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# GREGORIAN REVIEW

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# The GREGORIAN REVIEW

Studies in Sacred Chant and Liturgy

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*Choirmaster of Solesmes*

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October 25, 1956

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# THE INTROIT DICIT DOMINUS AND THE OFFERTORY DE PROFUNDIS

by Dom Joseph Gajard, O.S.B.,  
Choirmaster of Solesmes

The special character of these last Sundays of the liturgical year has often been remarked upon. Placed at the limits of the liturgical cycle, they mark the end of a stage. While it is true that they open certain perspectives on the future, they also make it possible to draw a culmination, to take stock of the work of God accomplished in us in the course of the cycle which is closing. They do not merely explain the punishments which will fall on the wicked, and in particular those which will precede the solemn coming of the Judge at the end of the world. They also provide us with an opportunity to measure the graces received and the divine blessings which fall on us ceaselessly.

Without even considering the Epistle of this last Sunday, which states the true attitude of the Christian and clearly shows what is commonly called the "intellectual character" of St. Paul's spirituality, and in restricting our examination of the sung texts, we see that although the *De profundis*, which recurs twice with such moving accents, is an appeal to divine mercy, it would not seem that the introit, gradual or communion have anything in their natures which is frightening. They lack such elements completely.

## The Introit *Dicit Dominus*

The introit quotes a passage from the letter sent by Jeremiah, in the Name of God, to the captive Israelites at Babylon (Jer. XXIX, 11, 12 and 14). From the whole of this letter, which, contrary to the sayings of the false prophets, foretells the long duration of the captivity, it is curious to note that the liturgy has selected just those verses intended

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to reassure the deported Jews by the promise that at the proper moment and after due expiations, the exile will end, with the dispersion which will be its consequence, and that God will rally His people to lead them into the Promised Land.

Thus we are certain of the profound meaning of the introit taken on the spiritual plane. It is a formal promise of pardon and mercy, and we must take to the letter this *cogitationes pacis et non affiliationis*. This is a statement of peace and confidence.

## INTROIT AND OFFERTORY

What should we draw from the melody? To tell the truth, it is presented in a somewhat mysterious way. The very low opening could easily mislead. Let us try to set forth its principal characters.

a) Actually, it uses for the intonation a well-known formula of sixth-mode introits, and moreover, it reverts to it insistently: *Dicit Dominus . . . cogitationes*. This formula is usually found as the intonation of joyful pieces, pieces which nearly reach a point of acclamation. Such would be the *Exsultate Deo* of Wednesday of the Fall Ember Days, or *Sacerdotes Dei* of Martyrs, both of which are hymns of jubilation to God. To tell the truth, the remainder of this *Dicit Dominus* has less "movement" than *Sacerdotes Dei*. Nevertheless, it remains true that the intonation, in spite of its low tessitura, evokes more of an idea of lightness and harmonious simplicity.

b) This impression is confirmed by the evidence of the manuscripts. This entire opening is notated in light neumes. Up to "*pacis*," and the two syllables which lead to and prepare it, there is not a single long neume. It will be found to be the same for the rest of the piece, too, except for four or five expressive neumes, the intention of which is the underscoring of the object of this divine promise.

c) The general melodic line, without, of course, contradicting the indications which we have just given, nevertheless makes it possible to set the scope of the piece. Nowhere does it have the cast of an exuberant joy. Without even falling back on the intonation formula, which, in spite of its lightness of movement, evolves quite within the depths of the sixth mode scale, it is within the lower part of the modal fifth that the melody resolutely remains, within the third, moreover, which it hardly ever really leaves. It reaches the fifth only three times, at *pacis*, *invocabitis* and *cunctis* (the case of *afflictionis* is only that of a classic cadence which punctuates the first phrase), and in each case it is followed by an immediate return to the tonic. As for the fourth, the melody attains that point only on the final of *exaudiam* (the three first B flats are only a corruption of the melody through the

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upward "elision" of the original note *la* to the semitone above), and except for the accent of *cunctis*, the entire last phrase simply recites on the tonic note *fa*, and usually at this single pitch, from which it departs only for a final downward inflection.

In one sense, then, and in the ensemble, we have a very continuous line, without great "movement", but also without weight . . . very simple, of a somewhat meditative character, giving an impression of great serenity.

In another sense, we have very clear and vivid cases of certain melodic surges on the significant words, on the assurances given by God of His mercy and of His intention of salvation. It is worth noting that these are just those cases where the expressive neumes of the paleographic sources appear. We may add to these two instances of the B natural (*invocabitis* and *cunctis*), with its usual effect of clarification. What a sharp relief, then, is given to the repeated affirmation of the intentions of divine mercy, of the total redemption which God prepares for His people!

Generally, then, we have a conservative, yet expressive piece, sober and vigorous. These two aspects, far from contradicting each other, concur in giving this piece its true character. They modify each other. We have here a firm promise from the Lord to His own. Perhaps one would say that it is presented in a tone of half-confidence. Listen to *cogitationes* as it returns, after *Ego cogito*, the low formula of the beginning. In any case, it is certain that in rendering full and due value to the solemn affirmations which we have just mentioned, the piece as a whole should be sung on a soft and quiet tone, with inward expression, without brilliance, and in a tranquil and deliberate tempo, giving an effect of neither slowness nor precipitation.

It is, therefore, easy to sketch the broad lines of the interpretation. It proceeds from all we have just said.

Let us take care, firstly, that in spite of the bar-lines of the Vatican edition, this introit contains only two phrases,

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both concluding on the tonic *fa*, after *afflictionis* and at the end. The full bar which follows *exaudiam vos* is obviously superfluous and should be reduced to the dimensions of a half-bar, marking the end of the first member of the second phrase. There is no real cadence here, to be sure, but merely a logical punctuation, in the melody as in the text, calling for a continuation.

