

ARTICLES

Toward a Definition of Liturgical Chant

By Fr. Mark Daniel Kirby

SUNG THEOLOGY



liturgical theology, insofar as it springs from the “proletarian, communitarian and quotidian”¹ enactment of the liturgy, is indissociable from sacred song.²

It is only natural that the worship of God is to be expressed in song. Inasmuch as the Christian by his baptism is a “transformed” being, so his praise of God in the worship of the Church should reflect this transformation. His praise cannot be reduced to the “language of this world,” stripped of all balance, rhythm, and harmony. The word of God and man’s response to it certainly is not just the reflection of an “ordinary” conversation. Rather it is a word charged with emotion and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. As soon as the word becomes identified with the contents of its message, it calls for order (rhythm) and melos (arrangement of pitch), i.e., a musical form. In this way, the perfect word, the fully developed word, most always has the nature of song.³

Liturgical theology, being “the perfect word, the fully developed word”⁴—from God, to God, and about God—finds, in some way, its truest voice in sacred song. *Theologia prima* is sung theology.

PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

“Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) have constituted an integral part of Christian worship from apostolic times. Kevin Irwin argues that the liturgical arts, including music, are “intrinsic to the liturgy and that their use is required for the integrity of the act of worship.”⁵ John Meyendorff qualifies sacred art as “inseparable from theology,” deeming it intrinsic

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¹ Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology: The Hale Memorial Lectures of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1981* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984), p. 93.

² Maxime Kovalevsky speaks of “la force sacralisante et pédagogique du chant qui, dans toute la tradition liturgique authentique, est le support de la parole et non son ornement.” This is, he argues, the tradition respected in the Orthodox Church where one knows not religious music but only liturgical chant. Chant is an integral part of the Orthodox liturgy; a liturgy stripped of chant is inconceivable. See Maxime Kovalevsky, *Retrouver la source oubliée* (Paris: Editions Présence Orthodoxe, 1984), p. 190. Annibale Bugnini, speaking from the vantage point of one intimately involved in the post-Vatican II reform of the Roman Rite, says pointedly that, “The sung form of the liturgy is the normal form.” Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 911.

³ David Drillock, “Music in the Worship of the Church,” *Orthodox Church Music*, 1 (1983), p.12.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994), p. 219.

to *theologia prima*, the enactment of the liturgy itself, for the liturgy “involves the whole man, without despising any functions of the soul or of the body, and without leaving any of them to the realm of the secular.”⁶ Maxime Kovalevsky, for his part, holds that within the general domain of art, liturgical art occupies a particular place; it mediates communication between the faithful and the Divine Transcendent, being, at the same time, a vehicle by which the Divine Transcendent intervenes in the life of the faithful.⁷ Nicolas Ozoline emphasizes the eschatological vocation of the arts: “Without any doubt, the liturgy represents for us the ultimate vocation of the arts, because the meaning of their common effort—their function—is to suggest the anticipation of the Kingdom.”⁸

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The root of these affirmations is anthropological as well as theological. Human nature, the very nature assumed by the Word of God, is a “substantial unity of matter and spirit, with mysterious but real reciprocal influence of one part on the other.”⁹ The Incarnation reveals the face of God in human form and the voice of God in human language. “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John 1:18). Liturgical iconography and liturgical chant, in their Eastern and Western forms, proceed from the same theological principle. Analogies between eye and ear, face and voice, image and chant, are useful insofar as they invite one to seek and to discover their origin in a common source: the Incarnation as the spring of the whole sacramental economy.

Rooted in the Incarnation and in the law of sacramentality established by it, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) participate in the “descending” and “ascending” mediation of the God-Man, the High Priest Jesus Christ.

The liturgy . . . is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. It involves the presentation of man’s sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible by the senses and its accomplishment in ways appropriate to each of these signs. In its full public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and his members.¹⁰

The teleology of Christ’s eternal priesthood is at once soteriological and doxological. The sacred signs used by the church serve this double end. Sacred song, harmoniously and rightly integrated into the wider “complexus of sacred signs”¹¹ constitutive of the liturgy, is a sacramental

⁶ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), p. 52.

⁷ Maxime Kovalevsky, “Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne: perennité de ses principes dans la diversité de ses manifestations,” in *Liturgies de l’Eglise particulière et liturgie de l’Eglise universelle* (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1976), pp. 183–184.

⁸ “Sans aucun doute, la liturgie représente pour nous l’ultime vocation des arts, car le sens de leur commun effort—their fonction—consiste à suggérer l’anticipation du Royaume”; Nicolas Ozoline, “L’icone, analogie et complémentarité de l’image par rapport au geste et à la parole liturgique,” in *Gestes et paroles dans les diverses familles liturgiques*, ed. Constantin Andronikof (Rome: BELS 14, 1978), 170.

⁹ Cipriano Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, tr. Leonard J. Doyle and W.A. Jurgens (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 55.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7.

¹¹ See Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 43–69.

embodiment of the mediation of Christ's priesthood. Functioning in concert with other signs perceptible to the senses, sacred music and, in particular, the art of liturgical chant, carries the saving initiative of God into the worshipping assembly; at the same time, it mediates the assembly's glorification of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. For Cyprian Vagaggini,

The end of art is at the service of a higher end, the liturgy's own end: the Church's sanctification and worship in Christ. Art, in its own way, must help the liturgy's end to be better expressed and better realized, by disposing souls to that sanctification and worship.¹²

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value.

Among the art forms appropriated by the liturgy for the sanctification of the faithful and the praise of God, liturgical chant holds a place of theological pre-eminence. I propose to explore the

theological pre-eminence of liturgical chant by pursuing the conversation opened in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. There, sacred music is accorded its own chapter, distinct from, and preceding, the chapter that treats sacred art and furnishings.¹³ Its opening sentences are seminal.

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.¹⁴

Sacred song is, therefore, "intrinsic to the liturgy";¹⁵ it belongs to the very fabric of the *lex orandi* and offers the liturgical theologian one of the church's richest sources of *theologia prima*.

FROM SACRED MUSIC TO LITURGICAL CHANT

Igor Stravinsky makes a distinction between music and song:

It is customary to distinguish instrumental forms from vocal forms. The instrumental element enjoys an autonomy that the vocal element does not enjoy, the latter being bound to words. . . . From the moment song assumes as its calling the expression of the meaning of discourse, it leaves the realm of music and has nothing more in common with it.¹⁶

Stravinsky intimates that the tie binding the vocal form to words is a musical liability. The vocation of liturgical chant, however, is precisely "the expression of the meaning of discourse." The liturgy invests the words of human discourse with a certain sacramentality, and this, by reason of their referral to the Word "that was in the beginning with God," and "through whom all things were made" (John 1:2–3).

¹² Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 51.

¹³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Ch. 6, "De Musica Sacra," ¶112–121.

¹⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶112.

¹⁵ Irwin, *Context and Text*, 219.

¹⁶ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, tr. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 45.

As this study focuses, not on instrumental music, nor on song extraneous to the texts of the liturgy itself, the term *liturgical chant* will henceforth be used to describe any monodic treatment of liturgical texts, executed by the human voice, and not requiring instrumental accompaniment.¹⁷ Of all the sacred signs constitutive of the liturgy, chant is the one most closely bound to the symbolic Word:

The saving Word of God is communicated to men by word of mouth and by symbolic action or sacramental rite. And both fall under the category of Word of God, or conversely in patristic thought, both fall under the category of sacrament.¹⁸

Together, the two realities of word and symbolic action comprise the *lex orandi*. Liturgical chant, therefore, has a direct bearing upon the *lex credendi*. The word, in the context of the enactment of the liturgy, is always a sacramental word, an efficacious sign of the presence of Christ, and of the operations of the Holy Spirit, within the church. The same sacramental word is the means by which the church unites herself to Christ's glorification of the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

Theologia prima inheres, not only in the sacramental word proclaimed, repeated, and prayed in the assembly, but also in the musical elaboration of that word. The intonation by which the word strikes the ears, penetrates the heart, and comes to flower on worshippers' lips is a constitutive element of liturgical theology.

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The true sense of Scripture always lies beyond, beyond the words, the concepts, and the events which are but signs in which faith detects the presence of the Only Son. For this very reason, the sacred texts invite the musical development which will make all that is unutterable in them an audible undertone.¹⁹

The "expression of the meaning of discourse" by the musical development of the liturgical text suggests and, often, unlocks its fuller theological, and spiritual, meaning.

¹⁷ Some English translations of documents on the liturgy have used *song* rather than *chant* to translate the Latin *cantus*. This may reflect a systematic preference for Anglo-Saxon words as opposed to words of Latin derivation. It may also evidence a desire to avoid certain "sacral" connotations of the word *chant*. The word *song*, on the other hand, has secular connotations. For the purposes of this work, *chant* has been judged the more adequate translation of *cantus*.

Jorge A. Cardinal Medina Estévez, Prefect of the Roman Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, in a letter dated March 16, 2002 to the presidents of the Conferences of Bishops in whose territories the liturgy is habitually celebrated in English, made the following related observation: "'Opening Song' does not translate 'Cantus ad introitum' or 'Antiphona ad introitum' as intended by the rites. The Latin is able to express the musical processional beginning of the Liturgy that accompanies the entrance of the priest and ministers, while 'Opening Song' could just as well designate the beginning number of a secular musical performance."

¹⁸ Anscar Chupungco, "Symbolism and Liturgical Celebration," in *Symbolisme et théologie* (Rome: Editrice Anselmiana, 1974), p. 180.

¹⁹ Maurice Zundel, *The Splendour of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), pp. 284–285.

The beleaguered 1967 Roman Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, Musicam Sacram, offers a broad and hardly satisfactory definition of sacred music.

For the purposes of this study, *liturgical chant* must be distinguished from other forms of sacred music, notably from *religious music* and *popular religious song*. Liturgical chant admits of a vast variety of forms, languages, and particular

historical inculturations and developments. Of these, the Latin chants of the current *Graduale Romanum*, *Graduale Simplex*, *Ordo Missae in Cantu*, *Liber Hymnarius*, and other liturgical books offer a choice, drawn principally from the Gregorian, Ambrosian, and Mozarabic traditions.

The beleaguered 1967 Roman Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, *Musicam Sacram*,²⁰ offers a broad, tentative, and hardly satisfactory definition of sacred music by identifying it with “that which, being created for the celebration of divine worship, is endowed with a certain sincerity of form,” but also with “Gregorian chant, sacred polyphony in its various forms both ancient and modern, sacred music for the organ and other approved instruments, and sacred popular music, be it liturgical or simply religious.”²¹ This definition reflects a compromise between two opposing factions: those who, holding to the “ministerial function”²² of sacred music advanced in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, sought to foster the collective participation of the assembly in the sung liturgy; and those who, defending sacred music as “art,” feared, above all, the loss of the treasured repertoire of the Roman *Cappelle*.²³ Marked by this fundamental divergence, *Musicam Sacram* retreated, in some points, from the more pastoral vision put forward in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:

Sacred music is to be considered the more holy, the more closely connected it is with the liturgical action, whether making the prayer more pleasing, promoting unity of minds, or conferring greater solemnity upon the sacred rites. The Church, indeed, approves of all forms of true art which have the requisite qualities, and admits them into divine worship.²⁴

The conciliar text stresses the intimate connection between sacred music and the liturgical action, and states that the “sacredness” of the former derives precisely from the liturgical action. *Musicam Sacram*’s inclusion of the “simply religious” signals a post-conciliar discomfiture.

Joseph G lineau, writing in 1962, used *sacred music* as a generic term; he applied it to all music which, by its inspiration, object, destination or use has a connection with faith.²⁵ G lineau’s neutral definition lacks any explicit reference to liturgical worship. It does, nonetheless, provide a stable platform, and so lends itself to further elaboration.

²⁰ See Bugnini’s account of what he calls, “the instruction’s Way of the Cross,” in *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 900–911.

²¹ “*Musicam Sacram*, On Music in the Liturgy, 5 March 1967,” in *Documents on the Liturgy* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 1294, n. 4.

²² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶112.

²³ The *Cappelle* were prestigious Roman choirs dedicated, in a special way, to the preservation and performance of ancient and modern polyphony.

²⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶112.

²⁵ Joseph G lineau, *Chant et musique dans le culte chr tien* (Paris: Editions Fleurus, 1962), p. 73.

Sacred music includes *religious music*: compositions for instruments or voice inspired by religious sentiment, and evoking the same in its hearers. One can perform religious music in the concert hall. Although religious music sometimes draws its inspiration from liturgical texts, it is not essentially related to the liturgical action, nor is it destined for use in, and by, the liturgical assembly.

Religious music may serve as a commentary on the liturgy; it may lead to the liturgical action, or flow out of it. At times, religious music may be performed at the liturgy or in conjunction with it. It is not, however, intrinsically ordered to the enactment of the liturgy itself, and can be performed independently of any sacred rite.

Religious music may serve as a commentary on the liturgy.

Popular religious song is a component of every culture. It is a wide term, embracing the treasures of Lutheran and Anglican hymnody, the Negro Spiritual, and the more recent collections of devotional hymnody and contemporary compositions. Popular religious song rarely borrows its words and inspiration from the liturgy itself. It arises outside of the liturgy, and favors subjective content over objective biblical and liturgical texts. Liturgical chants reveal their full meaning only within their proper ritual context. Popular religious songs, in contrast, can be sung independently of the liturgical action, and outside the ritual context, without suffering a diminishment of their essential meaning.

Elements of popular religious song, especially hymns, are sometimes adopted as a temporary or even permanent replacement for the chants of the liturgy itself. This practice, a departure from Roman Catholic tradition, needs to be critically evaluated and remedied.²⁶ While, in some instances, popular religious song may complement or embellish the celebration of the liturgy, it remains, at least, something added to the liturgical chants proper to the ritual action and, in many instances, substituted for them. Hymns and other elements of popular religious song should not compete with, or replace, the proper chants native to the liturgy itself.²⁷

Liturgical chant is a genre of sacred music distinct from the categories of religious music and popular religious song discussed above. Liturgical chant is indigenous to the earliest enactments of Christian rites. Allusions to such singing are found in the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin Martyr.²⁸ In attempting to trace the origins of Christian liturgical chant, scholars have argued the plausibility of a certain dependence of both Byzantine and Gregorian chants on a common source.²⁹ Wellesz points to the chants of the churches of Antioch and Jerusalem, themselves derived from the chants of Jewish synagogal worship, as that common source.³⁰

²⁶ See Irwin's discussion of the problem in *Context and Text*, 235–246.

²⁷ It is not a question of singing at the liturgy but, rather, of singing the liturgy. See Sacred Congregation of Rites, "Cantare la Messa e non cantare durante la Messa," *Notitiae*, 5 (1969), 406.

²⁸ See James McKinnon, ed., *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 18–21.

