorian, but this, in turn, was done according to the criteria of the various epochs.

It was on these criteria -- arbitrary, though justified by the context, that the renaissance editions (Medicea and others) were based, which tended to rationalize rhythm, melody and embellishments. The same could be said of some modifications made by the Cistercians for their repertoire. The purpose of these changes was to eliminate elements they regarded as out of line with certain Scriptural expressions.

Somewhat in the same rationalizing direction was the attempt of Dom Moquereau, who, though he had the irreplaceable merit of having brought research back to the original manuscripts, then attempted then to harness Gregorian chant into a rhythmic structure that was completely foreign to its nature.

Quite different is the spirit with which musical paleography confronts the problem of the restoration of Gregorian at a distance now of more than a millennium from the time of its composition. This amounts to a scientific undertaking, not yet complete, which is attempting to reproduce a musical execution as faithful as possible to the original; so it interprets the signs affixed to manuscripts for this purpose prior to the arrival of diastematic script. Vatican II encourages further study in this direction.

Another tendency to manipulate Gregorian chant exists: that of modifying it to make it more accessible. An attempt to achieve an “easy” Gregorian was made by the Cistercians so as to allow all the monks to participate in the chant. The Dominicans displayed the same tendency, abridging or even suppressing the melismatic passages, with the justification that this gave a greater simplicity to the chant<sup>36</sup>. As is clear, the changes were not made in function of a lay assembly, but in function of an assembly of monks.

The proposal of Pius X goes in the same direction: simplify Gregorian so that it can be used in the assembly. This is first time, as we saw, that the church was encouraging the assembly to sing. With this goal, it was proposed to use the format of Moquereau, which was undoubtedly closer to the experience of the musicians of that time than will later be the restored Gregorian of paleographic research. Of this tendency we have an example in “Il manuale del parrocchiano cantore” cited above.

### **III. Conclusions**

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<sup>36</sup> A. González Fuente, *El carisma de la vida Dominicana, San Esteban, Salamanca, 1994.*

To what extent can and should Gregorian, better called “the liturgical chant of the Roman church”, be sung in our churches?

The documents of the Church naturally acknowledge this chant as the heritage of the Roman liturgy<sup>37</sup> and this remains as a firm point for us all.

However, at this point we ask ourselves: to what Gregorian chant and to what repertoire are the pontifical documents referring with relation to the assembly? Which Gregorian chant is meant when we hear it said: “Gregorian chant is to be recovered; this chant should be made to resound in our churches, etc.”? We ask, then, what Gregorian chant are they talking about?

We run the risk of calling Gregorian chant any melody that is monophonic, in free style, and sung in Latin. Often we do not pause to consider the provenance and the era in which that melody was composed and its function in our celebrations. At times, statements are made that conform neither with the musical facts nor with the results of a serious investigation that has been carried forward in these last years.

In the past, already described above, Gregorian chant was interpreted in a variety of ways and certainly with the best of intentions. The human being needs to find expression in a variety of ways, to seek new forms, to acculturate to one's own environment, and so we have seen the rise of forms and melodies based on Gregorian that are of unquestionable beauty

This does not mean that we must restore to Gregorian those adaptations that were introduced to it by the influence of various historical situations that have followed on one another. We all know that in the 8<sup>th</sup> century Gregorian reached the high point of its splendor, and to this period belong the compositions of the Propers of the Mass and the of Divine Office, composed gradually as the feasts and the liturgical seasons evolved. All of this is attested to in the manuscripts, in open field.

From the 10<sup>th</sup> century on we see, however, the appearance of compositions that do have a Gregorian style, but that present a different melodic line from that of the other chants of the Gregorian repertoire. To this period belong in great part the compositions of the Ordinary of the Mass<sup>38</sup>.

If we pause to examine the characteristics of these two distinct repertoires we can say that Gregorian chant is **monodic**, without any instrumental support at all, with the exception of the vocal support on a chord sung by the *paraphonists*<sup>39</sup>. The fact that it is monodic means that enormous precision is involved in the collective interpretation.