*First phrase.* A very simple intonation, soft, very legato, with a nearly imperceptible crescendo toward the distropha of *Dominus*. The accent of *cogito* fills the role somewhat of a principal accent of this beginning part, since it is the only one to rise above the tonic. We should therefore bring it out, but discreetly, since it rises only to the third in an ornamental fashion, falling back immediately to the tonic and dropping then to the lowest part of the modal scale.

On *cogitationes* the movement, which is at first very flexible and free, becomes more deliberate (unquestionably from the repercussions of *ta*), leading to the solemn affirmation of *pacis*, with its sudden leap to the fifth which is completely unexpected, and its somewhat square melodic design, which contrasts sharply with the lightness of the preceding part, as well as the deliberate lengthening of each of its notes in the manuscripts. We arrive here at the height of the first phrase, and perhaps that of the whole piece.

Let us take care not to give this accent a heavy and material force which would destroy its entire savor. It would seem that the expressive power of this *pacis* cannot be properly brought out except through a cantando nuance, which will not upset its subtle inner quality. More precisely, the initial *la*, drawn by the soft and spiritual quality of the Latin accent, will become a very tiny bit broader, in such a way as to lead to, on the bivirga, in spite of its obvious arsie drive, a soft attack, whose softness is prolonged over the whole melisma. There is a certain stress, but not with the air of cadence which must be reserved for *afflictionis*. It would be wrong to give too much importance to the long torculus, thus cutting apart these two closely united members.

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*Second phrase.* The tempo is resumed on the clear notes of *invocabitis me*, which, although at the beginning, can be considered to be the principal accent of this second phrase. The B natural coming after the preceding flat, as well as the lightness of the melody, resting on the initial *sol* of the neume of accent, both combine to give this second phrase-opening an air of joy and assurance which calls for a certain decisiveness and vivacity of movement. In contrast, with *ego exaudiam* the modification of the melodic ambitus (the three first *si*'s should be *la*'s), the appearance of the B flat and the increase of long neumes all suggest more gravity. This is the answer of God to the prayer of His own, the affirmation of His promise with stress of His mercy. This precedes the return of the last member, beginning at the unison, to the character of quasi-confidence as at the beginning . . . tranquil, simple, without brilliance, as of an already assured matter on which there is no need of further comment. This is an assurance which is brought out a final time in a surge of joy, the unexpected rise to the fifth, clarified by the B natural of *cunctis locis* . . . assurance of certain and universal redemption, the final goal of the work of the Incarnation and the Redemption of which we have a final testament in this closing of the liturgical cycle, intended to commemorate it and bring out its meaning.

### The Offertory *De Profundis*

The offertory *De profundis* has quite another character. This is an instant prayer to God, a cry raised to Him from the depths of the abyss, the whole charged, if not with anguish, at least with a deep sense of human misery and man's need for mercy.

No doubt there is a general tendency among the faithful to misunderstand the real meaning of the psalm *De profundis* because of the custom of hearing it in most instances at funerals. It is only as an accommodation, although a good one, that it is applied to the Office of the Dead, perhaps because of its first words, and also certainly because of its appeal to divine mercy, at the hour when the sinner's soul, appearing before its Judge when it most needs it.

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In reality, particularly in the text of the Vulgate, Psalm CXXIX is an appeal, to be sure, but there is nothing funereal about it; all is bathed in an atmosphere of total confidence. We are concerned only with hope, mercy and redemption:

“But there is forgiveness with Thee: because of Thy law I wait for Thee, O Lord.”

“My soul waiteth on His word: my soul hopeth in the Lord.

“From the morning watch even until night let Israel hope in the Lord:

“For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plentiful redemption.

“And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

The Church is also happily inspired to sing it on Christmas Eve, at the very hour when the Incarnation sets in motion the entire work of the Redemption. This, too, is the psalm which the Church utilizes at the culmination of the liturgical cycle when a summary of the graces received and the responsibilities incurred is made. This is a plea for pardon and a total abandonment to divine mercy.

To tell the truth, in the liturgy of these final Sundays of the year, the *De profundis* occurs twice, in the Alleluia and in the offertory, and in two different versions, if we are to follow the melodies. The Alleluia, in the seventh mode, with its upsurges and a movement which carries it continually from one end to the other of the modal scale, which it even exceeds twice in the upper register in the pronounced progression *fa, sol, la*, is clearly a strong plea, but completely in elan, all bathed in clarity, and if we may not say joy, we may at least say certitude.

The offertory, on the other hand, has little movement. It remains in the depths and does not even rise above the

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dominant *fa*, at least in what we may perhaps call the main part of the piece, for want of more precise terms.

Indeed, this offertory poses a real problem. As given by the *Graduale Romanum*, it is composed of the first half-verse of the psalm: *De profundis clamavi ad te Domine*, which makes a unit, followed by a second phrase: *Domine exaudi orationem meam*, to a very different melody, which leads immediately back to the initial *De profundis*.

Should we consider this second part, *Domine exaudi . . .*, as a real "verse" of the offertory? The sharp change in the melodic line, the incomplete character of this second phrase, which seems very definitely to call for some kind of continuation; in fact, it leads wonderfully to the "refrain"; these points would lead us to look on the phrase as just such a "verse". This is also sustained by the similarity with the two real ancient verses, which end in the same way and lead back to the same refrain. It may be objected that the manuscripts do not actually mark this *Domine exaudi* as a verse, and that many of them, the sangallian scripts, in particular, do not mention the repetition of the *De profundis* afterward. To this we may say that most of these manuscripts, even after the two authentic verses, do not mention it either, and that moreover, other excellent manuscripts, including Laon 239 and Chartres 47, explicitly mark the repeat after *Domine exaudi*. This, however, is merely a matter of words. In the present aspect of the question, nothing prevents us from considering this *Domine exaudi* practically as a simili-verse, and that is how we shall view it in these remarks.