²⁹ See Carl H. Kraeling and Lucetta Mowry, "Music in the Bible," and Eric Werner, "The Music of Post-Biblical Judaism," in Egon Wellesz, ed., *Ancient and Oriental Music*, *The New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 1, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 283–312, 313–335. For a point of view reflecting more recent scholarship, see David Hiley, *Western Plainchant* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 484–487.

³⁰ Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 43.

It was from the Synagogue that the Christian communities took over the tradition of reciting, chanting, and singing, as more fitting for their simple service than the elaborate rite of the Temple, with its great choirs and instrumental music.³¹

By the fourth century, liturgical chant had become pervasive in Christian worship. Every word pronounced in church had a "singing quality."³² "In using the term 'chant' ancient ordos had reference to the entire service, which was thought of in all its parts as a singing of praise to God."³³

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Cantillation, a form of heightened speech or *ekphonesis*, half-way between recitation and singing, became in the Christian liturgy, as in Jewish worship, the normal vehicle of biblical readings, psalms, prayers, and litanies.³⁴ In contrast to the simpler forms of cantillation, more elaborate forms of chant also evolved, ranging from the syllabic and semi-ornate style to the melismatic.

By the fourth century, the fully sung liturgy, with its roots in Semitic chant, had become normative in both East and West. Simeon of Thessalonika bears witness to this tradition. "All catholic Churches in the whole world have observed it (the Sung Service) from the beginning and have uttered nothing in worship except in song."³⁵

Without dwelling on the controversies concerning the origins of Christian liturgical chant, it is both possible and useful to formulate a negative description of it.³⁶

Liturgical chant does not "accompany" the liturgical action; it is an integral part of it. It is not an embellishment of the celebration, superimposed on a rite deemed complete, adequate, and sufficient without it.

Music is not a adjunct to worship. It is the way the Church worships. Music is neither supplementary to, nor an enrichment of worship. It is the expression of

³¹ Wellesz, *Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 34. David Hiley contests the assumption that there existed an effective continuity between Jewish and early Christian worship; see his *Western Plainchant*, 484–487. Margot Fasler and Peter Jeffery differ from Wellesz in holding that the earliest Christian musical tradition developed not so much from the synagogue as from the practice of ritual singing at communal meals; see Margot Fasler and Peter Jeffery, "Christian Liturgical Music from the Bible to the Renaissance," in *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, ed. Lawrence A. Hofman and Janet Walton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 84–86.

³² Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminar Press), p. 165.

³³ Schmemmann, *Liturgical Theology*, 165.

³⁴ The tones provided for the orations, lessons, gospel, and Eucharistic Prayers in the revised *Graduale* and in the *Ordo Missae in Cantu* are examples of liturgical cantillation. See *Graduale Romanum* (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, 1974), 798–821; and *Ordo Missae in Cantu* (Solesmes: Abbaye Saint Pierre de Solesmes, 1975). Corresponding tones for the liturgy in English are given in Paul F. Ford, *By Flowing Waters, Chant for the Liturgy, A Collection of Unaccompanied Song for Assemblies, Cantors, and Choirs* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 329–416.

³⁵ Simeon of Thessalonika quoted in Schmemmann, *Liturgical Theology*, 168.

³⁶ For a full discussion of the origins of liturgical chant, see James McKinnon, *The Advent Project: The Later-Seventh Century Creation of the Roman Mass Proper* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000), pp. 19–34.

worship itself. It is not an accompaniment, a background, a preparation, a moodsetter, a filler, or any such thing, and it is certainly not a *divertimento*.³⁷

Unlike religious music and popular religious song, liturgical chant cannot stand independently of the total liturgical action without its meaning becoming obscured. The meaning of a Sanctus, for example, is essentially theological and liturgical, not musical. Its theological and liturgical meaning is revealed in the wider context of the whole Eucharistic Prayer. A gradual chant is related to the hearing of the Word of God to which it responds. The Alleluia refers to the Holy Gospel which it welcomes and announces.

Described positively, chant is purely vocal. It arises from the words of the liturgical texts and cannot be separated from them. "The origin of the melody is found in the word."³⁸ Lossky writes that, "In the Orthodox tradition, both Eastern and Western, the music is provided by chant. Consequently, it is closely linked to the word; it is at the service of the word; it is the vehicle of the word."³⁹

Unlike religious music and popular religious song, liturgical chant cannot stand independently of the total liturgical action without its meaning becoming obscured.

One . . . would then, of course, have to add that "word" in the biblical sense (and also the Greek sense) is more than language and speech, namely, creative reality. It is also certainly more than mere thought and mere spirit. It is self-interpreting, self-communicating spirit. At all times the word-orientation, the rationality, the intelligibility, and the sobriety of the Christian liturgy have been derived from this spirit and given to liturgical music as its basic law. It would, however, be a narrow and false interpretation if one understood by this that all liturgical music should be referred to the text in a strict way. . . . For "word" in the sense of the Bible is more than "text," and understanding reaches further than the banal understanding of what is immediately clear to everyone.⁴⁰

Chant effectively refers the words of liturgical rites to the Word from whom they flow and to whom they return, and, in so doing, irrigates all of life with the mystery that the liturgy makes present. The identifying function of liturgical chant is, then, to dilate the sacred text and render it more penetrating "until we make contact with the presence with which the texts are filled."⁴¹ The analysis of liturgical chant as music *tout court* will fall short of the mark, for

³⁷ Sergei Glagolev, "An Introduction to the Interpretation of Liturgical Music," *Orthodox Church Music*, 1 (1983), 25.

³⁸ Marie Pierik, *Dramatic and Symbolic Elements in Gregorian Chant* (New York: Desclée, 1963), p. 13. Pierik's use of the word melody is technically inexact. Stravinsky writes: "The term melody in the scientific meaning of the word, is applied to the top voice in polyphony, thus differentiating melody from the unaccompanied cantilena that is called *monody*," Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 41. That being said for the sake of technical precision, in this work *melody* and *melodic* will occasionally be used as Pierik has used them: to refer to the unaccompanied cantilena that characterizes chant.

³⁹ Vladimir Lossky, "Some Thoughts on Liturgical Music," *Orthodox Church Music* 1 (1983), p. 5.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, tr. Martha M. Matesich (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 120–121.

⁴¹ Zundel, *Splendour of the Liturgy*, 78.

while a chant may be discussed and dissected . . . as an object of study in itself, it must not be forgotten that it was composed in the creation of a complete way of life, the performance of the opus Dei, the work of God.⁴²

Religious music and popular religious song open a window into the soul of individual composers, often focusing on the composer's personal experience, or subjective insights. In contrast, James McKinnon evokes,

. . . the context in which the Roman Mass Proper came into being was the daily Office psalmody of the monks attached to the principal basilicas. Resident monastic choirs were active for more than a century before the schola cantorum came into existence; their "continuous" psalmody was heard for hours each day in the churches, frequently in the presence of pope and clergy.⁴³

This suggests that the proper chants of the Roman Mass, for example, were conceived and elaborated in a context of pre-existing liturgical chant and, notably, of psalmody; they emerged from

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within a tradition and developed in organic continuity with it.⁴⁴ Liturgical chant hands on, not the isolated compositional efforts of any one *schola cantorum* but, rather, the cumulative contemplative experience of worshipping Christians received and variously reinterpreted in function of the liturgy's organic evolution through the ages. As

"sung theology," liturgical chant, in the diversity of its forms, celebrates and actualizes the Paschal Mystery of Christ from one generation to the next, enriching each successive singing of the unchanging Mystery with new resonances.

THREE ATTRIBUTES OF LITURGICAL CHANT

In an article that appeared in 1976, Maxime Kovalevsky⁴⁵ argued that beneath the many varieties of liturgical expression, determined by differences in culture and language, subsists a

⁴² Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, 7.

⁴³ McKinnon, *Advent Project*, 83.

⁴⁴ "However one might assess the role of monasticism in the phenomenon, it cannot be denied that the closing decades of the fourth century were a time of unprecedented popularity for the singing of psalms. There is no evidence that anything so pervasive and intense existed before this time, nor that anything quite like it would be witnessed again in the history of Christianity. Its literary manifestation was an extraordinary series of extended encomiums of psalmody from the pen of authors including Athanasius, Basil, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Niceta of Remesiana. . . . The general popularity of psalmody in the later fourth century provides the necessary background to understand better the establishment of psalmody in the contemporary Mass. . . . For centuries to come the celebration of Mass without the singing of psalms would be somehow incomplete"; McKinnon, *Advent Project*, 39.

⁴⁵ Maxime Kovalevsky (1903–1988) was born in St. Petersburg and arrived in France in 1920. Mathematician, theologian, liturgist, iconographer, musicologist, composer, choir master, and professor of the history of the liturgy, of sacred art, and of comparative liturgies, he left behind a considerable body of original polyphonic compositions characterized by a faithful and humble respect for the living liturgical tradition of the church in East and West.

certain unity.⁴⁶ Kovalevsky located this underlying unity at the level of musical structures common to the most primitive liturgical traditions of Christianity.⁴⁷ Ultimately, Kovalevsky's theory of an underlying unity emerges at the level of the three articulated theological principles discussed below: breath, interiority, and freedom.

Music is an analogical art. Unlike the plastic arts which, by their very nature, imply an imitation of natural forms and colors, music translates sensible perceptions and experiences into sound. Of all the arts, music is the one most capable of manifesting the interior dimension of human experience; it wields a formidable evocative power and is capable of stirring and calling forth the whole spectrum of human emotions.

The evanescence of music distinguishes it from the other arts. Architecture, sculpture, and painting are characterized by a relative permanence; music is a succession of fugitive sounds, each one organically linked to the next by means of memory. Unlike the painting and the sculpture which subsist materially after their creation, of music there remains only what the memory has garnered. Stravinsky writes:

The plastic arts are presented to us in space: we receive an over-all impression before we discover details little by little and at our leisure. But music is based on temporal succession and requires alertness of memory. Consequently music is a chronologic art, as painting is a spatial art. Music presupposes before all else a certain organization in time, a chronometry.⁴⁸

For discourse to have meaning, memory must assume the task of linking together the succession of words. Liturgical chant, being heightened discourse, engages the memory of both singer and hearer, becoming a disclosure, in time, of the timeless mystery, a contemplative unfolding of the Word. "The unfolding of your Word gives light, and teaches the simple" (Ps. 118:130).

Music is an analogical art.

The intimate connection between music and memory links both the performance and the audition of music to the spiritual dimension of human nature. Impregnating the consciousness by means of the memory, music reaches into the depths of the psyche, and rouses the most diverse human potentialities. Music is always an act of co-creation achieved by the composer, the performer, and the auditor. For this reason, chant is among the most important means of the "full, conscious, and actual participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," p. 183.

⁴⁷ "En effet l'apparence hétéroclite des rites chrétiens présents à l'oreille et à l'oeil de l'observateur extérieur recouvre des structures indéniablement communes remontant aux sources mêmes du christianisme. . . . L'art liturgique garde, dans l'ensemble, une allure de simplicité relative, et un caractère pédagogique qui favorise l'assimilation progressive et la conservation fidèle des affirmations de la religion donnée. Techniquement—c'est là non une certitude théorique, mais une constatation historique—cet art se servira, pour parvenir à ses fins, d'un certain 'formulisme': des formules plastiques ou sonores, ciselées et portées au cours des siècles à leur perfection dernière, combinées entre elles avec une variété infinie, circuleront à travers toutes les formes de l'art liturgique en lui assurant un caractère de pérennité, d'universalité et de variété dans la cohérence. Ces formules créent l'armature de la trame qui fait le lien entre les générations." Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," pp. 183–194.

⁴⁸ Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶14.

The specific form of ritual music is determined by the metaphysical system of the religion it serves. Kovalevsky observes that a religion worshipping the forces of nature will prefer wind or percussion instruments to the human voice, and primitive rhythms to oratorical ones. The ancient Greeks preferred a sung poetry accompanied by isolated notes on stringed instruments as expressive of the harmony between human reason, and the ordered forces of the universe.⁵⁰ The oral preaching of the Gospel, rooted in the Semitic understanding of the word as creative presence and event (*dâbâr*), contributed to the emergence of a specifically Christian liturgical chant marked by three attributes: breath, interiority, and freedom.⁵¹

BREATH

The breath of God is the very transmission of life. "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The breath of God is indissociable from the word of God, and the word of God cannot be uttered save in a communication of the breath of God.

The specific form of ritual music is determined by the metaphysical system of the religion it serves.

By breathing and by speaking, the human person, fully alive, expresses likeness to God. Breath, life, and word constitute an inseparable triad in the divine economy of creation and redemption. "The words that I have spoken to you, says Jesus, are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

The Christian tradition invests breath and word with a Trinitarian significance.⁵² Human breath and human utterance, especially within the liturgical assembly, become symbolic of the Spirit and Word of God. For Saint Irenaeus, "the Spirit manifests the Word, but the Word articulates the Spirit."⁵³ By means of the Spirit and the Word, the Father reveals himself. Again, by means of the Spirit and the Word, the Father draws his human creature into the circle of divine life. Similarly, by means of breath and word, the Christian "confesses with his lips" (Rom. 10:10), "calls upon the name of the Lord" (Rom. 10:13), and "sings psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). The Spirit and the Word together constitute liturgical chant's divine archetype. Breath and word, then, are the indispensable human components of liturgical chant.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 186. For a technical exposition of the musical theory of the ancient Greeks, see Isabel Henderson, "Ancient Greek Music," in *Ancient and Oriental Music*, 336–403; see also Wellesz, *Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, pp. 46–122.

⁵¹ "La révolution chrétienne, en effet, ouvre à l'ensemble des peuples méditerranéens, et ensuite à toute l'humanité, une vision rénovée du monde. C'est la vision biblique avec toute sa profondeur sémitique traditionnelle, rajeunie et transformée par la prédication orale de la Bonne Nouvelle de libération et de résurrection." Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," p. 186.

⁵² "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps. 32:6). In this verse Eusebius, Basil, Athanasius, and Jerome, among others, see an image of the Trinity. See Claude Jean-Nesmy, *La tradition médite le psautier chrétien* (Paris: Editions Téqui, 1973), p. 137.

⁵³ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, tr. Joseph P. Smith (Westminster: Newman Press, 1952), p. 51.

⁵⁴ "L'homme est créé de la terre, mais animé par le souffle de Dieu et, grâce à ce souffle, il est l'image de Dieu. D'où l'extrême importance du souffle, synonyme d'esprit, et son rôle de véhiculer des paroles sacrées"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 186.

INTERIORITY

Liturgical chant originates in the Word, but germinates in silence, and in the secret of the heart. The psalmist prays, “teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (Ps. 50:6), before asking, “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise” (Ps. 50:15). Paul F. Ford writes that, “the movement is first from the Word outside to the Word inside, from ears to heart.”⁵⁵ The Word, descending from above, is received, held, and hidden within, before taking flight heavenward in “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16).

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secret of the heart.*

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isa. 55:10–11).