## I. Characteristics and exigencies of Gregorian Chant

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<sup>37</sup> Pius X: “*Tra le sollecitudini*”; Vatican II, SC 116.

<sup>38</sup> *Exception is made of a few Kyries and Glorias of syllabic style that are very ancient indeed and that do have the characteristics of the chant.*

<sup>39</sup> *Already in 7<sup>th</sup> century this way of sustaining and interpreting the chant was very probably in existence.*

The sonority of the Latin language endows the word with considerable force and intensity. It was this language that inspired the anonymous composers of the primitive Gregorian chant. Keep in mind that this was the Latin used now by non-Latin populations, who had introduced a different musicality into the language, based on the accent<sup>40</sup>. It is probably for this reason too that graphic signs were added to promote the perfect pronunciation of certain words which involve a certain vocal difficulty<sup>41</sup>.

Since the sense of the classical Latin meter had also been lost, rhythm comes from Gregorian based on the accent of the word, and thus the metric unit becomes the indivisible syllable. The syllable is sung based on its characteristics and also on that of its position in the melodic-verbal structure, such that it can evolve, without thereby taking on a duration valued proportionally with respect to other syllables.

In contrast, metric music, which is now the common and exclusive heritage of our times, assigns to notes durations proportional to the metric unit.

In Gregorian it is the words, the sentence or the half-sentence which determine the values; these are brought out by the neumatic script. For example in the Hartker manuscript the meaning of the text in its articulation is made clear solely by the added signs which determine the phrasing and a correct style of declamation, since it lacked every type of punctuation (which is however found in the other manuscripts).

The execution of the chants of the proper of the Mass and the Office requires the habit formed through daily choral singing – above and beyond a profound knowledge of the language and of Gregorian music (both of which, as we have said, are now quite foreign to contemporary experience). Without these presuppositions, now quite impossible for an assembly, or even for a non-specialized choir to achieve, one risks falling into ingenuous adaptations.

## 2. Possibility of incorporating Gregorian chants into liturgies today

If one wishes to preserve for even a popular liturgical use the inestimable value of the entire repertoire of Gregorian chant, the assembly must above all be educated to listen<sup>42</sup>. In this way the professionalism of the singers will be able to transmit the spiritual message required for every occasion, for every feast and every liturgical season. In fact, listening does not exclude participation in the liturgical action, even if it can only be one aspect thereof.

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<sup>40</sup> *In the hymnic forms we even have the use of rime.*

<sup>41</sup> *E.g. signs of liquescence.*

<sup>42</sup> *Cf. The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church: Joseph Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, 1985, Ignatius Press, chapter 9.*

With due preparation, monastic choirs are of course able to comply with every required prerequisite for a dignified celebration of the liturgy in Gregorian, transmitting, first to themselves and then to whoever happens to be listening, the profound message of the sung Word, which so comes to inform their whole lives.

In a different, but technically analogous way, Gregorian can become the repertoire of specialized choirs and constitute for them too a form of spiritual experience. Particular cultural environments can promote the development of such choirs.

The assembly, in many ecclesial situations, is habituated to singing pieces which, while having some connection to Gregorian chant, constitute a repertoire now almost always late and of limited value from a liturgical point of view. We have pieces of the Kyriale: Missa De Angelis, a few simple settings of the Kyrie, Sanctus and Agnus Dei<sup>43</sup>, a number of Sequences or Hymns; modern era pieces, such as the (simple) Salve Regina, Tota Pulchra, Tantum ergo, Adoro te devote, etc. In certain cases, the singing of the Vespers of a few feasts. This practice should not be let go, in part because on a few occasions of particular importance or with certain assemblies, this repertoire can still amount to a valid expression of universality, spirituality and link with the tradition that should not be slighted.

On the other hand, this specific repertoire does not necessarily require the same nuances of execution as those of more classical stock, since the pieces in question were probably designed from the start for more popular performance. Even in the paraliturgical celebrations and devotions some of this repertoire, which has become popular, can still have a powerful effect of its own<sup>44</sup>. In certain ecclesial situations, it would be possible to imagine promoting the insertion of a sung Mass in Gregorian with a certain, and specific, participation of the assembly in the chant.