*First phrase.*—Although the whole piece, verses included, must be counted as among the most expressive of the entire repertoire, it is incontestably this first phrase, the "refrain", which constitutes the most beautiful and moving part of it.

This is a second mode piece in its full power, drawn squarely within the lower notes of the scale. It returns with marked predilection to the dominant, *fa*, which it never surpasses in height, even in an ornamental fashion. Although it

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uses the *do*, even with a kind of emphasis, we may say that it evolves mainly within the modal third *re-fa*, and the intonation, beginning with the low *la* and strongly stressing the initial accented *re*, adds still further to the profundity of the whole. As for the B natural, touched once in passing, we should consider it merely as a momentary borrowing, a fleeting touch of the neighboring hexachord.<sup>1</sup>

In sum, we have something very reserved, massive, and yet singularly powerful in expression. No matter how little inner feeling you may focus on it, you cannot help but sense this current of intensive life, which, in spite of the limited development of the melodic line, flows throughout these neumes, so seemingly heavy. This life carries everything forward from the first note toward the cadence *ad te Domine*. It is a reserved inner life, but a very real one.

It is perhaps pointless to try to find the exact apex of this phrase. Is it the accent of *profundis*? That of *clamavi*? Good reasons exist for choosing either. If I were not afraid of seeming paradoxical, I might say that we might, if we wish, put the apex on the *te*, under the condition that we distinguish between the intensive pole and the expressive pole of the work. It is an incontestable fact that the *ad te* belongs to the apodosis of the line, but it is nevertheless true that everything seems to converge toward this point, and the impression of relaxation which we feel on these light neumes, which move in descending progression after the uninterrupted tension of the preceding neumes, all marked as long in the manuscripts, is no doubt of certain significance.

Let us forego these questions of pure technique, however, which are, after all, secondary, and let us give our attention to the reality of this prayer which rises here, so heavy with the misery of suffering humanity and yet so full of the most absolute confidence. Sing it with a maximum of ardent supplication, bringing out without stress, but with all your soul, each of these words so filled with expression. Render the upsurge of *De profundis* with vigor and in a fine and

1. See Potiron, *L'Analyse modale*, p. 78 and 101.

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broad movement, bringing out the tonic accent through a heavy stress of the first ictic *re* of the disaggregate torculus which, in truth, actually "carries" the whole neume as well as the following tristropha. Then, after a moment of relaxation on the closing porrectus before the quarter-bar, take up the original tempo, extend your crescendo across the whole word *clamavi* with the same vocal warmth.

Then comes the last incise, *ad te Domine*, which forms an indivisible unit, within which there is a very obvious shading of infinite tenderness. After a very tiny break in the vocal line, attack the preposition *ad* softly, moving brightly, but without hurry and in a mellow voice, toward the *te*, taken with maximum smoothness in a full expression of respect and love. It would be good, in order to bring out this little essential word, to articulate it clearly, particularly the *d* and *t*, broadening the first *re* and flowing on in full legato to the other notes, a legato which will carry into the cadence of *Domine*.

*Second phrase.*—Here there is a marked change in the melody, in tempo, style and all other aspects. From the outset the change is obvious. The dominant, an extreme limit up to this point, now becomes a point of departure, immediately surpassed in pitch, first by the interval of a second, then by a third. From this comes a very clear impression of taking flight.

Indeed, everything is more lively. The melismas are richer, the melodic line becomes more and more independent of the words and takes on a free course, the neumes in the manuscripts are now mostly without signs of length, and the "movement" makes itself more and more evident. The ambitious is not really much greater than before, as the high *la* is reached only once and the *sol* four times, all with an ornamental cast. We may even say that the melody has a definite downward tendency, but in any case there is a very definite feeling of movement, and a splendid continuity.

Released by the strong appeal of *Domine*, the theme of which is taken with emphasis by the word *exaudi*, the very

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Offert.

2.

**D** E pro-fún- dis \* clamá- vi ad te, Dómi- ne.

ÿ 1. Dó- mine ex- áu- di o-ra- ti- ó- nem mé- am :

De profún- dis etc.

ÿ 2. Fi- ant au- res tu- ae inténdén- tes,

in o-ra- ti- ó- nem servi tu-

i. De profún- dis etc.

ÿ 3. Si in- i-qui- tá- tes obser- vá- ve- ris,

Dómine, Dómi- ne, quis

sustí- né- bit ? De profún- dis etc.

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fluid melodic line rolls forth around *orationem meam*, the feminine cadence of which evokes a vocal upsurge of wonderful lyricism, seeming unlimited in scope. Note how it at first seems to remain within the modal third, as though to muster its power. Then it gives itself over freely to its inspirations, more and more so as it spreads across the chord-like intervals *la-do-re-fa*, *fa-re-do-la*, so characteristic of the second mode, and by which the piece actually began. Certainly there is no need to stress the use of the long notes on *fa* which the melody seems reluctant to give up, nor the rich melodic curve which leads to the extraordinary, suspenseful final cadence. Without going into the matter of the unity of this whole section, which merely develops the opening theme, there is, in these accents, a power of expression and evocation which makes this melisma equal to the finest in the repertoire.