Liturgical chant, quickened by the descending Word, erupts from within, like “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Its vital principle is interior; its origin in the “sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26) of the Spirit’s intercession for the saints. Robert Hugh Benson writes that

Music and its relation to man’s inner nature, has not yet been adequately considered. All other arts are imitative or descriptive: music is creative. Painting imitates colours: not so music, a bird’s song, or thunder. Music, it may well be, rises from a spring within man himself, and if imitative at all is imitative of something beyond the world of sense.⁵⁶

Unlike the music of the ancient Greeks which sought to harmonize itself with the external forces of the universe, Christian liturgical chant begins in “the hidden part”⁵⁷ in the secret place where the Word attunes the human spirit to the Spirit of God.⁵⁸

FREEDOM

The preaching of the Gospel links freedom to truth. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31–32). In the Christian dispensation, knowledge of the truth is a gift freely given by God in Christ, and assimilated progressively by the believer under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The place of this progressive assimilation by “continuing in the word,” is the cyclical and repetitive enactment of the liturgy.

⁵⁵ Ford, *Flowing Waters*, xvi.

⁵⁶ Quoted by C. C. Martindale in *The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson*, vol. II (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1916), p. 344.

⁵⁷ “In occulto sapientiam manifestasti mihi” (Ps. 50:6).

⁵⁸ “Le royaume des cieux n’est ni un lieu ni une loi extérieure, il est à l’intérieur de nous. Aucune forme extérieure ne peut donc entièrement déterminer notre vie intérieure”; Kovalevsky, “Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne,” 186.

The word, says Abraham Joshua Heschel, is dark. This is the task of him who prays: to kindle a light in the word. Humbly we must approach both the word and the chant. We must never forget that the word is deeper than our thought, that the song is more sublime than our voice.⁵⁹

Singing the liturgy, the heart feeds upon truth, and so grows in freedom.⁶⁰ The spiritual resonance of Christian liturgical chant is proportionate to the subject's inner adhesion to the truth it proclaims. "A word has a soul, and we must learn how to gain insights into its life. Words are commitments, not only the subject matter for aesthetic reflection."⁶¹ Liturgical chant, by inviting commitment to the word, becomes a transforming encounter with Christ, sent to proclaim release to captives and to set at liberty those who are oppressed (cf. Luke 4:18). At the same time, by confronting both singers and hearers with the Word of truth, liturgical chant is an agent of ongoing spiritual liberation or conversion of life.⁶²

Breath, interiority, and freedom emanate from the heart of the Gospel, and resonate in every enactment of the liturgy. To sustain and communicate these realities in the midst of the Christian

people, a new ministerial art was born, an indispensable complement of apostolic preaching: Christian liturgical chant.⁶³ In response to the exigencies of the developing liturgy, Christian liturgical chant, in both form and performance, came to be associated with a certain number of identifying characteristics: (1) the

Singing the liturgy, the heart feeds upon truth, and so grows in freedom.

human voice as instrument, (2) chant as sung speech, (3) the objective delivery of the sacred text, (4) chant as holy and hallowing, and, finally, (5) chant as a means to "that full, conscious, and actual participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy."⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966), p. 251.

⁶⁰ Freedom here corresponds to Cassian's *purity of heart*; see John Cassian, *Conferences*, I, 6–7, tr. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 39. By associating growth in inner freedom to the work of liturgical chant, the ascetical and aesthetical aspects of the liturgy, often seen in antinomy, are synthesized in the liturgy, the primary locus of personal and corporate conversion.

⁶¹ Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 249.

⁶² "La vérité (justesse) nous rend libres. Cette vérité n'est ni naturelle ni intellectuelle. C'est un don accordé d'en haut et assimilé vitalement, progressivement, comme une nourriture par l'être total. Le centre vital de l'homme n'est pas le cerveau mais le 'coeur,' l'être global"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 186.

⁶³ "Les documents historiques et les témoignages des Pères des premiers siècles sont concordants pour affirmer que, sans hésitation, l'Eglise est amenée à assigner des buts précis à sa musique: exprimer des démarches intérieures de l'homme sans intermédiaire mécanique; *soutenir, préciser, et sanctifier* la parole; *libérer* les participants au culte des contingences du monde extérieur pour les rendre *disponibles* à l'action de grace; favoriser *l'assimilation* et la *remémoration* de l'enseignement. Ces buts imposeront tout naturellement le choix des matériaux mis en oeuvre dans l'élaboration de la musique liturgique chrétienne"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 186–187.

⁶⁴ "Valde cupit Mater Ecclesia ut fideles universi ad plenam illam, consciam atque actuosam liturgicarum celebrationum participationem ducantur, quae ad ipsius Liturgiae natura postulatur et ad quam populus christianus 'genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis' (1 Petr. 2:9; cf. 2: 4–5), vi Baptismatis ius habet et officium," *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶14.

FIVE IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF LITURGICAL CHANT

THE HUMAN VOICE

In the liturgy, the human voice is irreplaceable.⁶⁵ “In no other way does man reveal himself so completely as in the way he sings. For the voice of a person, particularly when in song, is the soul in its full nakedness.”⁶⁶ Only the human voice, a coincidence of breath and word, can express directly the inner movements of the heart.⁶⁷ Clement of Alexandria offers a profoundly theological justification for the absolute primacy accorded the human voice in Christian worship:

The Word of God, scorning the lyre and cithara as lifeless instruments, and having rendered harmonious by the Holy Spirit both this cosmos and even man the microcosm, made up of body and soul—he sings to God on his

In the liturgy, the human voice is irreplaceable.

many-voiced instrument and he sings to man, himself an instrument: “You are my cithara, my aulos and my temple,” a cithara because of harmony, and aulos because of spirit, and a temple because of the word, so that the first might strum, the second might breathe, and the third might encompass the Lord. . . . The Lord made man a beautiful breathing instrument after his own image; certainly he is himself an all harmonious instrument of God, well-tuned and holy, the transcendental wisdom, the heavenly Word.⁶⁸

The human person, created in the image and likeness of the Word, is, like the Word, “a beautiful breathing instrument,” destined by the Father “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6).⁶⁹

⁶⁵ “Seule la voix humaine (le souffle-esprit) est jugée capable d’exprimer directement l’être intérieur, la ‘pensée du coeur.’ La musique sera donnée purement vocale”; Kovalevsky, “Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne,” 187.

⁶⁶ Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 251–252.

⁶⁷ Paul F. Ford intuits this in speaking of “song supported by wonderfully resonant buildings, so that even and perhaps especially when it was unaccompanied, its simplicity conveyed the words right down into the heart.” Ford, *Flowing Waters*, xix.

⁶⁸ Clement of Alexandria, “Protrepticus,” in McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 30.

⁶⁹ This same theological anthropology is implicit in more recent liturgical law’s defense of the irreplaceable value of human breath and human word in worship: “The use of mechanical instruments and devices—such as the ‘player’ organ, phonograph, radio, tape recorder or wire recorder, and other similar devices—is absolutely forbidden in liturgical services . . . even if their use is limited to transmitting sermons or sacred music, or substituting for the singing of the faithful or even supporting it”; Sacred Congregation for Rites, Instruction, *De musica sacra et sacra liturgia*, September 3, 1958, in: *The Liturgy, Papal Teachings*, ed. Benedictine Monks (Boston: Saint Paul Editions, 1962), 603–604. The same position was reiterated after the Second Vatican Council: “The Church wishes at all costs to maintain fidelity to that ‘worship in spirit and in truth’ that the Lord Jesus has initiated. That brings in human beings, in their complete person, body and soul; their participation in the mystery of salvation, present sacramentally and at work, engages their whole being. Neither the celebrant, the people in the body of the church, nor the organist can be reduced to the status of a machine, a robot, a tape recorder. Theirs must be the presence of the holy people of God, praying, singing, playing music in a single-minded faith, a vital hope, and a burning charity”; Editorial, “Mecanique et liturgie,” *Notitiae*, 3 (1967), 3–4. See also Richard J. Schuler, “Taped Music,” *Sacred Music*, 112 (Spring 1985), 3–4.

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Voices, rather than instruments, ought to be heard in the church: the voices of the clergy, the choir, and the congregation. Nor should it be deemed that the church, in preferring the human voice to any musical instrument, is obstructing the progress of

music; for no instrument, however perfect, however excellent, can surpass the human voice in expressing human thought, especially when it is used by the mind to offer up prayer and praise to God.⁷⁰

The prohibition of musical instruments in favor of the unaccompanied human voice was universally observed in the West until the ninth century; in the East it is observed to this day.⁷¹ Historically, the exclusion of musical instruments from the liturgy proceeds not only from the church's desire to banish from her cult anything redolent of worldly entertainment, but also from a lofty theological anthropology.⁷² "The notes previously observed as issuing from musical instruments are now seen to emanate from the rational bodies of men."⁷³

SUNG SPEECH

Liturgical chant is sung speech, and not the application of a pre-established music, composed of independently determined notes and rhythms, to a text.

Language is an art. In church music this becomes crucial, because this art form must be most perfectly blended with music which gives it utterance. Having the musical skills is basic only in as much as it is the voice by which the art of language is expressed in all its poetic power and beauty. But the words themselves have their own music, in motion and pause, as they pulse like life itself forming intricate connections through flowing nuance and inflection, rhythm and phrase, carrying within them the vision and revelation of life being given to be celebrated as worship.⁷⁴

Liturgical chant is not a question of "words for the music" but, rather, of "music for the words" or of "music *in* the words." The cantilena is born of the text itself; it surges and falls with the contours of the spoken discourse and brings its "cantus obscurior"⁷⁵ to the surface by lifting into formulaic patterns the musicality inherent in the flow of speech.

⁷⁰ Pius XI, Apostolic Constitution, *Divini Cultus*, December 20, 1928, in: *Papal Teachings, The Liturgy*, 251.

⁷¹ See Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 187.

⁷² As late as 1749, Pope Benedict XIV was able to write: "The use of the organ and musical instruments is not yet admitted by all the Christian world. . . . Our Pontifical Chapel, although allowing musical chant on condition that it be serious, decent and devout, has never allowed the organ. . . . No use is made of organ music; only vocal music, of grave rhythm, is allowed with plainchant"; Benedict XIV, Encyclical, *Annus Qui*, February 19, 1749, in: *The Liturgy, Papal Teachings*, 53.

⁷³ Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, tr. P. G. Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1990–91), vol. 1, p. 25.

⁷⁴ Glagolev, "Interpretation of Liturgical Music," 24.

⁷⁵ Cicero, *Orator*, 57: "In dicendo quidam cantus obscurior."

Music is the soul of language. A good sentence is more than a series of words grouped together. A sentence without a tone, without a musical quality, is like a body without a soul. The secret of a good sentence lies in the creation of a tonal quality to correspond to the meaning of the words. There has to be a harmony of the right tone and the right words.⁷⁶

Liturgical chant requires a melody—a tonal quality to correspond to the meaning of the words—that, arising organically from the sacred text, espouses what Dom Cardine called, “the natural plasticity of the word.”⁷⁷ Its mission is fulfilled when the song buried in the sacred text rises on the wings of the cantilena.

OBJECTIVITY

The precise and intelligible communication of liturgical texts within the worshipping assembly requires an accurate and objective delivery. In the simplest cantillations, as in its more ornate forms, liturgical chant remains a technique of oral communication “at the service of the word and of the community, whose free access to the word must be respected to the uttermost degree.”⁷⁸ Objectivity pertains not only to the naked text but to its theological meaning as well. The fullness of tradition is the transmission not only of the sacred text, but of its theological meaning as well. Of this fullness, ordinary speech is an inadequate vehicle.

Liturgical chant requires a melody, a tonal quality to correspond to the meaning of the words.

Words die of routine. The Cantor’s task is to bring them to life. A Cantor is a person who knows the secret of the resurrection of the words. The art of giving life to the words of our liturgy requires not only the personal involvement of the Cantor but also the power contained in the piety of the ages. Our liturgy contains incomparably more than what our hearts are ready to feel. . . . There is a written and an unwritten liturgy. There is the liturgy but there is also an inner approach and response to it, a way of giving life to the words, a style in which the words become a personal and unique utterance.⁷⁹

The liturgical cantilena follows a fixed cursus of accents and emphases; it delivers the text itself—and more than the text—in an objective manner. At some level, the liturgical cantilena suggests that the meaning of words lies beyond the mere delivery of a text; the cantilena preserves and transmits meaning.⁸⁰ Kovalevsky argues that objectivity requires the cantillation of all

⁷⁶ Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 248.

⁷⁷ Eugène Cardine, O.S.B., *Beginning Studies in Gregorian Chant*, tr. William Tortolano (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, 1988), p. 1.

⁷⁸ Lossky, “Thoughts on Liturgical Music,” 8.

⁷⁹ Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 251.

⁸⁰ It is, for example, one thing to read the text of the Lamentations appointed for Tenebrae, the night offices of the last days of Holy Week. It is quite another thing to sing or to hear them clothed in one or another of the ancient chant melodies that, while they deliver the text, express more than the text. The cantilena faithfully and objectively transmits the meaning of the text as received, repeated, and prayed by the church through the ages.

sacred texts and the elimination of ordinary conversational discourse from the liturgy.⁸¹ It invites to a real communion with generations of singers and hearers who, in the past, filled their mouths and ears, their minds and hearts, with the same words.

HOLY AND HALLOWING

Traditional chant formulae may be described as both holy and hallowing. Liturgical chant clothes the language of the *theologia prima* with dignity and reverence. Its sacred character accommodates the word *from* God, the word *to* God, and the word *about* God in the most suitable way.

Chant is holy by reason of its origin in the Word. It is to be considered the more holy, the more closely connected it is with the Word of God, and with the liturgical action in "the assembly of the saints" (Ps. 149:1).⁸² Kept alive in the collective memory of the church, liturgical chant hallows both singer and hearer by fostering the contemplative assimilation of the sacred texts, and by serving as a sign and bond of communion with a long line of singing forbears. As a sacramental expression of ecclesial prayer, liturgical chant mediates and expresses the encounter with the Holy.

As a sacramental expression of ecclesial prayer, liturgical chant mediates and expresses the encounter with the Holy.

In the enactment of the liturgy, chant is a sacred doorway to the numinous. The creative reconfiguration of formulaic musical patterns, adapted to the form and theological meaning of the word, creates within the memory of the subject a store of associ-

ations with previously assimilated experiences of the Holy. The simplest melodic formula has strong evocative power capable of "opening a door through which Mystery approaches the creature, and the creature moves out in response."⁸³

The first few notes of the Exultet intoned at the Paschal Vigil suffice to evoke the glory of the Paschal Mystery in the hearts of the hearers.⁸⁴ The same may be said of other chants repeated year after year at fixed moments in the liturgical cycle and, most notably, of those that, in the *Graduale Romanum*, mark the celebration of the Paschal Triduum. Each repetition of the symbolic

⁸¹ "Seule une cantilène fixant traditionnellement les accents logiques et emphatiques de la phrase, assure la transmission rigoureuse d'une pensée orale à travers les siècles. D'où l'obligation de cantiler les textes sacrés en éliminant des offices le parler courant. . . . Toute parole émise au cours de l'office doit être chantée ou cantillée. Le verbe 'parlé' n'est réservé qu'à la prédication"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 187, 192.