### 3. Application of the spirit of Gregorian chant to musical compositions in the vernacular

#### **Liturgical languages**

The transition from liturgy in Greek (in the *koine*) to that in Latin in about the 4<sup>th</sup> century was a necessary adaptation to the changed politico-cultural situation – the fact that Latin (not classical Latin) is now spoken by all cultivated persons of Europe and of North Africa.

The Second Vatican Council began to operate in the same way when it allowed that the various experiences in the field of liturgical music and popular religious song in the vernacular, already in existence for centuries, should find completion in genuine vernacular liturgies<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> *It is clear to all of us that exception would have to be made of a few Masses of the Kyriale, of ornate style, which were composed exclusively for the schola.*

<sup>44</sup> *See SC, n. 118.*

<sup>45</sup> *SC, n. 36.*

### **New compositions for the repertoire in the vernacular: formation of the various actors**

What legacy should be drawn from the experience and the spirit of Gregorian chant?<sup>46</sup> What directives should be given to contemporary composers and singers? Let us attempt to summarize a few guidelines for those who have to perform the ministry of music in the Church.

a. Of composers, one should demand:

- a profound liturgical spirituality
- respect for the musicality of the language employed
- familiarity with and understanding of the liturgical text
- phrasing closely linked to the word

This presupposes an education of composers such that they acquire a kind of sensitivity that is verbal and of liturgical inspiration. They will of course have to make their own those characteristics of Gregorian chant enumerated above, but, as people of our time, they will also have to take into account the great change we are living through.

The composer should above all keep in mind that his work is for the assembly<sup>47</sup> convoked by God to celebrate the liturgy. This assembly is divided into various components, but in its totality it is a sacrament of God toward the world. The rediscovery of this concept is due to Vatican II and entails a revolution in the way of doing music. Gregorian chant was composed in view of a community of monks or a group of clerics, who constitute a small part of what today we call the assembly. Today the community of reference has changed, and divides into its various components. In the liturgy, these components “dialogue” with each other, through both word and actions. The chant should underscore and facilitate this dialogue, taking into account the characteristics and specific ministries of every component.

b. Of those who interpret the chants, one should expect:

- perfect pronunciation of certain syllables that can easily be lost
- careful enunciation of the final syllable of a word
- openness to the entrance of the Spirit with the song into one's heart and soul at every moment of the rite

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<sup>46</sup> “...It requires poetic and compositional creativity to rouse the hearts of the faithful to the most profound significance of the text of which the music is the instrument. This applies also to traditional music (in the different countries of the world), for which the Council expressed great esteem, with the demand that “a suitable place is to be given to it, not only in forming their religious sense but also in adapting worship to their native genius...” (SC, n.119).

<sup>47</sup> From now on the term “assembly” will have its full theological-liturgical signification and will not only designate non-clerics, non-choir members, etc., as it did in the remainder of this work.

Those who perform the music must, then, likewise prepare themselves to assume their role in the chant. This applies to priests, to cantors and to all who participate in the celebration in virtue of any role whatever.

For all, even if to varying degrees, a technical preparation should be provided, which attends to the exigencies of the sung word which we have seen to be characteristic of Gregorian; but this is not enough. In Gregorian, the sung word was for monks the primary means by which to cultivate the conversation between God and man. The assembly of today should be aware that liturgical chant is still the principal way to cultivate dialogue with God, and through Him, with the world.

c. A final word for the celebrant

The one who presides at the celebration has the momentous task of calling forth a compelling dialogue with the concelebrating assembly (this he must do whether he is celebrating in Latin or in the vernacular), such that the assembly can with equal conviction respond or assent with faith to the word offered by the Priest in *Persona Christi*. This word, when offered with song, has a greater expressive and spiritual force.

Thus, the Liturgy will be not only the summit of our spiritual life, but also the inexhaustible **font** that will fully satisfy every moment of our existence.