Therefore, after the feminine cadence of *meam*, and in making the ictic *re* which follows the quarter-bar both the point-of-arrival of the preceding material and the beginning of what follows, take this vocalise, even during the two climaxes *mi-re-do*, *re-do-la*, in unbroken crescendo with some *accelerando*, without, however, attacking harshly or hurriedly any of these long *fas*. It would be well to broaden ever so slightly each of the *res* which fall in the center of this final repetition of the stressed *fa*. Keep this drive moving up to the distropha on which the final cadence is hinged. Sing this final curve very broadly, and do not be afraid of giving full value to the two *pressus* of holding the final *re* much longer than its written value, somewhat like the effect of an organ-point.

After this, and after a broad pause, return smoothly to the *De profundis* with all the sincerity and vocal warmth of which you are capable. Take it in a powerful crescendo, singing every neume with fullness. It will be at this point that you will feel the full power and truth of the sentiments drawn from the depths of your being toward the God of goodness and mercy.

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We know that originally the offertories of the repertoire included a series of verses, just like the introit and the communion, but generally more ornate. Many of these are musical compositions of great beauty. They quickly fell into disuse, and we find them only in the most ancient manuscripts. The only remaining trace of this older arrangement in our present-day liturgy is that of the offertory of the Requiem Mass.

We take the opportunity of publishing here a reconstruction of the verses of the offertory *De profundis*, although we do not propose it as definite. We do not have the occasion to comment on these other verses here. A brief examination of them, however, will suffice to show the extent to which they have stemmed from the same inspiration which created the whole of this *De profundis* and the extent to which they form a unit with it. They, too, remain in the lower register, with a broad intonation, which the final verse, *Si iniquitates*, extends from the low *sol*, and then repeats in its integrity on the words *quis sustinebit* at the end. This is a highly expressive touch of suppliant prayer, both anguished and confident, which is the sum and substance of this entire piece.

## **THE INTERPRETATION AND STYLE OF GREGORIAN CHANT**

by David Nicholson, O.S.B.  
Monk of Mount Angel Abbey

[Editor's note: Father David is a very experienced musician and chant scholar. He has been known for many years now as a choirmaster of the Mount Angel Abbey Seminary Choir, which has made numerous concert appearances and released some of its work on recordings. In 1955, Father David spent some time at Solesmes under the guidance of Dom Gajard, O.S.B., choirmaster of the famous Abbey. The following remarks are drawn from his experience at Solesmes and the readings recommended to him by Father Gajard. In this sense they reflect the impressions of an American choirmaster as to the aspects of chant technique and style which are usually stressed by Dom Gajard in his personal teaching.]

Many excellent books on the theory of the rhythm of Gregorian Chant have been written during the past few decades. They have had as their sound foundation the principles of Solesmes as promulgated by Dom Mocquereau and his successor, Dom Joseph Gajard. While it is true that these texts have promoted a better understanding among choirs and choirmasters of the subtleties of the rhythm of this official song of the Church, it is also true that enough has not been written about the interpretation and the style of this beautiful music.

Great advances, of course, have been made, for due to the Motu Proprio of St. Pius X, there was official appreciation and the all-important insistence upon the following of the decree.

## INTERPRETATION AND STYLE

Actually the understanding of the intricacies of Plain Song is still in the infant stage in many parts of the world. Those who are qualified to teach the subject are, themselves, involved in struggling with these very intricacies. This means that if we are to progress further we must not remain in the text book stage, but must try to embrace completely the theory of the Chant, while adding to our knowledge of the more finished elements of the subject.

It is in order to present facts on interpretation and style that these notes have been prepared. The conclusions are based on conversations with Dom Joseph Gajard, and on the experience of proof-reading and correcting a set of manuscripts written by the choirmaster of Solesmes. It is my hope that this shared knowledge will help open the doors of understanding to the beauty and melody of the Church's songs.

### The Basic Pulse

Here we must first consider the equality of the notes and of the syllables in chant, since the complete basis of all plain song singing is the realization in both theory and practice that all notes are relatively equal unless otherwise designated. Each note should be given the full value of its beat, and on no occasion should that beat be shortened. When the old system of making some notes short and some long is allowed, the unevenness of the basic pulse gives way very soon to a sort of jerky syncopation which ultimately destroys the complete rhythm.

Nor is it music when each note is sung in a mathematical manner as in following a metronome. It must be kept in mind that no matter what the effect on the individual notes and neumes of the greater rhythm of the entire melodic line or the effect of the working of the binary and ternary groups, the simple notes must still retain their full value. This same equality of value also governs the syllables of the words of the Latin text. Each syllable is relatively equal to the others and care must be taken to see that there is no lengthening or

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shortening of some of them. Syncopation is the only result when inequality of values is allowed. As in the melody, the words must not be metronomic. Artistic taste and discretion must be used.

### The Precision of the Binary and Ternary Groups

This rule follows the preceding one as a natural consequence. As the basic pulse of the simple note is one of relative evenness and precision, so must the notes when gathered together in composite rhythm be gathered together so as to maintain that precision. Here is a most important point of Gregorian interpretation. To destroy the foundation of the equality of the groups is to try to build a house without a foundation or a plan. The structure, insecure and lopsided, will soon crash to the ground. An excellent plan in practicing the chant is to begin by counting smoothly and with suppleness the individual binary and ternary groups. By going through the entire selection and determining where the ictus is, then counting the groups of twos and threes, a discipline is built which will show itself in the entire general rhythmic plan. Be certain, when counting, to give the up-beats, that is, the second or third notes of the compound groups, their full value of the basic pulse. Shortening the up-beats while at the same time adding extra length to the ictus completely destroys the smooth legato of the cantilene. And again, that same element of syncopation is the result.