⁸² Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶112.

⁸³ Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 21. Illustrating this, Saint John Cassian writes: "Once when I was singing the psalms a verse of it put me in the way of the prayer of fire. Or sometimes the musical expression of a brother's voice has moved sluggish minds to the most intense prayer." *Conferences*, IX, 26, tr. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 117. The experiences described are not of the aesthetic order but rather illustrate the potential of liturgical chant to dispose the worshiper to a transforming encounter with the Holy.

⁸⁴ Concerning the Exultet, R.H. Benson writes: "it was a song such as none but a Christian could ever sing. It soared, dropped, quavered, leapt again, laughed, danced, rippled, sank, leapt once more, on and on, untiring and undismayed, like a stream running clear to the sea. Angels, earth, trumpets, Mother Church, all nations, and all peoples sang in its singing. And I, in my stiff pew, smiled all over my face with sheer joy and love"; quoted by Martindale, *Robert Hugh Benson*, I:293.

word contextualizes and re-contextualizes it in an ever-deepening perception of the *theologia prima* that reaches from one generation of saints to the next.

ACTIVE AND CONSCIOUS PARTICIPATION

Already in 1903, in terms that would be taken up and amplified by the Second Vatican Council, Pius X called "active participation in the most sacred mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church . . . the first and indispensable source of the Christian spirit."⁸⁵ Twenty-five years later, his successor Pius XI enjoined the Catholic faithful "once more to sing the Gregorian Chant, so far as it belongs to them to take part in it. . . . Filled with a deep sense of the beauty of the liturgy, they should sing alternately with the clergy or the choir, as it is prescribed."⁸⁶ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, promulgated on December 4, 1963, identified "full and active participation by all the people" as the "aim to be considered above all else in the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy."⁸⁷ It is clear that chant fosters "full, conscious, and active participation"⁸⁸ in the liturgy by engaging the assembly in both listening and singing.

Chant fosters "full, conscious, and active participation" in the liturgy by engaging the assembly in both listening and singing.

Abraham Joshua Heschel offers a reflection that is as refreshing as it is realistic: "People may not be able to pray; they are all able to chant. And chant leads to prayer."⁸⁹

The attribution of various forms of liturgical chant to the presider, deacon, psalmist or cantor, schola, and assembly is neither arbitrary nor optional; it pertains to the essential nature of the liturgy as a corporate action of the whole worshipping Church.⁹⁰ The cantillation of eucharistical texts, of readings, and of psalmody invites the assembly to listen actively. Simple and adaptable musical formulas of cantillation have withstood the test of time in diverse liturgical traditions, not only because of their intrinsic artistic value, but also because of their proven ritual functionality. They effectively stimulate active and intentional listening.⁹¹

The chants of the assembly, for their part, require a cantilena that springs from the liturgical texts themselves and expresses their natural verbal inflections by means of simple musical formulae adapted to the specific liturgical function of each piece.⁹² A composition that does not belong to the liturgy and lead more deeply into the mystery celebrated, even though it be sung

⁸⁵ Pius X, *Tra le sollecitudini*, 178.

⁸⁶ Pius XI, *Divini Cultus*, 252.

⁸⁷ "Quae totius populi plena et actiosa participatio, in instauranda et fovenda sacra Liturgia, summopere est attendenda." *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶14.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 247.

⁹⁰ The liturgy is the "actio Christi et populi Dei hierarchice ordinati," see *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*, ¶16.

⁹¹ On recitation formulae for readings, see Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, 54–58.

⁹² Examples from the Roman liturgy abound: the various dialogues and acclamations, the simple tone of the Te Deum, the brief responsories of Lauds and Vespers, Gloria XV, Credo I, and Sanctus XVIII. Ford, *Flowing Waters* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. xx–xxi; Paul F. Ford's English presentation of the *Graduale Simplex*, is a recent work, illustrating the same timeless principle.

The context of liturgical chant is, before and after anything else, silence.

with full-voiced enthusiasm by all, cannot be qualified a true expression of conscious and active participation in the liturgical action.⁹³ Active participation implies that the assembly is singing the liturgy itself, beginning with the dialogical chants, acclamations, and refrains.⁹⁴

Unlike standard hymn singing, the performance of which is relatively uniform and congregational, liturgical chant privileges the responsorial, dialogical, antiphonal, and acclamatory modes of performance. These, being among the most effective forms of active sung participation, manifest more adequately the mystery of the church as a eucharistic organism of different members, characterized by “the order of symphony, an order in liberty and in love.”⁹⁵

LITURGICAL CHANT IN CONTEXT

SILENCE

The context of liturgical chant is, before and after anything else, silence. It originates, with the word, in silence. Like the Word, it “springs from the silence.”⁹⁶

It is the task of man to reveal what is concealed; to be the voice of the glory, to sing its silence, to utter, so to speak, what is in the heart of all things. The glory is here—invisible and silent. Man is the voice; his task is to be the song. The cosmos is a congregation in need of a Cantor. . . . Wherever there is life, there is silent worship.⁹⁷

Silence precedes liturgical chant; rhythms it, and prolongs it. Even after the singing has ceased, the word continues to resonate. Liturgical chant leaves singers and listeners alike in a

⁹³ “E la Messa, Ordinario et Proprio, che si deve cantare, en non ‘qualcosa’, anche se plane conruit, che si sovrappone alia Messa. Perché l’azione è unica, ha un solo volto, un solo accento, una sola voce: la voce della Chiesa. Continuare a cantare mottetti, sia pure devoti e pii (come il Lauda Sion all’offertorio nella festa di un santo), ma estranei alia Messa, in luogo dei testi della Messa che si celebra, significa continuare un’ambiguità inammissibile: dare crusca invece di buon frumento, vinello annacquato invece di vino generoso. Perché non solo la melodia che interessa nel canto liturgico, ma le parole, il testo, il pensiero, i sentimenti rivestiti di poesia et di melodia. Ora, questi testi devono essere quelli della Messa, non altri. Cantare la Messe, dunque, e non solo cantare durante la Messa”; Sacred Congregation of Rites, “Cantare la Messa e non cantare durante la Messa,” p. 406. See a rather laconic English translation of the same text in *Documents on the Liturgy*, 1299.

⁹⁴ The most comprehensive document of the post-conciliar period on singing the liturgy is the instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, *Musicam Sacram*, issued March 5, 1967. (For the Latin text, see *Notitiae*, 3 (1967), 81–108, and for the English translation, see *Documents on the Liturgy*, 1293–1306.) *Musicam Sacram* presents the sung celebration as normative. Contrary to a widely-held misconception, the fully sung celebration is not a solemnization of the spoken form of the liturgy; on the contrary, the spoken form is derived from the fully sung celebration which is normative; see the (untitled) introduction to *Musicam Sacram* by L. Agustoni in *Notitiae*, 3 (1967), 82.

⁹⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), p. 71.

⁹⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letters*, ed. Pierre Thomas Camelot, *Sources Chrétiennes*, 10 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988), p. 102.

⁹⁷ Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 245.

heightened awareness of the divine presence, drawing them into a silence that, according to the psalmist, is itself praise: “Tibi silens laus” (Ps. 64:2). John Breck writes that “ultimately, proclamation and celebration of the Word must resolve into silence.”⁹⁸ The silence generated by liturgical chant is charged with the resonance of the Word. It transforms the place of worship into an “awesome place” into “the house of God and the gate of heaven” (Gen. 28:17).

THE MINISTERIAL FUNCTION OF CHANT

Chant springs from silence in the liturgy in order to fulfill a “ministerial function in the service of the Lord.”⁹⁹

As a combination of sacred music and words, the musical tradition of the universal Church forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. . . . It makes prayer more pleasing, promotes unity of minds, and confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites. . . . Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when the divine offices are celebrated solemnly in song with the assistance of sacred ministers and the active participation of the people.¹⁰⁰

In his “Introduction to the Interpretation of Liturgical Music,” Father Sergei Glagolev, writing from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, complements the teachings of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and brings them into clearer focus. Glagolev unfolds the ministerial function of liturgical chant along the following lines: (1) *synactic*—to assemble the church, the people of God “hierarchically arrayed” for celebration; (2) *rubrical*—to order time, place, space, and dimension; (3) *ritual*—to give voice to the dialogues, acclamations, proclamations, readings, psalmody, and euchological texts of the liturgy; (4) *ceremonial*—to clothe the sacred action in solemnity and beauty; (5) *synoptic*—to hold together the whole experience of the liturgical action as something more than the sum of its component parts.¹⁰¹

*Silence precedes liturgical chant;
rhythms it, and prolongs it.*

SYNACTIC

Chant assembles in unity those who come together to perform a common work, the liturgy. Liturgical chant’s synactic function pertains to the question of ordered corporate participation in the *actio*. “Each person, minister or layman, who has an office to perform, should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.”¹⁰² The cumulation of diverse and complementary liturgical roles by one individual

⁹⁸ John Breck, *The Power of the Word in the Worshiping Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), p. 21.

⁹⁹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶112.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ See Glagolev, “Interpretation of Liturgical Music,” 25.

¹⁰² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶28.

entails a loss of active participation and of order. Even the smallest liturgical synaxis can express the mystery of the church as the Body of Christ and the earthly reflection of the heavenly and trinitarian *leitourgia* by maintaining the diversification of roles which, while functional in practice, is profoundly theological in meaning. Sung liturgy assures the proper distinction of roles while promoting the unity of the worshipping body.

Euchological texts receive a musical treatment not unlike that of the readings. Joseph Gélinau describes the cantillation of the priest:

The pre-eminence of the celebrant's song finds expression in the music which is the vehicle of his prayer. . . . He makes no pretensions to be a virtuoso. Just a few notes, a few melodic formulas which are restrained in character and fixed by law serve him in his prayer or thanksgiving. Here is no exercise of the fine arts, but only the perfection of practical art in the mouth of the "sacrificer," that is, the "artisan of the sacred."¹⁰³

Euchological texts receive a musical treatment not unlike that of the readings.

The priest celebrant, the *artisan of the sacred*, serves most effectively when he makes use of his voice as the human means by which the prayer and thanksgiving of the total Christ, Head and members, ascends to the Father, in the Holy

Spirit.¹⁰⁴ By obliging the presider to engage in dialogue with the assembly, to pray in the plural *we*, and to solicit repeatedly the assent of the people, expressed by *Amen*, the liturgy strikes at the root of individualistic piety and subjective interpretation. The simple, hieratic cantillations of the various liturgical traditions invite the presider to humble service of the mysteries and to iconic transparency.

The dialogical and responsorial nature of liturgical chant allows even the smallest *synaxis* to celebrate a sung liturgy. While much of the repertoire of religious music and even of popular religious song is often beyond the musical capabilities of small liturgical assemblies, simple ritual cantillations lend themselves to assemblies of modest dimensions as well as to larger ones. The implementation of the dialogical and responsorial chants of the liturgy demonstrates that the liturgical action engages the whole church in call and response; in listening and in speaking; in praise, supplication, and thanksgiving.

RUBRICAL

Glagolev qualifies the ministerial function of chant as rubrical when it orders "time, place, space, dimension, and relation by giving substance to the movement and material of

¹⁰³ Joseph Gélinau, S.J., *Voices and Instruments in Christian Worship: Principles, Laws, Applications*, tr. Clifford Howell, S.J. (London: Burns & Oats, 1964), p. 74.

¹⁰⁴ Heschel's reflection on the ministry of the Jewish Cantor, while valuable for all called to sing in the liturgical assembly, is poignantly applicable to the ministry of the priest celebrant invited by the rubrics to lift his voice in song, particularly in the anaphora: "A Cantor who faces holiness in the Ark rather than the curiosity of man will realize that his audience is God. He will learn to realize that his task is not to entertain but to represent the people Israel. He will be carried away into moments in which he will forget the world, ignore the congregation, and be overcome by the awareness of Him in whose presence he stands. The congregation will hear and sense that the Cantor is not giving a recital but worshiping God, that to pray does not mean to listen to a singer but to identify oneself with what is being proclaimed in their name"; Heschel, *Insecurity of Freedom*, 247.

worship."¹⁰⁵ Within its liturgical context, chant effects and manifests order. It marks the beginning of the *actio*, as well as its progressive unfolding. The chants of the ministers and of the assembly link the various moments of ritual time and space and sing the theology proper to each moment and place.

Processional chants accompany passage from one place to another and reveal the theological significance of ritual movement. Other chants illustrate the architectural spaces which they, in some measure, define: the narthex, nave, ambo, choir, and altar. Conversely, the organization of ritual space, in some way, offers a hermeneutical key to the various chants of the liturgy. For instance, in commenting on the significance of the ambo from which, a reader or psalmist, delivers the word, Paul De Clerck notes that,

This arrangement of space constitutes a proclamation: it expresses that someone is speaking to us, that a word is coming to us; this word does not come from the assembly, but is intended for the assembly, from a place that is not its own. . . . The failure to differentiate liturgical settings causes a blurring of the functions, and leads to their becoming banal.¹⁰⁶

Chants intoned from the narthex and continued in procession contextualize movement to the altar and articulate a theology of the church in progress towards the Kingdom.¹⁰⁷ For Joseph

Jungmann, the entrance procession ought "to be distinguished as a movement to prayer, as an approach to God's majesty."¹⁰⁸ Schmemmann maintains that "the idea of *entrance* has a truly decisive significance for the understanding of the eucharist."¹⁰⁹

Within its liturgical context, chant effects and manifests order.

While the specific ritual function of different processional chants varies,¹¹⁰ by their very nature they suggest one theological reality: "the ascent and entry of the Church into the heavenly sanctuary."¹¹¹

A chant intoned from the ambo is word *from* God addressed to the assembly. Its particular musical form is commanded by the need for an objective, intelligible delivery of the message. In

¹⁰⁵ Glagolev, "Interpretation of Liturgical Music," 25.

¹⁰⁶ Paul De Clerck, "In the beginning was the Word': Presidential Address," *Studia Liturgica*, 22 (1992), 2.

¹⁰⁷ In characteristically poetic language, Zundel describes the eschatological significance of the entrance chant: "The Introit greets us at the entrance of the Mass. It is like a triumphal arch at the head of a Roman road, a porch through which we approach the Mystery, a hand outstretched to a crying child, a beloved companion in the sorrow of exile. The Liturgy is not a formula. It is One who comes to meet us"; *Splendour of the Liturgy*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, tr. Francis A. Brunner, 2 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1951, 55; reprint, Westminster: Christian Classics, Inc., 1992), vol. 1, p. 266.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist—Sacrament of the Kingdom*, tr. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), p. 50.

¹¹⁰ The Mass of the revised Roman Rite includes processions at the entrance, gospel, offertory, and communion, each with a corresponding chant. In addition, there are processions peculiar to certain days and rites, each with proper chants. The procession of the *adoratio crucis* on Good Friday, the procession with the Paschal Candle, and the procession to the baptismal font at the Paschal Vigil belong to the latter category. The current, revised Roman Liturgy of the Hours proposes a procession to the font at Baptismal Vespers on Easter.

¹¹¹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 50.

both Jewish and Christian tradition, chant is the normal medium for the liturgical proclamation of Holy Scripture.¹¹² By means of simple melodic formulae, adapted to the punctuation, accents, and cadences of the text, the word is presented audibly, intelligibly, and objectively.¹¹³ Not only does the ritual cantillation of the sacred text reduce the need for artificial amplification of the voice; it resurrects words, lifting them above the personal, the subjective, and the informative. The cantillation of the gospel, in particular, disposes the hearers to experience its mysterious power: the presence of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁴

*In Jewish and Christian tradition, chant is
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proclamation of Holy Scripture.*

Chant from the ambo, be it the cantillation of readings, or the psalmody that follows the reading, elicits a response from the assembly. The sung response of the assembly can be a short acclamation after the readings,¹¹⁵ or the repetition of a simple refrain after the verses of the psalm.¹¹⁶

Chants “from the nave”—that is, belonging to the people—are characteristically brief enough to be sung from memory. They are, almost without exception, dialogical, acclamatory, or responsorial in nature. The dialogical character of certain chants, alternated between the altar and the nave, in particular those of the anaphora, suggests the essentially corporate ordering of the *actio*, in which a diversity of roles call forth and express the unity of the church.¹¹⁷ Chant alternated between two facing choirs, especially the psalmody of the hours, evokes yet another ecclesiology: the ministry of the members of Christ one to another, proffering and receiving the word of life.

¹¹² “In the words of Rabbi Yohanan, ‘If one reads Scripture without a melody or repeats the Mishnah without a tune, of him Scripture says, *Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good* (Ezekiel 20:25). . . . Torah without a tune is devoid of spirit”; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), p. 355.

¹¹³ See Gélinau, *Chant et musique*, 11.

¹¹⁴ “The working of the Holy Spirit is needed if the word of God is to make what we hear outwardly have its effect inwardly. Because of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration and support, the word of God becomes the foundation of the liturgical celebration and the rule and support of all our life. The working of the Holy Spirit precedes, accompanies, and brings to completion the whole celebration of the Liturgy”; *Lectionary for Mass* (New York: Catholic Book Pub. Co., 1970), ¶9.

¹¹⁵ “Even if the Gospel itself is not sung, it is appropriate for the greeting The Lord be with you, and A reading from the holy Gospel according to . . . , and at the end The Gospel of the Lord to be sung, in order that the congregation may also sing its acclamations. . . . At the conclusion of the other readings, The word of the Lord may be sung, even by someone other than the reader; all respond with the acclamation. In this way the assembled congregation pays reverence to the word of God it has listened to in faith and gratitude”; *Lectionary for Mass*, ¶17–18.

¹¹⁶ “As a rule the responsorial psalm should be sung. There are two ways of singing the psalm after the first reading: responsorially and directly. In responsorial singing, which, as far as possible, is to be given preference, the psalmist, or cantor of the psalm, sings the psalm verse and the whole congregation joins in by singing the response. In direct singing of the psalm there is no intervening response by the community; either the psalmist, or cantor of the psalm, sings the psalm alone as the community listens or else all sing it together.

“The singing of the psalm, or even of the response alone, is a great help toward understanding and meditating on the psalm’s spiritual meaning”; *Lectionary for Mass*, English version approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See, with the New American version of Sacred Scripture.

¹¹⁷ See *Missale Romanum*, editio typica tertia (Vatican City: Typis Vaticana, 2002), p. 516.

Chant intoned from the altar is word *to* God, primarily eucharistic or doxological in nature. Its musical form must allow for the intelligibility of the euchological text and have, at the same time, a certain lyrical quality. The tones given in the *Missale Romanum* for the anaphora and, in particular, for the preface, exemplify this sober lyricism.¹¹⁸

The rubrical function of liturgical chant orders the relations between God and his people; between Christ and the church; among members of the worshiping assembly; among human beings and angels. It orders exchanges between heaven and earth, and between the Kingdom of God sacramentally anticipated and the whole creation “groaning in travail” (Rom. 8:22). Chant is communication. The specifically theological value of a chanted text derives, then, not only from what is sung, but by whom it is sung and to whom it is addressed.

RITUAL

Glagolev defines the ministerial function of chant as ritual when it takes “the rubrical substance of what is being ‘said’ in the dialogue, didache,¹¹⁹ kerygma,¹²⁰ and the prophecy¹²¹ of sacred worship, and gives it voice in sacred worship.”¹²² In addition to Glagolev’s four categories of liturgical word, another—euchology—may be useful.

*Chant intoned from the altar is
word to God.*

Dialogue in the liturgy is not the casual exchange of social convention; chant, by ritualizing both greeting and reply, breathes grace through them, and gives them liturgical idoneity. The *Ordo Missae* prescribes a greeting and reply at the introductory rites, before the proclamation of the gospel, at the beginning of the anaphora, at the sign of peace, and at the dismissal. Foremost among the sung dialogic elements of the liturgy is the sublime exchange of the *Sursum corda*.¹²³

Didache pertains to the “word about God.” “Although the sacred liturgy is principally the worship of the divine majesty it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful. For in the liturgy God speaks to his people and Christ is still proclaiming his gospel.”¹²⁴ The didache of the liturgy is not addressed to reason alone; chant allows the “word about God” to penetrate the heart, facilitating its assimilation and remembrance.

The liturgy appears as the principal means of the Church for causing her view of the world to penetrate vitally into the minds of the faithful. . . . It is the principal means in the sense that it is more vitally effective, more continual, more intuitive and penetrating, more popular and universal.¹²⁵

Kerygma is the announcement of the mystery of Christ. Liturgical kerygma is not the mere recounting of a story; the sung anamnestic proclamation is an actualization of the mystery, and

¹¹⁸ *Missale*, 516–517, 623–662.

¹¹⁹ Teaching or instruction.

¹²⁰ Proclamation or announcement.

¹²¹ Inspired utterance in the name of God.

¹²² Glagolev, “Interpretation of Liturgical Music,” 25.

¹²³ See *Missale Romanum*, 516.

¹²⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶33.

¹²⁵ Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions*, 518.

the unleashing of its power for the life of the church and of the world.¹²⁶ The liturgical kerygma is not limited to the proclamation of readings from the lectionary; it also encompasses psalmody and euchology.

Psalmody is integral to the liturgical kerygma. The praying church finds her voice principally in the psalter. The psalter has a voice for every human situation, and for every experience of God; voices for the joy of his presence and the anguish of his absence.

*The praying church finds her voice
principally in the psalter.*

Within the Old Testament the Psalter is a bridge, as it were, between the Law and the Prophets. It has grown out of the requirements of the temple cult, of the law, but by appropriating the law in prayer and song it has uncovered its prophetic essence more and more. It has led beyond the ritual and its ordinances into the "offering of praise," the "wordly offering" with which people open themselves to the Logos and thus become worship with him. In this way the Psalter has also become a bridge connecting the two Testaments. In the Old Testament its hymns had been considered to be the songs of David; this meant for Christians

that these hymns had risen from the heart of the real David, Christ. In the early church the psalms are prayed and sung as hymns to Christ. Christ himself thus becomes the choir director who teaches us the new song and gives the Church the tone and the way in which she can praise God appropriately and blend into the heavenly liturgy.¹²⁷

The Church holds her ear to the psalter to learn from the psalms not only her own song, but the song of Christ as well. In the antiphons and psalmody of the *Graduale Romanum*, the *Graduale Simplex*, the antiphonal of the hours, and other liturgical books, Christ is present as the one addressing the Father, as the one addressing the church, or as the one to whom the church addresses her supplications and her praise.¹²⁸ In the first case, Christ sings with the church, facing the Father. In the second, as the revelation of the Father's glory, he sings to the church, facing her. In the third, it is Christ who receives the song of the church, as the object of her love and desire.¹²⁹ In hearing the psalms, the church recognizes the voice of Christ; in singing the psalms, she finds her own voice.

The liturgical kerygma is ordered to, and includes, the proclamation of the Gospel and its sacramental fulfillment in the Eucharist: the church's experience of the risen and ascended Christ

¹²⁶ See Robert Taft, "Toward a Theology of the Christian Feast," in *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1984), p. 7-9.

¹²⁷ Ratzinger, *New Song*, 96-97.

¹²⁸ "He is present when the Church prays or sings, for he has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them' (Mt 18:20)." *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7.

¹²⁹ The use of titles, orations, and antiphons in conjunction with the psalter attest to the Christological illumination of the psalms traditional in the church's liturgical prayer and are authorized by the Risen Christ himself in Luke 24:44: "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled"; see Balthasar Fischer, "Le Christ dans les psaumes," *La Maison-Dieu*, 27 (1951), 86-113; Jean-Nesmy, *Tradition médite*; A. Rose, *Les psaumes, voix du Christ et de L'Eglise* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1981).

in her midst, the “source and summit”¹³⁰ of her life and mission.¹³¹

The church sings the kerygma because, “knowing Christ face to face in his mysteries,”¹³² she has passed over into the never-ending Day in which “nothing is read, but everything is sung.”¹³³ The liturgical kerygma is, therefore, both

anamnetic proclamation and *eucharistic acclamation*: anamnetic proclamation of the *mirabilia Dei* culminating in the Paschal Mystery of Christ and pointing to his return in glory, and eucharistic acclamation of the Father, in the Holy Spirit. While simple speech suffices for the recounting of a story, the merely spoken word is insufficient for the anamnetic proclamation of a “power unleashed” and for the eucharistic acclamation of God, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit. This is why the church, the witness of Christ’s resurrection, has always sung, continues to sing, and will sing until the end of time.

The church has always sung, continues to sing, and will sing until the end of time.

We have seen the resurrection of Christ, and this memory remains with us once and for all. This is what liturgical singing can be said to be: a glorious confirmation of the Resurrection. . . . We, the musicians of the Church, discover with amazement, beyond ourselves, through the ordinary practice of ceaseless singing: the abiding presence and return of the Risen Lord which is consistent with His own promise to the disciples to be with us, wherever we may be, to the end of time. We anticipate this blessed end, at every recurrence of the daily, weekly and yearly cycle, whenever song resounds in the Holy Temple of God.¹³⁴

Prophecy in the liturgy is the voice of God speaking today: a word addressed to the assembly, characteristically in the first person singular. The prophetic word is found throughout the liturgy, particularly in antiphons and responsories from the prophets and the psalms. The introit *Dum sanctificatus* for the Vigil of Pentecost, taken from the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, is one example.¹³⁵ The liturgy of the Paschal Triduum offers another example of the prophetic genre:

¹³⁰ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶9.

¹³¹ On the dynamic relationship between *mysterium*, *actio*, and *vita*, see Achille M. Triacca, “La spiritualité liturgique est-elle possible?” in: *Liturgie, spiritualité, cultures, Conférences Saint-Serge, XXIXe semaine d’études liturgiques*, Paris, 29 juin–2 juillet 1982, ed. A.M. Triacca and A. Pistoia (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1983), p. 333.

¹³² “Facies ad faciem te mihi, Christe, demonstrasti; in tuis te invenio sacramentis.” Ambrose of Milan, *Apologie de David*, Sources chrétiennes, 239 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1977), p. 156.

¹³³ In the Byzantine usage, after the intonation of the troparion “Christ is risen” at Easter Matins, the rubric specifies that “nothing further is read; everything is sung.” The fully sung liturgy expresses the mystery of the Eighth Day; it signals the presence of the Kingdom and anticipates the liturgy of the heavenly Jerusalem. “This is a key to an understanding of what music in church is all about. This Paschal Ideal already has its roots in the Old Testament—no one simply ‘said’ Scriptures or ‘read’ prayers in the presence of God”; Glagolev, “Interpretation of Liturgical Music,” 25.

¹³⁴ Michael Fortounatto in a lecture delivered at the 1984 Liturgical Institute at Saint Vladimir’s Seminary, Crestwood, New York: “Church Music and Spiritual Life,” *Orthodox Church Music*, 2 (1985), 15.

¹³⁵ “When I shall be sanctified in you, I will gather you out of all the earth, and I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filth, and I shall give you a new spirit” (Ezek. 36: 23–26); see *Graduale Romanum* (Tournai: Desclée, 1961), 290 [145].

the verses of the *Improperia* on Good Friday.¹³⁶ In both examples it is God who speaks. Chant is the most adequate vehicle of the liturgical prophetic word.

In contrast to prophecy—God speaking to his people—*euchology* is the church speaking to God. Euchological texts are prayers offered by the celebrant in the name of all; they are, as a rule, “sealed” by the *Amen* of the assembly. “The prayers addressed to God by the priest who, in the name of Christ, presides over the assembly, are said in the name of the entire holy people and of all present.”¹³⁷ Euchology is best served by the kind of cantilena that frees the celebrant from his own individuality by binding him to the use of simple and flexible formulas.¹³⁸

CEREMONIAL

For Glagolev, the ministerial function of chant may be called ceremonial when it gives to “what is being ‘done’ the eternal pulse of worship in movement and in sound.”¹³⁹ While the ritual function discussed above relates chant to what is “said”—dialogue, didache, kerygma, prophecy, and euchology—the ceremonial function of chant relates it to what is “done.” It has been argued that liturgical chant in its varied forms—syllabic, semi-ornate, and melismatic—is a

solemnization of words, communicating a higher sense of the verbal discourse.¹⁴⁰ Chant is also a solemnization of ritual action, imparting a fullness of meaning. Chant relates dynamically to sacred action; it amplifies what is done and, in a certain sense, magnifies its meaning. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy describes this in terms of “conferring greater solemnity upon the sacred rites.”¹⁴¹

Chant is also a solemnization of ritual action, imparting a fullness of meaning.

Instances of this abound. The Eucharist is the action “done” by the church in obedience to the command of Christ, “Do this in memory of me” (1 Cor. 11:24). When the Eucharistic Prayer is fully sung, with priest and people taking their proper parts, the action of the Eucharist is, in some way, amplified; its meaning is magnified. When the rite of the *fractio* is done to the chant of the *Agnus Dei*, the breaking of the bread is invested with a fullness that it would not otherwise have. Among the examples found in the liturgy of the Paschal Triduum are the antiphons of the *Mandatum*, the *Improperia* that accompany the *adoratio crucis*, and the acclamations of the *Lumen Christi* after the blessing of the new fire.

¹³⁶ The *Improperia* are treated in Chapter Three of my dissertation, *The Proper Chants of the Paschal Triduum in the Graduale Romanum: A Study in Liturgical Theology*, submitted for the Ph.D. at Oxford University, August 2002.