### The Ictus

The ictus itself has no material force. In the overall rhythm it is simply the end of one composite group and the beginning of the next. It follows, then, that to give this important touch-point a strong beat or force, would be to introduce a completely foreign element into the chant.

It is best to avoid giving the ictus any material force when counting the groups of twos and threes. This force may more properly be *imagined*. There are, however, several instances when the effect of the ictus is felt as intensive.

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A case in point is when the ictus is arsic; that is, when it coincides with the accent of the Latin word. Then we have more of a feeling of impulsion, a strong gathering together of the impetus elements which make up the arsis.

### Arsis and Thesis of the Binary and Ternary Groups

Having achieved the smooth, equal counting of the binary and ternary groups and maintained the intactness of the basic pulse, we now move to a higher concept. Here we must determine whether and which groups are arsic or thetic. The rules for this are clear in every good text book on rhythm, but it must be stressed that in order to produce the feeling of correct style and interpretation, the effect of the arsis or thesis must be infused into the compound group. This is best done by retaining the action of counting the compound groups while giving each arsic group a slight crescendo and feeling of impetus. Then, at the opposite side of the rhythmic factor, of course, the thetic groups will be marked by a feeling of repose and rest. Without the infusion of the arsic or thetic elements into our basic rhythm, we cannot progress toward the greater rhythm which is the most attractive feature of plain song. One should be able, when listening to a good choir sing the chant, to determine by the very treatment of the notes and neumes whether they are arsic or thetic.

Once we have accomplished both the counting of the groups and the counting of these same groups with the infusion of the elements of arsis and thesis, we should next sing the melody with the vowel "o". We must not destroy the precision that the counting has given to the melody nor the essential rhythmic factor given with the introduction of the arsis and thesis. We simply use the "o" vowel to prepare for the welding of melody and words.

The final step in rhythm practice is to unite the arsic and thetic groups in each incise, member and phrase, blending into one grand rhythmic arsis and thesis. This is called building up the intensive line, and its achievement means that we have succeeded in bringing out every essential part of the structure

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from the basic pulse to the final culmination of Gregorian rhythm.

### The Latin Tonic Accent

The final step, of course is to sing the melody with the words. With this we have accomplished the intention of the composer — to bring forth not only the rhythm of the melody, but also the rhythm of the Latin word. In Gregorian melodies, one without the other is pointless. It is the combination of the two which completes the charm — the subtle exterior manifestation of an interior spirituality and understanding. At the very root of the rhythm of the Latin word lies the tonic accent. Each Latin word is composed of syllables with equal value of length, but possessed of the interplay of arsis and thesis as in the rhythm of the melody.

That the Latin tonic accent is light by nature, and arsic, is the considered opinion of many who believe that it is to be sung short, and quickly. Actually the tonic accent — and in addition the secondary accents — is light and arsic. But many have allowed a certain text-book mentality to so influence their choirs that this short, quick element has produced the usual undesirable syncopation.

A most important point of style in reciting or singing Latin words is to allow each syllable to retain its full value while lifting the tonic accent up. To accomplish this, the accented syllable must be permitted to be lifted up and broadened — and with some amount of amplitude or fullness. Care must be taken that the accent not be given an intensive force of any kind in this case, since laxity will cause the very opposite of the desired quality, a material thump. Thus, when reciting the Latin text, let every tonic accent retain its prominent value of being lifted up and broadened. In this way that peculiar and particular prominence of the most important syllable of each Latin word will be brought out.

There are many instances in Gregorian melodies where the tonic accent (and sometimes secondary accent) coincides

with the note in a composite group which is called the up-beat. This note, which gets either the "two" or "three" count, is light and arsic by its position in the group. Coinciding as it does with the accent, which by its nature is light and arsic, there will be a very prominent lifting up of the arsic element. This is particularly true when the word is a spondee.

### The Final Syllable

Since the final syllable comes after the accent, it is generally thetic, especially in the case of spondees. Thus the final syllable should be recited or sung with an expression of repose and softness, but not, however, to the point of debility. Too often the final syllable of a word is given a hammer-like blow or even an explosive force which threatens to banish the entire concept of the rhythm of arsis and thesis in the Latin word.

### The Greater Rhythm and the Intensive Line

By means of the intensive line, as we have previously mentioned, the culmination of the melodic rhythm is clarified in the bringing out of the Greater Rhythm. This is done by the use of the crescendo and decrescendo. The uniting of the various arsic and thetic groups requires the welding by some external force of the intensive and dynamic qualities. To procure this intensive line, one of the best rules to follow is that of adherence to the contours of the melody. When the melody begins to mount, infuse it with a small, proportionate crescendo. When the melody begins to descend, a small proportionate decrescendo should be made.

To be sure, the basic rules of determining the arsis and thesis of each melodic group must first be worked out, but these then blend into the greater rhythm. There are not, however, tremendous crescendos and corresponding decrescendos in chant. Each use of the dynamic panel must be discreet, prayerful and artistic. Never must it be forgotten that the chant is the most prayerful of all sung texts. To introduce the modern concept of all-out dynamics would be to destroy the prayerfulness which has had universal admiration throughout Christian ages.

## GREGORIAN REVIEW

Before we enter more closely into the detailed elements which make up the style, we must add that in the correct developing of the fine details of this music, nothing mechanical is to be introduced. To do this would be to remain within the pages of the textbook.

Above all, chant is supple and flexible. To sing it otherwise is to make a parody of it. Thus, even though we insist upon careful attention (both in practice and actual singing) to the various factors which make up our rhythms, these must not be mechanical in style. Freedom and liberty have always been a *sine-qua-non*.

### The Legato

There is, then, more to the singing of chant than a mere scrupulous attention to the detailed elements of rhythm. There are various points which we more accurately determine as "style".