¹³⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶33.

¹³⁸ “Quant au celebrant, seul un certain type d’exécution de la cantilation lui permet de se libérer de sa propre individualité, d’utiliser des formules simples mais souples, et sévèrement sélectionnées, et de ne pas s’en écarter”; Kovalevsky, “Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne,” 188.

¹³⁹ Glagolev, “Interpretation of Liturgical Music,” 25.

¹⁴⁰ See the masterful and exhaustive presentation of chant genres in Hiley, *Western Plainchant*, 47–286. For a simpler introduction to the syllabic, semi-ornate, and melismatic forms, see Eugène Cardine, *An Overview of Gregorian Chant*, tr. Gregory Casprini (Orleans: Paraclete Press, 1992), pp. 6–7.

¹⁴¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶112.

Glagolev's categorization does not distinguish between the chant that solemnizes a sacred action and the chant that, by itself, constitutes a sacred action in its own right. This is the case of the acclamation before the reading of the Gospel:

The fully sung liturgy has about it a quality of integrity and internal coherence.

The Alleluia or, as the liturgical season requires, the verse before the Gospel, is also a "rite or act standing by itself." It serves as the greeting of welcome of the assembled faithful to the Lord who is about to speak to them and as an expression of their faith through song.¹⁴²

SYNOPTIC

Finally, liturgical chant has a *synoptic* ministerial function. Glagolev defines this as "holding all elements together contextually in worship."¹⁴³ Words, when clothed in appropriate melodic vesture, function more harmoniously and more organically with the other sacred signs constitutive of the liturgy. The fully sung liturgy has about it a quality of integrity and internal coherence. This is "the way we do what we are doing in church and the way we say what we are saying."¹⁴⁴

Chant functions synoptically by mediating the presence of Christ "in whom all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). From the beginning of the celebration to the end, the ministerial function of chant is to turn the assembly to the sacramentally mediated presence of Christ. The church uses chant as a way of pointing to the risen Christ, of mediating his presence, and of responding to him in faith. Christ himself—Word of the Father to the church, Word of the church to the Father, and Word of the church to the world—is the synopsis of the *actio*. As an integral and pervasive part of worship, liturgical chant is one means by which the church passes from the language of symbol to the experience of the realities of the Kingdom of God where "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

THE THEOLOGICAL VALUE OF LITURGICAL CHANT

Liturgical chant is intimately tied to the threefold definition of liturgical theology. It is the voice of the *theologia prima*. In the enactment of the liturgy, chant is a vehicle of the word *from* God, the word *to* God, and the word *about* God. Understood in this way, the ministerial function of chant is intrinsically theological. Chant is sung theology and, as such, it is (1) *epiphanic*, (2) *doxological* and *eucharistic*, and (3) *sapiential* and *mystagogical*.

EPIPHANIC: THE WORD FROM GOD

Liturgical chant is at the service of the word *from* God, that is, the saving revelation of the Father, in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The various formulaic tones developed for the cantillation of readings illustrate this. So, too, do the tones set forth for psalmody. Whether sung

¹⁴² *Lectionary for Mass*, ¶23.

¹⁴³ Glagolev, "Interpretation of Liturgical Music," 25.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

When the Church prays, or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished

wished to manifest and communicate both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind."¹⁴⁵

by a cantor, a group of cantors, or by the assembly itself, the psalmody of the Mass and of the hours is word *from* God, before becoming in the hearts of the hearers, word *to* God, and in their minds, word *about* God. Liturgical chant is *epiphanic*, when, in the context of the church's worship, it actualizes the divine revelation by which "God

DOXOLOGICAL AND EUCHARISTIC: THE WORD TO GOD

Liturgical chant is equally at the service of the word to God, that is, the action by which Christ the Priest and his Body, the church, gathered in the unity of the Holy Spirit, praise the glory of the Father, thank him for his steadfast love, and confess his wonderful deeds on behalf of humankind.¹⁴⁶ The *praeconium* of the Paschal Vigil,¹⁴⁷ and the admirable prefaces of the *Missale Romanum*¹⁴⁸ illustrate this, as do the ancient hymns, *Gloria in Excelsis*,¹⁴⁹ *Te Deum*,¹⁵⁰ and *Te Decet Laus*.¹⁵¹ Similarly, the word to God is expressed in the Alleluias, and in the other acclamations and litanies that punctuate the Mass and the hours with praise, thanksgiving, and intercession. When liturgical chant functions in this capacity, it is *doxological* and *eucharistic*.

SAPIENTIAL AND MYSTAGOGICAL: THE WORD ABOUT GOD

The ministerial function of chant does not exclude the word *about* God, that is, all those things by which the Holy Spirit forms, teaches, and builds up the church engaged in worship.¹⁵²

Thus not only when things are read "which were written for our instruction" (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays, or sings or acts, the faith of those

¹⁴⁵ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, ¶6.

¹⁴⁶ A succinct theology of praise is given in the *Praefatio Communis* IV: "Quia, cum nostra laude non egeas, tuum tamen est donum quod tibi grates rependamus, nam te non augent nostra praeconia, sed nobis proficiunt ad salutem, per Christum Dominum nostrum"; *Missale Romanum*, 560.

¹⁴⁷ The *Exsultet*; see *Missale Romanum*, 342–347.

¹⁴⁸ *Missale Romanum*, 518–567.

¹⁴⁹ *Missale Romanum*, 510.

¹⁵⁰ *Antiphonale Monasticum pro diurnis horis* (Tournai: Desclée, 1934), pp. 1250–53.

¹⁵¹ *Antiphonale Monasticum*, 1260.

¹⁵² "The first concern of a parish is the community of believers who are conscious of their faith, want to deepen within themselves the life given them in baptism and labor to show in deeds their fidelity to Christ the Lord. But a parish also contains catechumens, people weak in faith, and Christians in name only—in short, classes that need a catechetical initiation into the mysteries of Christ and the liturgical mysteries of the Church. Finally, there are the non-believers who have not as yet accepted the Gospel message. These people form the missionary sector of the parish community. Sacred music has a special message for each of these categories of individuals. . . . The experience of music, after all, does not consist simply in learning new melodies. Sacred songs are also a catechesis which helps the faithful grasp better the meaning of texts and the spiritual content of the mysteries in whose celebration these songs are used"; letter of Cardinal Villot sent, on behalf of Pope Paul VI, to the Twenty-second Congress of the Italian Association of St. Cecilia, September 22, 1976, in: Robert F. Hayburn, *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music, 95 A.D. to 1977 A.D.* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1979), p. 576.

taking part is nourished, and their minds are raised to God so that they may offer him their spiritual homage¹⁵³ and receive his grace more abundantly.¹⁵⁴

Not only psalmody, readings, and euchological texts, but also antiphons, responsories, and acclamations, proclaim the mysteries of the faith, and facilitate their contemplative assimilation by the faithful.¹⁵⁵ "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," says the apostle, "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:15). Saint Benedict enjoins his monks to taste what they sing: "Psallite sapienter."¹⁵⁶ Sung in this way, liturgical chant is *sapiential* and *mystagogical*.

AN EAR FOR THEOLOGY

The liturgical traditions of both East and West privilege the "mysterious combination of verbal-linguistic expression and non-verbal vocalization" that is chant.¹⁵⁷ Chant is to the ear what a sacred image is to the eye: a sensible mediation of a spiritual reality. The analogy is suggested by Saint John Damascene:

*Chant is to the ear what a sacred
image is to the eye.*

The apostles saw Christ in the flesh: they witnessed his sufferings and his miracles, and heard his words. We too desire to see, and to hear, and so be filled with gladness. They saw him face to face, since he was physically present. Since he is no longer physically present, we hear his words read from books and *by hearing our souls are sanctified and filled with blessing, and so we worship*, honoring the books from which we hear his words.¹⁵⁸

Chant prepares, accompanies, and expresses the church's experience of Christ in the liturgy, an experience mediated by images, words, and other sacred signs. Aemiliana Löhr rightly speaks of, "the imaginative language of Holy Scripture from which the liturgical texts in great part are derived. God has made known his deep things in visible images and symbols."¹⁵⁹ The sung word resonates more harmoniously with the other symbolic actions of the liturgy—washing, anointing, preparing the holy table, breaking bread, kissing, eating, drinking, bowing, walking, and

¹⁵³ The Latin has *rationabile obsequium*, better translated perhaps as "rational service" or "reasonable service."

¹⁵⁴ *Sacrosanctum Consilium*, ¶33.

¹⁵⁵ "Un enseignement oral, tel qu'il est donné par la liturgie, ne peut être facilement assimilé, mémorisé et transmis que s'il est élaboré en un nombre limité de formules agencables en combinaisons nombreuses et variées. La rencontre dans une nouvelle combinaison, d'une formule déjà connue et aimée, entraîne des associations intérieures qui assurent la cohérence générale de la doctrine et sa plus profonde compréhension"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 188.

¹⁵⁶ *Regula Benedicti*, 19:3.

¹⁵⁷ Phillip Harnoncourt, "Te Deum Laudamus," in: *The Meaning of the Liturgy*, ed. Angelus A. Häussling, tr. Linda M. Mahoney (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), p. 96.

¹⁵⁸ Saint John of Damascus, *On The Divine Images*, tr. David Anderson (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 72. The italicization is my own. Note that in ancient liturgical sources, "to read" refers to chanted declamation, better termed "cantillation"; see Gelineau, *Chant et musique*, 77.

¹⁵⁹ Aemiliana Löhr, *The Mass Through the Year*, vol. 1, tr. I. T. Hale (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1958), ix.

burning incense. Chant quickens the senses without exciting them to excess or unrestraint.¹⁶⁰ It contributes to a climate of restful vigilance in which the senses become more receptive to the theological and eschatological significance of the actions that make up a given rite.

Irwin remarks that the proper interpretation of liturgical texts requires understanding the kind of chant melodies assigned to these texts, not just the words of the texts. This requires that the chant melodies be sung in the form proper to them, and heard in their native liturgical context.

Liturgical chant allows the many to pray together.

It is precisely in this sense that one can say that to have an "ear for chant" is to have an "ear for theology." By hearing *in this way*, "our souls are sanctified and filled with blessing, and so, we worship."¹⁶¹ Kilmartin calls this, "a twofold movement, a back and forth play, in which the Father communicates self through Christ in the Spirit (*katabatic*) so that the 'many' may freely give

themselves back (*anabatic*) in love to receive God's gift."¹⁶² Chant, in its various forms, sustains and illustrates this "back and forth play," this "sacred action surpassing all others."¹⁶³

LITURGICAL CHANT: ECCLESIOLOGICAL, SACRAMENTAL, AND ESCHATOLOGICAL

One who has an "ear for theology" will recognize that liturgical chant is at once ecclesiological, sacramental, and eschatological. It is *ecclesiological* insofar as it serves the unity of the church at "the summit"¹⁶⁴ toward which her activity is directed, and at "the wellspring" from which all her power flows, by binding its members to one another and to their Head, Christ the Priest.¹⁶⁵

Every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others. No other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree.¹⁶⁶

In an age when many deem books the indispensable apanage of liturgical celebration, chant rescues words from the privacy of the printed page, and frees them to be sung and heard in the register proper to shared ritual action. Liturgical chant allows the many to pray together with one breath, that of the Holy Spirit, and with one voice, that of the total Christ.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ "Ce chant, tout en évitant les associations de pensée avec le monde extérieur, ne doit en aucun cas avoir de caractère envoûtant, voire magique. Il ne doit ni exciter ni bercer, mais tenir en éveil. D'où le choix d'un rythme libre, ni syncope ni régulier, et de modes ne contenant pas 'attractions contraignantes'"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," 188.

¹⁶¹ Irwin, *Context and Text*, 59.

¹⁶² St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, 72.

¹⁶³ Edward J. Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church: The Particular Liturgy of the Individual Church*, ed. Mary M. Schaefer, *Canadian Studies in Liturgy*, 5 (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1990), p. 90.

¹⁶⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶10.

¹⁶⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7.

¹⁶⁷ "Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song, with the ministers of each degree fulfilling their ministry and the people participating in it. Indeed, through this form . . . the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown, (and) the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices." *Musicam Sacram*, ¶5.

When the body of the Son prays, it does not separate its head from itself: it is the one Saviour of his body, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, who prays for us, and prays in us, and is prayed to by us.

He prays for us as our priest; he prays in us as our head; he is prayed to by us as our God. So, we must recognize our voices in him, and his voice in us.¹⁶⁸

Christ himself, in whom "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17), is the perfect realization of the ecclesial synaxis. Even as it fosters and expresses the relationship of worshipers to each other here below, chant becomes a means of communion with the risen and ascended Christ "who has entered . . . into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb. 9:24). "In its origin and in its goal, liturgy is a participation in the economic Trinity."¹⁶⁹ The ecclesiological dimension of chant is, therefore, fully realized when, through Christ, it unites the synaxis of worshipers to the Father, in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

*It was a natural development when
in the liturgy the sacred texts put on
the garb of song.*

Liturgical chant is *sacramental* in that it serves the actualization of Christ's mysteric presence in the midst of the assembly. "He is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.'"¹⁷⁰ The church perceives the mystery of the Word expressed in the human words of scripture as analogous to the mystery of the Incarnation in which the same Word assumed the flesh of human weakness.¹⁷¹ Pursuing the analogy, one can see in the cantilenas of the liturgy a kind of vesture for the Word. The vesture has no movement of itself; it is animated from within by the "one perfect body of the Word"¹⁷² that it reveals, conceals, adorns, and prolongs. "It was a natural development," writes Maurice Zundel, "when in the liturgy the sacred texts put on the garb of song, and music sought to render the Divine atmosphere with which the words are invested."¹⁷³

Chant is, then, a *sacrament* of Christ's presence in the midst of the church, and of his prayer to the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ, High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He attaches to himself the entire community of mankind and has them join him in singing this divine song of praise.¹⁷⁴

Finally, because "in the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims,"

¹⁶⁸ Saint Augustine, "In psalmum LXXXV," 6–12 in *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 39 (Tournai: Brépols, 1956), p. 1176; translation from *The Divine Office* (London: Collins, 1974), vol. 2, p. 224.

¹⁶⁹ Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 92.

¹⁷⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7.

¹⁷¹ *Dei Verbum*, ¶13.

¹⁷² Origen, "Fragment of a Homily on Jeremiah" (*Patrologia Graeca*, 17, 289), quoted in Olivier Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (New York: New City Press, 1995), p. 98.

¹⁷³ Zundel, *Splendour of the Liturgy*, 285.

¹⁷⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

liturgical chant is *eschatological*.¹⁷⁵ Appropriated by the liturgy, the chanted word is ritually adapted to “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived” (1 Cor. 2:9). The fully sung celebration “more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem.”¹⁷⁶ The experience of sung liturgy, as the normative form of worship, invites the church to incline the ear of her heart (Ps. 44:11) to the “voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters” (Rev. 19:6).

The earthly liturgy can be described as a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy. It is the expression of an anticipated reality. It is the enactment of the desire or hope for something that already exists elsewhere. But it is also a real participation in the heavenly liturgy. . . . The earthly liturgy is directed to the heavenly liturgy, and obtains its basic orientation from it.¹⁷⁷

Liturgical chant is ecclesiological, sacramental, and eschatological because it illustrates the law set in motion by the Incarnation. By virtue of this law, all things are restored to their doxological finality, and re-ordered to the kingdom, by way of the sacraments, through the church. Saint John Damascene alludes explicitly to the “perceptible words” of the church’s prayer and *psalmody* in this regard:

The earthly liturgy can be described as a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy.

Just as we physically listen to *perceptible words* in order to understand spiritual things, so also by using bodily sight we reach spiritual contemplation. For this reason Christ assumed both soul

and body, since man is fashioned from both. Likewise baptism is both of water and of Spirit. It is the same with communion, prayer, *psalmody*, candles or incense; they all have a double significance, physical and spiritual.¹⁷⁸

Created matter is foundational to the whole sacramental economy because, in the words of Saint John Damascene, “the Creator of matter became matter for my sake, willed to take his abode in matter, and worked out my salvation through matter.”¹⁷⁹ The incarnation of the Word is not, however, the end of the song; it is the beginning in time of “that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven.”¹⁸⁰ Ratzinger points out that,

The incarnation is only the first part of the movement. It becomes meaningful and definitive only in the cross and resurrection. From the cross the Lord draws everything to himself and carried the flesh—that is, humanity, and the entire created world—into God’s eternity. Liturgy is ordered to this line of movement, and this line of movement is the fundamental text, so to speak, to which all liturgical music refers. . . . Liturgical music is a result of the claim and the dynamics

¹⁷⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶8.

¹⁷⁶ *Musicam Sacram*, ¶5.

¹⁷⁷ Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Saint John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*, 72–73 (my emphasis).

¹⁷⁹ Saint John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*, 23.

¹⁸⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

of the Word's incarnation. For incarnation means that also among us the Word cannot be just speech. . . . Faith becoming music is a part of the process of the Word becoming flesh.¹⁸¹

Sometimes described as immaterial, liturgical chant is, on the contrary, material, insofar as it is inseparable from the ordered sound of speech. Chant is a heightened form of language. Its raw material, vocal sound, "is readily at hand from the beginnings of human life, and is supple and adaptable for the elaboration of symbols expressing all nuances of human insight and conception."¹⁸² Apparently evanescent, chant, in fact, perdures in the memory long after being heard or sung.

The ecclesiological, sacramental, and eschatological import of liturgical chant is, in some way, proportionate to its transcendent quality. Chant induces a certain estrangement from what is familiar, a straining of the ear to catch, even in exile, the sound of Zion's

*Chant is a heightened form of language,
its raw material is vocal sound.*

songs.¹⁸³ This is achieved by means of creative obedience to an ensemble of pre-established melodic formulas, developed over the course of time by the diverse liturgical traditions of the church, and tested by a long experience of liturgical practice.¹⁸⁴ The conventional eight modes of Gregorian chant, offering "familiarity with variety," are but one example of this.¹⁸⁵

The canons of liturgical chant—normative, flexible structural forms—foster and protect its specifically theological value.¹⁸⁶ They discern between authentic artistic creativity and the tyranny of subjective fantasy, all the while offering the artist—composer or singer—a certain number of musical formulas to be used in various combinations, thereby assuring what Kovalevsky calls "a character of coherent continuity, universality and variety."¹⁸⁷

Composers should have as their motive the continuation of the tradition that provided the Church a genuine treasury of music for use in divine worship. They should thoroughly study the works of the past, their styles and characteristics; at the same time they should reflect on the new laws and requirements of

¹⁸¹ Ratzinger, *New Song*, 121–122.

¹⁸² William A. Van Roo, "Symbol in Art and Sacraments," in: *Symbolisme et théologie* (Rome: Anselmiana, 1974), p. 154.

¹⁸³ "For it was there that they asked us, our captors, for songs, our oppressors for joy. 'Sing to us,' they said, 'one of Zion's songs'" (Ps. 136:3).

¹⁸⁴ "Les chants 'byzantin,' 'grégorien' et 'russe' (ancien et actuel) conservent fidèlement la classification des formules mélodiques en 8 Tons (4 Modes comportant chacun un ton authentique et un ton plagal). Pour saisir plus concrètement le sens de cette classification nullement arbitraire, il est utile de ramener le chant à sa forme la plus élémentaire. Pour le 'grégorien,' c'est la psalmodie simple: dans chaque ton les 4 formules (cellules) musicales (l'intonation, la flexe, la médiante et la terminaison, soit 4 x 8 = 32 formules) et leurs rapports avec la note de récitation déterminent presque entièrement les bases de cette psalmodie. Le grand édifice des chants 'ornés' se construit à partir de cette-ci par amplification, variation"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," p. 190.

¹⁸⁵ See Ford, *Flowing Waters*, xxi.

¹⁸⁶ Fidelity to the ecclesiological, sacramental, and eschatological vocation of liturgical chant obliges its artisans to obey what one author has called the *psaltic canon*, see Marcel Pirard-Angistriou, "Le chant liturgique orthodoxe entre la polyphonie et la monophonie," *Contacts* (1995), p. 193.

¹⁸⁷ ". . . un caractère de pérennité, d'universalité et de variété dans la cohérence"; Kovalevsky, "Le chant de la liturgie chrétienne," p. 184.

the liturgy. The objective is that “any new form adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.”¹⁸⁸

Liturgical chant grows organically out of two sources: the articulation of the word, and the interiorization of musical prototypes within a given liturgical tradition. The hieratic quality of liturgical chant is an anthropological expression of the transcendent common to many cultures.¹⁸⁹ Liturgical chant cannot be a naturalistic echo of “the form of this world which is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31).

Its essential function is not to cause aesthetic pleasure, nor to entertain, but to show forth symbolically, by anticipation, the eternal realities of the Kingdom.¹⁹⁰

The church, even as she is sent by Christ into the world, “has already begun to mutate by fits and starts into the City-of-God-in-the-making, the focal point of a World made new in Christ Jesus.”¹⁹¹ The church’s liturgy, enacted by men and women of flesh and blood, in space and time, realizes, nonetheless, a new order of things in which “the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest.”¹⁹² Among the sacramental portents of this new order of things, liturgical chant holds a unique and privileged place.

While the church draws her means of liturgical expression from the various resources of human culture, these means are, nonetheless, subjected to purification and refinement—to transfiguration in the fire of the Holy Spirit—in view of the proper end of the liturgy itself: the manifestation of the Kingdom of God.¹⁹³ The chant of the church is sacramental because it is, in a very real sense, worldly; it is eschatological because it is, in just as real a sense, other-worldly.¹⁹⁴ “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. . . . As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:16,18). The intelligibility of all liturgical signs is contingent upon their worldliness; their *iconicity* is contingent upon their other-worldliness.¹⁹⁵

The liturgizing church, “both human and divine, visible yet endowed with invisible resources, eager to act yet intent upon contemplation, present in this world yet not at home in it”¹⁹⁶ reveals the kingdom of God in the world. Christ and the church, acting synergetically in the Holy Spirit, are the sacrament of the Father’s saving love for the world and the voice of the world raised “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph. 1:6). These soteriological and doxological dimensions of the liturgy—Kilmartin’s “twofold movement, a back and forth play”¹⁹⁷—are best perceived when the sacramental means employed by the church, chant being among them, are seen as proceeding from what is divine in her as well as from what is human, from her heavenly and from her earthly nature. Finally, chant is a complete sung theology—ecclesiological, sacramental, and eschatological in its scope—only when its audible parts are subordinated to its silence. ❧

¹⁸⁸ *Musicam Sacram*, ¶59.

¹⁸⁹ See Peter Jeffery, “Chant East and West: Toward a Renewal of the Tradition,” in *Music and the Experience of God*, ed. David Power, Mary Collins, and Mellonee Burnim (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Ltd., 1989), p. 28.

¹⁹⁰ On the liturgy as the symbolic epiphany of the Kingdom, see Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, pp. 27–48.

¹⁹¹ Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 42.

¹⁹² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶1.

¹⁹³ See Zundel, *Splendour of the Liturgy*, 283.

¹⁹⁴ See Kavanagh, *Liturgical Theology*, 3–69; see also Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), pp. 11–22.

¹⁹⁵ On the quality of liturgical iconicity, see Giancarlo Carminati, “Una teoria semiologica del linguaggio liturgico,” in *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, 102 (1988), 184–207.

¹⁹⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶2.

¹⁹⁷ Kilmartin, *Culture and the Praying Church*, 90.

The Divine Office: Joining in the Song of the Holy Spirit

by Maximilian Heim, O.Cist.¹



Isn't the claim implicit in my title a bit too much? Can we really say that in the Divine Office we join our voices to that of the Holy Spirit? A well known legend from the life of Pope St. Gregory the Great can begin to shed light on this idea. The author of the *Vita Gregorii*, the Roman historian Ioannes Diaconus, describes a scene reminiscent of depictions of the inspiration of Sacred Scripture: the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove whispers words into the saintly pope's ear by which he is to interpret scripture. This image was used to explain the composition of Gregorian chant as well. Pope Gregory, after whom the chant is named, came to be described as the composer inspired by the Holy Spirit. The name of Pope Gregory was used to guarantee the authenticity of chant. The use of this image is not limited to the *Vita Gregorii*, as Prof. Stefan Glöckner of Essen notes,

The authorship and origin of the Latin liturgical chants is explained through such images in other manuscripts of the early and high Middle Ages as well. Either the pope himself writes down what he has heard or he dictates the melodies to a scribe.²

The Divine Office is thus doubly inspired: in word and in melody. The one who sings it is therefore engaged in joining his voice in something formed by the Holy Spirit. The origin of the sung prayer is the revelation of God, its authenticity is guarded by the authority of the church.

Considering the inspiration of the Divine Office has pointed us toward seeing that it leads both singer and hearer into the *Communio* of the Holy Spirit; this can be also seen by observing the effect the sung office has on the praying community of singers/hearers. St. Augustine gives us a very personal description in his *Confessions*:

How did I weep, in thy hymns and canticles, touched to the quick by the voices of thy sweet-attuned church! The voices flowed into mine ears, and the truth distilled into my heart, whence the affections of my devotion overflowed, and tears ran down, and happy was I therein.³

Not long had the Church of Milan begun to use this kind of consolation and exhortation, the brethren zealously joining with harmony of voice and hearts...

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¹ Originally written in German under the title "Das göttliche Officium als Einstimmen in die Worte des Heiligen Geistes"; English translation by Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist.

² "Kleine Einführung in die Gregorianik," [www.kirche-im-bistum-aachen.de/kiba\(dcms/traeger/4/vivuscantus/gregorianik.html](http://www.kirche-im-bistum-aachen.de/kiba(dcms/traeger/4/vivuscantus/gregorianik.html))

³ "Quantum fleui in hymnis et canticis tuis, suave sonantis ecclesiae tuae vocibus commotus acriter! voces illae influebant auribus meis, et eliquabatur veritas in cor meum, et exaestuabat inde affectus pietatis, et currebant lacrimae, et bene mihi erat cum eis." (*Conf.*, IX, 6, 14)

Then it was first instituted that after the manner of the Eastern Churches, hymns and psalms should be sung, lest the people should wax faint through the tediousness of sorrow: and from that day to this the custom is retained, divers (yea, almost all) thy congregations, throughout other parts of the world following herein.⁴

The terms *consolation* and *exhortation* which Augustine here uses describe essential attributes of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seizes the heart of the individual and brings it into harmony with the community. We need only think of the Pentecost hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*—the Holy Spirit as comforter and guide of hearts— or the Pentecost sequence *Veni Sancte Spiritus*—the Holy Spirit as bringer of light and dispeller of darkness . . .

Finally a third argument moves me to speak of the Divine Office as a *Communio* in the Holy Spirit. A well known text by the father of the Cistercian Order, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, was the inspiration. In Sermon 47 of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, “Virginité and Martyrdom,” St. Bernard speaks again and again of the Holy Spirit as the one who formed the words which require the entire devotion of the monks.

By our Rule we must put nothing before the work of God (*Regula Benedicti*, 43:3). This is the title by which our father Benedict chose to name the solemn praises that are daily offered to God in the oratory, that so he might more clearly reveal how attentive he wanted us to be at that work. So, dearest brothers, I exhort you to participate always in the divine praises correctly and vigorously: that you may stand before God with as much zest as reverence, not sluggish, not drowsy, not yawning, not sparing your voices, not leaving words half said or skipping them, not wheezing through the nose with an effeminate stammering, in a weak and broken tone. But pronouncing *the words of the Holy Spirit* with becoming manliness and resonance and affection; and correctly, that while you chant you ponder on nothing but what you chant. Nor do I mean that only vain and useless thoughts are to be avoided; but, for at least that time, and in that place, those also must be avoided with which office-holders must be inevitably and frequently preoccupied for the community’s needs. Nor would I even recommend that you dwell on those you have just freshly acquired as you sat in the cloisters reading books, or such as you are now gathering from the Holy Spirit during my discussions in this lecture-hall. They are wholesome, but it is not wholesome for you to ponder them in the midst of the psalms. For if at that time you neglect

The Holy Spirit seizes the heart of the individual and brings it into harmony with the community.

⁴ “Non longe coeperat Mediolanensis ecclesia genus hoc consolationis et exhortationis celebrare magno studio fratrum concinentium vocibus et cordibus. nimirum annus erat aut non multo amplius, cum Iustina, Valentiniani regis pueri mater, hominem tuum Ambrosium persequeretur haeresis suae causa, qua fuerat seducta ab arrianis. excubabat pia plebs in ecclesia, mori parata cum episcopo suo, servo tuo. Ibi mea mater, ancilla tua, sollicitudinis et vigiliarum primas tenens, orationibus vivebat. nos adhuc frigidi a calore spiritus tui excitabamur tamen civitate attonita atque turbata. tunc hymni et psalmi ut canerentur secundum morem orientalium partium, ne populus maeroris taedio contabesceret, institutum est, ex illo in hodiernum retentum multis iam ac paene omnibus gregibus tuis et per cetera orbis imitantibus.” (*Conf.*, IX, 7, 15); *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, tr. Edward Bouverie Pusey, Project Gutenberg, Etext 3296.

what you owe, the Holy Spirit is not pleased to accept anything offered that is not what you owe. May we always be able to do his will in accord with his will, as he inspires, by the grace and mercy of the Church's Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever. Amen.⁵

St. Bernard words are an elaboration on the exhortation of St. Benedict, "let us therefore consider how we ought to behave in the presence of God and his angels, and stand for the singing of the psalms in such a way that our hearts concord with our voices."⁶ The fathers of our order have handed down to us certain marks of our prayer that

it ensure that it be truly a Divine Office and a joining in the song of the Holy Spirit. It is not my intention to give a complete list of these marks, but only to pick three out of the great wealth of our tradition: purity or authenticity, unity, and love, which I wish to link to purity of heart.