The legato is one of the characteristics of Gregorian art. Since this art is, above all, sung prayer, nothing troubled or agitated must be introduced to disturb the perpetual uninterrupted continuity of the grand rhythmic line. Such things as staccato effects, syncopated rhythms, disturbed phrasing, or distorted pronunciation of the Latin words are to be avoided with the most diligent care.

The perfect use of the legato, however, will not interfere with the very necessary clean and correct articulation of the consonants — a quality indispensable to all sung music, ancient or modern. The distinction of the verbal or melodic incisives of the chant will not detract from this very necessary quality.

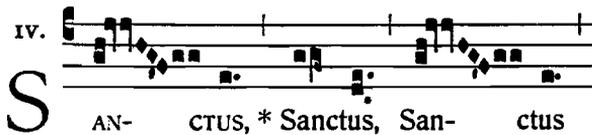
### The Softness of the High Notes

We have here another principle of style which is so evident in the interpretation of the Solesmes school of chant. Like many of our other points, it does not come into opposition with the principles of rhythm. It simply flows quite naturally from them.

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In modern music we sometimes, for effect, attack the top notes with brilliance and strength of tone in order to derive a necessary effect. Such a practice does not occur in the chant, which never strives for effects, theatrical or otherwise. The top notes, especially those which rest at the very peak of the melodic line, are to be sung with a discreet softness in order to avoid a "point" in the crescendo which generally precedes this high group along the mounting melodic line. An example is given in the Sanctus of Mass III.

iv.



S AN- CTUS, \* Sanctus, San- ctus

The podatus *sol-la* which begins the first incise is very arsic, due to its coincidence with the accent, and also because it begins the very intonation of the arsic phrase.

There will be a crescendo on this neume which, if permitted to culminate in a very loud *forte* on the double *do* of the bivirga, would result in an exceedingly vulgar effect. Such an effect is avoided by singing these top notes with reserve, softness and an element of *piano*, rather than *forte*. The effect of such a treatment creates a profound attitude of prayerful repose.

### Divisions in the Melody and Words

A most important point must be stressed now in regard to the singing of the chant. We sing in order to express a thought or a sentiment, since music is a language which must be sung intelligently and interpreted intelligently. Therefore we do not sing the chant as if it were an exercise in solfeggio or any other set of vocalises. We must gather together in this sublime art all the living forces which will develop an intelligent rendition of the music. In order to do this we must sing the text so that it makes sense. Either to split up or to weld together words or phrases whose juxtaposition de-

## GREGORIAN REVIEW

stroys the sense of the text is contrary to rules of pronunciation and enunciation. For example, to sing the phrase *Hosanna in excelsis* as if it were one part, destroys its sense. It is better so sing it *Hosanna — in excelsis* placing a slight pause between the *Hosanna* and the *in excelsis*. This brings out the meaning of the text which actually is made up of two small ideas.

The same treatment must be given to the singing of many such phrases which, if sung as if on one continuous line, would lose the sense of their texts. Occasionally the celebrant of the Mass will begin the preface with the words "*Pe-romnia saecula saeculorum,*" etc. The correct singing of that text is "*Per omnia saecula saeculorum*". The words should never be run together.

In certain places in the melody line we have incisives, members and phrases which demand slight divisions in order to bring out the important contours of the rhythm and melody. Text books, of course, give the various rules on breathing, pauses, etc., of these important points. But it must be pointed out that in the interpretation of these points of breathing, or of rest, a great deal of flexibility must be observed. This must be done in order to keep the legato of the greater rhythm unbroken. On the other hand, these points of breathing or rest must not be stressed to any degree of exaggeration. The melodic line should be sung so that all points of breathing and of rest will blend into the grand line and lend repose and tranquillity to the complete effect.

### The Suppleness of the Tempo

There is no hide-bound set of limits in the tempo of the chant. There should, on the contrary, be the greatest liberty in determining the speed and tempo of each selection.

The habit of placing metronome marks before each selection of chant in the repertoire is preposterous. It evidences a lack of understanding of this type of music.

## INTERPRETATION AND STYLE

There is no special movement for the Introits, nor for the Graduals, the Offertories, etc. In order to determine the tempo of each piece, we must consult the text and the melody welded together as an ensemble.

Actually, the tempo can often vary within the confines of a single piece, from one member to the next. There are certain delicate nuances in each selection which can be brought out by a differing of the tempo as the melodic line continues. A detailed study of each melody makes it possible to determine all this before singing.

In general, however, the tempo is always one which gives a sense of movement — even in those instances which would naturally invite a rest. To stop the movement at any place would be to discontinue the rhythmic synthesis which was built up in the melody by the composer.

Here we must reiterate a necessary point: no matter what the speed or tempo may be, we must not, by our subtle interpretation of the movement, contradict the great and primary principle of the indivisibility of the basic pulse or equality of notes. As has been stressed before, these have a relative value. Their duration will vary naturally with the tempo and just as naturally, they will be enlarged or diminished with it. But no matter what the nuance, there must be no interference with the basic pulse.

### The Horizontal Episema

Text books on Gregorian rhythm outline in detail the many uses of the horizontal epizema. Its place in the melodic line will determine whether it is arsic or thetic, as also will its placing above the accent, or on a thetic syllable of the word. However, one point of style should be emphasized: the horizontal episema is not a sign of length. It is above all a sign of nuance or expression. Another element evolves from this same principle, in the fact that it does not change the rhythmic quality of the note or notes which it affects. Rather does it give added shading to the arsic or thetic rhythm of the note or notes above which it is placed.

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### Special Treatment of Certain Neumes

#### *The Pressus preceded by a note on a new syllable*

When on a new syllable, accented or not, there is a single note immediately preceding a pressus, nothing is changed with regard to the rule that the first note of the pressus receives the rhythmic ictus, and the first note preceding the pressus is lifted. The last mentioned, however, is treated so that it is very lightly rounded off and amplified. In this manner it prepares the gentle alighting of the voice on the ictus of the pressus. An example presents itself in the Grad-



ual for the 1st Sunday of Advent. The first note *re* which precedes the pressus on *do* will be treated in the manner as described above. This type of formation of style constantly occurs throughout the entire Gregorian repertoire. After assiduous practice one becomes accustomed to treating it in the proper manner.

#### *Notes isolated between two long notes*

In this case we refer to any note which has been lengthened beyond its ordinary time value of one basic pulse, by the addition of a dot or a horizontal episema. Other long notes which may also be included in this category are the pressus, strophicus, notes with an oriscus and the note which precedes the quilisma.

When a single isolated note presents itself between two of the aforementioned long notes great care must be taken not to syncopate the legato rhythm of the phrase by shortening the isolated note. We must give this note the full value of its time, and even broaden it very slightly in order that it fit in

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with the other lengthened notes. In this way all notes are lengthened into the legato phrase gently and there is nothing erratic or jerky.

An example is in the Introit of the Salve Sancta Parens (Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin).

S AL-VE \* sancta Pa- rens,

These two cases give ample proof of the point of style in question. If followed they will safeguard the smooth legato of the phrase. If we were to sing the isolated notes between the long notes with their ordinary time value, we would have a syncopated series of long and short notes, which would disturb the tranquillity of the movement.

### *Isolated Notes between two neumes.*

As with the previous rule, an isolated note which is placed between two neumes in the melodic line must be given the same full value of its length. In most cases, to preserve the continuous legato line, that same note should be slightly lengthened. The Introit for the XXII Sunday after Pentecost will illustrate this point of style. In the first incise —

S I in- iqui-tá-tes \*

*Si iniquitates* — we have an isolated note — *sol* — placed between the clivis and the podatus. By somewhat enlarging the time value of the isolated note, we can preserve perfectly the legato line, even though it is in an arsic passage.

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There is another case of this isolated note in the *Alleluia* of the same Sunday. To enter brusquely into the new incise without giving the full time value, and even more, to hurry the single note *fa* over *et*, would be fatal to the movement.



### *Disaggregate Neumes.*

The case of the separated single note placed before a torculus in the same syllable, as illustrated in this rule, and also the single note which is separated and placed before the porrectus in the same syllable as illustrated in the following example, is called a "disaggregate" neume. Actually, if the single note were placed in conjunction with the following neume and were not separated from it, the conjunction of the two would form a different type of neume, but the separating of the single note from the following neume makes it a disaggregate neume.

In the ordinary run of events, with regard to the placing of the ictus, the neume itself would attract the ictus, having it placed on the first note of the neume-group. However, in the case of the disaggregate neume the ictus falls upon the isolated note which precedes the group. Thus the rhythmic grouping is changed by the placing of the ictus on the single isolated note.

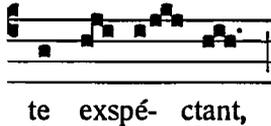
### *Single note before a Torculus in the same syllable.*

This rule of style is not to be found in many "methods" on Chant rhythm. Nevertheless, when understood properly it contributes considerably to the charm of the Solesmes style.

The single note placed before a Torculus in the same syllable is held very slightly, in order to prepare for the

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graceful execution of the Torculus itself. The effect should be one of easing into the Torculus by means of the single preparatory note. The first example which presents itself in the Liber is found in the 1st Sunday of Advent in the Introit.

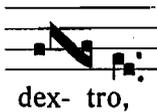


We must be certain that it is a single note preceding the Torculus in the same syllable. To have this phenomenon occur in separate syllables does not bring into force the value of the rule. The single note is not to be attached to the Torculus.

### *Single note before a Porrectus in the same syllable.*

The same effect of the treatment of the single note preceding a Torculus in the same syllable applies to the single note preceding a Porrectus in the *same* syllable.

Two examples are given in the *Vidi Aquam* — the first on the word *dextro* and the second on the word *dicent*. The



graceful and somewhat broadened rendition of the Porrectus is approached by holding, slightly, this single “disaggregate” note preceding it. Care must be taken in recognizing this group of notes, for there are not too many of them in the Gregorian repertoire. Do not treat in this way the note *attached to*, and preceding what looks like the ordinary Porrectus, for in that case we have a Torculus respinus.

*The climacus.*

With regard to this rather difficult neume, the movement of descent is never precipitous, especially on the long climacus. We must take special care to give each note its full value and to descend gracefully and with temperate dignity in order to give an unhurried effect.

*Large descending intervals.*

All intervals in Chant, especially the larger ones, are sung in such a way as to give the effect of being broad and unhurried. The large descending intervals are sung so that an arched, rounded and light treatment is given, without precipitation. It is best not to pounce on the bottom note. It should be touched with some hesitation. In this way a delicate touch point is established.

*Melodic descents which come before a long note.*

In order to prepare for the point of rest which is required by notes of length, we must ease into them. This is especially true in places where the melody descends, where we should hold back somewhat the last note which precedes the long note. Cadences especially require this treatment.

In the *Alleluia* for the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, we have two examples within the same word.



If we were to make the descent in a brusque manner, coming to an abrupt stop on the dotted notes, we would have a disturbed rhythmic effect. All peace and tranquillity would be lost. But if we ease into the long notes by holding back the note which precedes them — and gently alighting on the long notes — we have an artistic and spiritual treatment of both the melody and the text.