The Cistercians attempted a restoration of the liturgical chants, sorting out new inventions and restoring corrupt melodies to their primitive form.

AUTHENTICITY OR PURITY

The ideal of the authentic, the primitive form was central to the Cistercians from the beginning. They determined to return to an exact observance of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict rejecting all later accretions. In the liturgy only authentic texts were to be sung, as St. Bernard emphasizes in the proemium to the Cistercian Antiphonal.⁷ In order to realize this ideal the Cistercians decided to attempt a restoration of the liturgical chants, sorting out new inventions and restoring corrupt melodies to their primitive form. This attempt was made twice: first in the years 1109 and 1110 under Abbot Stephan Harding, third Abbot of Citeaux, and then immediately following his death under the direction of St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux.

A few quotations from St. Bernard's Proemium to the Cistercian Antiphonal give a good sense of the background of this reform. On the first reform under St. Stephen Harding, Bernard writes:

They then sent brothers to Metz, to copy and bring with them the antiphonary of the church of that place, which allegedly could be ascribed to Gregory. But they found the reality very different from what they had heard of it. On examination this antiphonary displeased them, because it proved to be, in both chant and text, flawed, poorly composed, and in almost all respects contemptible [*vitiosum et incompositum nimis ac paene per omnia contemptibile*]. Since, however, they had begun with it, they used it and held fast to it up to our time. Finally our brother abbots could not bear it anymore, and wishing to see it changed and corrected, they entrusted me with this work. From these our brothers I called on those who are the most educated and experienced in the art and practice of

⁵ *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs III*, tr. Kilian Walsh, O.C.S.O., and Irene M. Edmunds (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1971), pp. 9–10.

⁶ *Regula Benedicti*, 19: 6–7.

⁷ See "Prolog zum zisterziensischen Antiphonar," in: *Neuerung und Erneuerung: Wichtige Quellentexte aus der Geschichte des Zisterzienserordens vom 12. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hildegard Brem & Alberich M. Altermatt, Quellen und Studien zur Zisterzienserliteratur 6 (Langwaden: Bernardus-Verlag, 2003), pp. 126–133, at 127.

chant [*qui in arte et usu canendi instructiores atque peritiores inventi sunt*]. From many and different sources we finally composed in this book a new antiphony, which in our opinion is irreproachable [*irreprehensibile*] in both chant and text. Anyone who sings from it will be able to confirm this—if he is well versed in these matters.⁸

From many and different sources we finally composed a new antiphony.

Unable to find an authentic version, the reformers began to reconstruct one according to their own theories of what the original chants must have been like. In addition to Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot Guido of Cherlieu became an influential leader of the reform. Bernard assigned him to write a treatise *De Cantu Antiphonarii* which explains and defends the principles of the reform. Prof. Glöckner mentions⁹ the following criteria as decisive:

- The range of a piece should not exceed a tenth;
- The use of a strict system of modes with an unambiguous division into *authentic* and *plagal* modes.
- The determination of the final of each piece as the tonic of the whole piece and thereby the unambiguous determination of each piece to a single mode;
- The abbreviation of melismas.

A too literal interpretation of the verse (Ps. 143:3) *In psalterio decachordo psallam tibi* (“I praise thee on the ten stringed harp”), led Abbot Guido of Cherlieu to decide that the range of a piece ought not to exceed a tenth. For the pieces sung by the full choir such as the introits and communions this was easy since, as Glöckner notes,

These pieces scarcely ever reach the *ambitus* of a tenth. A more difficult problem were the graduals, Alleluias, and secondary offertory verses. Of the 114 graduals 11 have a range of eleven or twelve steps and were accordingly “revised.” 63 other graduals had their *melismata* trimmed. The secondary offertory verses—whose doubtful aesthetics had apparently already been recognized earlier, and which were therefore often deleted from manuscripts using corrosive acid—were entirely left out of the Cistercian Antiphonal.¹⁰

Let me illustrate this with liturgical directives from St. Bernard’s proemium to the Cistercian Antiphonal:

In many liturgical offices [*historiis*] we even found post-communions, chants which are foreign to the simplicity of the antiphonal, in place of apposite responses. The verses joined to these fit so badly that it was impossible to place the notes above them in such a way as to fit the rhythm of the text. We gave ourselves

⁸ S. Bernardi Abbatis *Super Antiphonarium Cisterciensis Ordinis*, in: *Neuerung und Erneuerung*, 126–133, at 127.

⁹ Stefan Glöckner, “*In psalterio decachordo*: Beobachtungen zum Zisterzienserchoral,” in: *Musik in Salem*, ed. Erich Bachmann (Salem: Münsterpfarre, 2005), pp. 6–13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

the trouble of making sure that one and the same verse is not repeated in the same office [*historia*]; indeed, unless we are mistaken, you will scarcely find three verses that are repeated even twice in the whole antiphonal. We removed certain post-communions, replacing them with familiar and authentic responsories. We preserved the texts of some, however, as they were holy and faithful to the Gospel, and set them to honest and beautiful melodies; always preserving the sober reserve of the music. In short, we found the text of the old antiphonary [of Metz] in many places so degenerated and neglected [*tantae remissionis atque dissolutionis et comperimus*] that it was disfigured by many fables like apocryphal birthmarks [*multis falsitatibus sive apochryphorum naeniis respersa*] and therefore instilled not only tedium into its readers, but even disgust. Thus the novices who had been educated in ecclesiastical schools rejected the antiphonary full of reluctance and disinterest, both because of the text and the notation [*pro nota*]. Thus they became ever more tardy and drowsy in the praise of God.¹¹

It is worth noting that the editors of the Cistercian Antiphonal were guided by principles similar to those laid out in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy;¹² there also one finds a concern for authenticity of text and noble simplicity of form.

UNITY

The *Carta Caritatis* of St. Stephen Harding presents unity as one of the fundamental principles of the Cistercian Order. In discussing the ruling that all monasteries should have the same liturgical books and customs the charter explains:

The Ambrosian hymns should be used, since they are the only hymns mentioned by St. Benedict.

And because we receive all monks coming from other monasteries into ours, and they in like manner receive ours; it seems proper to us, that all our monasteries should have the same usage in chanting, and the same books for Divine Office day and night and the celebration of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, as we have in the New Monastery; that there may be no discord in our daily actions, but that we may all live together in the bond of charity under one rule, and in the practice of the same observances.¹³

Abbot Stephen, third Abbot of Cîteaux, in virtue of the authority of God and his own authority, commands that only the Ambrosian hymns should be used, since they are the only hymns mentioned by St. Benedict, he sees this as part of keeping the purity of the Rule: "preserve rather these hymns—you who hold the vision of our Holy Father dear, realize and propagate it."¹⁴ The

¹¹ S. Bernardi Abbatis Super Antiphonarium Cisterciensis Ordinis (<http://www.binetti.ru/bernardus/24.shtml>).

¹² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶34.

¹³ *Carta Caritas*, ch. 2; <http://www.osb.org/cist/charta.html#Chap.2>.

¹⁴ *Epistola Stephani Secundi Cistercii Abbatis: De Observatione Hymnorum*, in: *Einmütig in der Liebe. Die frühesten Quellentexte von Cîteaux. Antiquissimi Textus Cistercienses*, ed. Hildegard Brem & Alberich M. Altermatt (Turnhout : Brepols, 1998), pp. 208.

Abbot of Citeaux and the General Chapter authority to act for the preservation of unity we can scarcely imagine today; Bernard emphasizes this in the proemium cited above:

Finally, we wish that the changes have been made, and are contained in this book, in word and notation be followed everywhere in our monasteries. By the authority of the whole chapter, in which all the abbots unanimously accepted and confirmed this book, we forbid that anything in it at all be changed by anyone.¹⁵

Purity of heart is the condition for communion between the choir of monks on earth and the heavenly choir.

This unity was later confirmed by papal bulls. The Cistercian Pope Eugene III, for instance, in the bull *Sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia* (1152) writes, "In all the monasteries of your order you shall hold fast to the same observances, the same chants, and the same liturgical books."¹⁶ In similar words Pope Alexander III exhorts the Cistercians in a bull of the same name in 1163: "In all the monasteries of your order you shall observe entirely the same observances, cultivate the same chants, and use the same liturgical books."¹⁷

LOVE

From the beginning the Cistercians understood their monasteries as schools of the love of God and neighbor. The famous words of St. Stephen Harding are a witness to this: in actibus nostris nulla sit discordia, sed una caritate, una regula similibusque vivamus moribus, "in our actions let there be no discord, rather let us live in one love, under one rule, and with similar customs." This principle is a sort of echo of the band of love that united the church of the martyrs. Let us think for example of St. Ignatius of Antioch, in his letters he repeatedly calls for the preservation of unity. For example here:

Therefore by your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is being sung. Now do each of join in this choir, that being harmoniously in concord you may [join God's melody] in unison, and sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, that he may both hear you and may recognize, through your good works, that you are members of his Son. It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, in order that you may always commune with God.¹⁸

PURITY OF HEART AS THE CONDITION FOR COMMUNION

Purity of heart, *puritas cordis*, is the condition for communion between the choir of monks on earth and the heavenly choir. That communion was wonderfully expressed by the Venetian sculptor Giovanni Giuliani in the choir stalls which he carved for us in Stift Heiligenkreuz. Over all stalls of the monks he carved singing saints and playing angels, according to the words of the

¹⁵ "Prolog zum zisterziensischen Antiphonar," in: *Neuerung und Erneuerung*, 127.

¹⁶ Eugenius III., *Sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia* (1152), in: *Einmütig in der Liebe*, 244–255, at 247.

¹⁷ Alexander III., *Sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia* (1163), in: *Einmütig in der Liebe*, 256–263, at 257.

¹⁸ *Ignatius to the Ephesians*, 4:2, in: *The Apostolic Fathers I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912; reprint, 1998), pp. 173–197, at 177–178.

psalm “in the presence of the angels I sing your praise.” (Ps. 138:1) Our holy father St. Benedict warns us, though: “let us therefore consider how we ought to behave in the presence of God and his angels, and stand for the singing of the psalms in such a way that our hearts *concord* with our voices.”¹⁹

The chants of the Divine Office point us toward heaven.

Purity of heart is the basic condition for this concord and unity; it opens the eye for God, the origin and goal of our praise: “blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). The present essay is not able to give a detailed account of purity of heart. Nevertheless, I would like to at least mention a few aspects: compunction of heart; the readiness for conversion; and discretion, “the

mother of all virtues.”²⁰ It was in this spirit that the general chapter of our order rejected artificial modes of singing that falsify the voice:

Men ought to sing with manly voices, and not shrilly like women, or as the vulgar say in *falsetto*, as though they wanted to imitate the antics of a clown. Therefore we determine that moderation is to be observed in singing, that it may sound dignified and serve devotion.²¹

CONCLUSION

The chants of the Divine Office point us toward heaven; or rather they come from heaven, or—to use the expression of the Graz Liturgy professor Philipp Harnoncourt—they are “*vom Himmel abgelauscht*.”²² As the Second Vatican Council has taught,

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims . . . we sing a hymn to the Lord’s glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army.²³

The chanted office, the oldest form of psalm meditation, must be inspired by true listening to the Word of God, i.e. listening to the Holy Spirit, who unites us to God and one another. In this communion individual and community are led ever deeper into the mystery of God’s Word, the Word which he is and which he has revealed.

¹⁹ *Regula Benedicti*, 19: 6–7.

²⁰ Cf. *Regula Benedicti*, 64: 19.

²¹ Joseph M. Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Ordinis Cisterciensis ab anno 1116 ad annum 1786* (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1933), 1:30, Statute LXXIII, *De falsis vocibus*; cited in: St. Aelred of Rivaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, tr. Elisabeth Connor, O.C.S.O., (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), p. 210, note 178.

²² [“Picked up from from heaven”]; Philipp Harnoncourt, “Gesang und Musik im Gottesdienst,” in: *Die Messe: Ein kirchenmusikalisches Handbuch*, ed. Harald Schützeichel (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1991), pp. 9–25, at 13, 17; cited in: Ratzinger, *New Song*, 137.

²³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶8; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, ¶50; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶1090.

But what corresponds to this mystery of the Divine Word? What is “liturgy in accordance with *Logos*,”²⁴ that is with Christ? In concluding I would like to mention four points developed by Pope Benedict XVI:²⁵

“Liturgy in accordance with *Logos*,” must not conform itself to this world. Thus St. Cyprian wrote:

But let our speech and petition when we pray be under discipline, observing quietness and modesty. Let us consider that we are standing in God’s sight. We must please the divine eyes both with the habit of body and with the measure of voice. For as it is characteristic of a shameless man to be noisy with his cries, so, on the other hand, it is fitting to the modest man to pray with moderated petitions.²⁶

Liturgy in accordance with Christ must be the prayer of the church, which does not construct or fabricate itself, but rather knows itself to be bound to the origin, to the action of Jesus, his sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection.

The Divine Office must be a *sursum corda*, a lifting of the heart to God, to the Father—as Jesus prayed, “Father, I desire that all whom thou hast given me . . . may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me.” (John 17:24, 22) The singers of the Divine Office are to be taken up into a trinitarian communion in the Holy Spirit.

The liturgy of the Divine Office is thus at the service of adoration; it is a joining in the choir of the angels and saints, and has thus a truly cosmic character, beholding heaven and earth past and future in the eternal now of God.

In participating in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, liturgy in accordance with *Logos* transcends the boundaries of time and place, in order to gather all together in the “hour” of Christ. This hour becomes present in the Liturgy: Christ is here, he who says, “I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Rev. 22:13)

*Liturgy in accordance with
Christ must be the prayer of the
church.*

Thus the earthly liturgy is a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the heavenly city Jerusalem, toward which we journey as pilgrims. Let us join our voices to the symphony of the heavens. This longing for the Heavenly City causes the church, the Bride of Christ, to call in the Holy Spirit: come! He who hears let him shout: come! Come Lord Jesus! Maranatha. (Rev. 22:17, 20) Then Jesus, the incarnate *Logos*, will become, as our father St. Bernard says, *mel in ore, in aure melos, in corde iubilus*, “honey in the mouth, melody in the ears, jubilation in the heart.”²⁷ ❧

²⁴ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 50.

²⁵ Ratzinger, *New Song*, 138.

²⁶ *De dominica oratione*, 4, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf05.iv.v.iv.html>.

²⁷ Bernhard von Clairvaux, 15. *Predigt zum Hohenlied*, in: *Sämtliche Werke*, V, ed. G. B. Winkler (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1994), 220.