### Held Notes

It often happens that the singing of the held notes in the melodic line presents a real obstacle to the continuity of the line and the life of the rhythm. These notes which occur constantly throughout the melodic line, even within the same incise, are too often treated so as to give the impression that the rhythm has come to an end. This is not the case. All long notes, all held notes except the final one, are part of the rhythmic entity. Even though there is a pause to be observed on them, they are not to be held or treated so as to give the impression of complete finality. We must keep the movement flowing and gliding from one note to another, from one phrase to the other.

The ends of incises, members and phrases, are not to be treated with complete finality, but are to give the correct impression that something is to follow. In this way we can weld the entire rhythmic line together, not sectioning it off into small parcelled parts, but giving the rhythmic and aural impression that the entire selection is a unit.

### Cadences of Alternate Chants

For the same reason as stated above, we do not give the lesser cadence endings of those chants which are sung in antiphonal style between opposite parts of the choir the impression of complete finality. (Examples: *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*). An exaggerated *rallentando* must be avoided on these cadences, since this would be contrary to the unity of the greater law of rhythm. It is only on the last part of the piece (the last stroke of the Hymn, the last *Kyrie*, the *Amen* of the *Gloria* and of the *Credo*) that an enlargement of the rhythm is usually given. Thus, when these parts constitute the finale of the selections, they may be sung with a good *rallentando*, full but light.

### The Holding of the Final Note

In order to prepare for the final note which will mark the completion of the finished performance, the note which

occurs immediately before it should be treated with an almost imperceptible retard. Thus we avoid landing suddenly and with too much material force on the final note itself. This final note should be thetic, and sung with an atmosphere of complete prayerful spirituality. The final note is always a dotted punctum, but in order to give the impression of complete rest and finality it should be held for more than the double count. One often hears the best choirs give this note a count of three and even four beats, before fading into inaudibility. In this regard the good taste and discretion of the choirmaster should be foremost.

### The Voice

The volume and tone of voice are not essential parts of the rhythmic structure of the chant. Nevertheless their correct use does constitute a most necessary part of the style and interpretation.

Since the chant is the official sung-prayer of the Church, we have a universal tradition of rhythm and chanting which is colored with qualities and characteristics of each nationality. This is not only necessary; it is also essential. In the unity of the Chant a diversity is permitted, and diversity will naturally spring from national traits of temperament, character, education and background. To maintain that, each country must sing the Chant in its own way, vocally speaking of course, since to sing in imitation the linguistic traits of another country would be beyond the bounds of both reason and good taste. However, so subtle and refined is the rhythm and interpretation of Chant, that it requires a certain special treatment of voice in order to obtain the proper style.

We may have complete theoretical and artistic knowledge of our subject, but unless we adapt our voices to its mold, we shall not be able to accomplish the high goals and standards which we have set.

It is my belief that the matter of voice is a tremendously important one. It should not be treated lightly, for without proper vocalization we will not have the proper style.

## INTERPRETATION AND STYLE

It is to be remembered that Plainsong is not in the same category as Polyphony (classical or otherwise) or contemporary music. Throughout the last five centuries we have established a system of singing each kind of music so that it can often be recognized by the very use of the voice itself. Thus we do not sing Classical Polyphony with the stentorian qualities and extreme volume and resonance that is required in Wagnerian opera. Nor do we approach the singing of Opera in general with the voice used in *lieder*. Each type of music has its own "voice." This is important. Too often, and unhappily, do we hear the most spiritual and ethereal music of the Gregorian repertoire sung in a manner which should only be used for the more dramatic forms of the art.

Any use of the voice which will give a materialistic impression should be avoided. Even the *bel canto* is far too "artificial". The voice should be light and flexible so that all the delicate shadings of an intricate rhythm can be managed. A voice that is heavy, throaty, chesty and too vibrant will not attain those nuances so necessary for the proper style. The *mezzo* voice, without strain, is the ideal. If one can manage this voice and produce a good resonance, that is likewise desirable. But if by a too stentorian and loud use of the voice the shadings are completely obliterated, then one is advised to soften and lighten the voice. It is also true that to strive after any theatrical effect in tone or quality of voice will give a material quality to the music. Let the voice come out naturally, with suppleness and fluidity. The result will take care of itself.

To sing Plainsong properly requires a great deal of humility on the part of the singer. At all times the individual's voice and temperament must be subordinate to, and blended into, the ensemble. No one voice should protrude from or above the volume and line of pitch. When it does, the effect of unity upon which this monodic music is built is lessened.

### Conclusion

From the material which has been outlined in the previous pages, the reader will gather that Gregorian art is more than pure, theory and detail. The true style of chant consists of this theoretical knowledge, plus the countless number of shadings and nuances that are so necessary for a music which is — above all — spiritual.

To approach Gregorian art purely from the standpoint of music would be to eliminate the soul of its existence. This music, the official song of the Church, is above all prayer. As such, it is elevated to the highest plane.

Inseparable from the Liturgy, in many places it can be said to be the voice of the Liturgy. For this reason it must be treated with the deepest respect, both in technique and in spirit. All the rules of its theory, all the nuances of its style combine to make Gregorian art the most sublime of its kind. Whenever one is singing or listening to the chant, the first and foremost impression should be one of contemplative prayer. That, after all, is the very reason for its existence.

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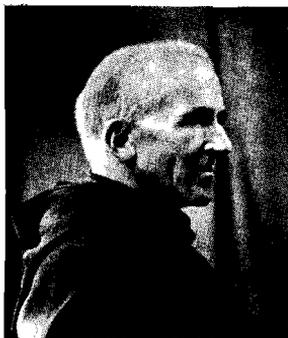
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