

INTERPRETATION OF SACRUM

To what extent do the arts reflect the period in which they were created? And what do the contemporary arts say about us? The streamlined automobiles, the sleek architecture, the deafening pop concerts and the uncommunicative visual arts. And the services in the Mother Church, with its growing culture of singing tunes and rhymes where everything is reduced to a level that a child can understand and not a single celebrant can be gripped by the Majesty of God?

We are always inclined to lump together a period's cultural expressions in the widest sense – whatever the period – if only because they are contemporaneous.

I

After the Edict of Milan in 313, when freedom of religion began to dominate in the Roman Empire, the Christians could openly practice their religion and give public expression to it in a wide range of arts. It was later that Gregorian Chant quietly grew out of the sounds derived from the synagogue and emerged, mainly during the Great Migration of Peoples, with Rome as its cradle.

Gregorian Chant testifies to a spirituality that breathes 'the unearthly, inward-looking piety of the traditional Church', sung in monasteries and singing schools by voices joining with the heavenly choirs of angels.

These are the words with which Helene Nolthenius opens her book *Muziek tussen hemel en aarde. De wereld van het Gregoriaans* [Music between Heaven and Earth. The World of Gregorian Chant] from 1981. 'An echo of God: That is how we should try to understand the hushed, unworldly character of its music,' says Nolthenius in her introduction. 'It is inward looking, just like the churches in which it grew. It is what one might call the aloof mystery of Gregorian Chant.'

Echo of God is an echo of eternity – hushed, not of this world, taciturn at a respectful distance. If Gregorian Chant could spring forth from that state of mind, in that focus on the essential and simple core of life, then finding such peace of mind is the gift of voicing for all like-minded individuals in every age and in every culture. God's echo appears in the cosmos in accordance with Pythagoras' theorem, where the ratios established by the Creator are in harmony and are reflected in nature, in architecture and in music.

The liturgy lives by the analogy. For all the differences, there are similarities between heavenly and earthly liturgy – the former complete and divine, the second incomplete and human. But the earthly seeks the heavenly and yearns for the silence there where it is total and where the incense does not cease ascending to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb that was slaughtered (Revelation 5:13; cf. 8:1 ,3-4). The same happens in the great prayer of the Preface in every Holy Mass, for which Gregorian Chant is still used in these liturgically impoverished times:

'*Sursum corda*' (Lift up your hearts), '*Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro*' (Let us give thanks to the Lord our God). And after thanking and praising God the Father through Jesus Christ, the priest announces with which angels and other heavenly creatures we devote the thrice repeated 'sanctus' (holy) derived from the heavenly liturgy via Isaiah (6:3) and Matthew (21:9).

It is in my view no consoling coincidence, but rather a coincidental consolation that in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* the penitents slowly climbing to heaven hear Gregorian Chant seven times on Mount Purgatory, where souls pay for their sins.

In Canto VIII, as evening falls he and Virgil hear the spirits singing the hymn '*Te Lucis ante terminum, rerum Creator poscimus*' (Before the light goes out, we beg You, creator of all [to protect us in the coming night]). In Canto IX, at the dawning of the day they both listen to the solemn hymn '*Te Deum laudamus, Te Dominum confitemur*' (You are God, we praise you; You are the Lord, we acclaim you). In Canto XII, there is the beatitude '*Beati pauperes spiritu*' (Blessed are the poor in spirit) referring to Matthew (5:3), and in Canto XXVI, Dante receives the advice to consider the first lines of the 'Paternoster'. In Canto XXVII, quietly reaching the top of the mountain, both hear a voice emerging from the light of Christ's welcome to the new day singing from Matthew (25:34): '*Venite, benedicti Patris Mei*' (Come, you blessed of My Father). In Canto XXIX, Matelda, who is now accompanying Dante further, sings from Psalm (32:1): '*Beati quorum tecta sunt peccata*' (Blessed are those whose sins are covered). In Canto XXX, just three canti removed from Paradise, the '*sommo Poeta*' [Supreme Poet] of the Italian peninsula hears welcoming texts being sung: one from Song of Songs (4:8) for Beatrice; the other a variation on Matthew (cf. 21:9) for Dante himself: '*Benedictus qui venis*' (Blessed is he who comes).

II

'With flying colours, some of our concerned clergy ran from the Latin cathedral only to suddenly start indulging in conventicles that are part revival meetings and part Sunday school, which frame a rump Eucharist with songs and an attempt at mass control and which bear the stamp not of the supratemporal Church, but of the local director.' Thus wrote the priest and art historian Frits van der Meer in *De Tijd* newspaper on 13 February 1965 of four 'tragic illusions' regarding the liturgy in the Netherlands after the Second Vatican Council.

The first illusion is that the entire Mass must be entirely of our time. But the liturgy, in contrast, 'transcends time, and not twenty but all centuries. It is therefore never entirely of the present time. It is the treasure, new and old, that the owner of a house brings forth from his storeroom' (cf. Matthew 13:52).

The second illusion is the conviction that one has to act normally to reach the common folk. 'That is an error. The trivial – and everything current is banal, even if it stands out – immediately becomes boring. [...] The Spirit, which inspires the sacred books, did not do it with conviviality and with conformity to the world, but with divine poetry and unworldly light.'

The third illusion is 'the relative indifference and the automatically accepted ignorance, in matters of Holy Scripture and Belief, of a large part of our congregation. [...] Nothing

[however] is more important to all of us who wish to lift our spirits than that sublime, more believed than understood practice that is the secret of our worship service'.

The fourth illusion mentioned by Frits van der Meer is the overestimation of the didactic: 'The Dutch person who knows something, however little, plays the schoolmaster. He does not believe in the power of the immutable symbol, the exalted word, the supratemporal gesture. He forgets that the Scriptures assert little, but rather proclaim, usually by means of sometimes amazingly simple and sometimes dazzling poetry. [...] The actual service of worship is an infinitely higher pronouncement. It occurs in the doing, in the actually being present, in the participation without explanation.'

By citing these four illusions, articulated more than half a century ago, I am referring for now to the demise of the sacred, the ignorance regarding the *sacrum*. I am endeavouring to build the bridge back to the sanctity of the liturgy, to the interpretation of the *sacrum* as expressed by Gregorian Chant.

And even if we are occasionally distracted by the singing in that great tradition, we can take comfort from the mildness of Benedict, the father of monasticism, in his Rule (cf. 19): We stand straight, we are aware of being in the presence of God and his angels. We are concentrating intensely on singing the psalms with reverence and beauty in such a way that our minds need to join to our voices in harmony – *ut mens nostra concordet voci nostrae*.

III

What is it that makes Gregorian Chant so apt for those souls that God causes to be cleansed on Dante's mountain? It is the fact that the sacred texts in the Scriptures and the liturgy are supported by Gregorian Chant, not dominated by it. The chosen form follows the content, and thus the function of the text. The intonation of the spoken word is enhanced and clarified by the music. The music follows the text and accentuates it through the arrangement of voices in height and depth, through expansion and compression, through extension and abbreviation.

Accordingly, Gregorian Chant could also be interpreted as a particular form of rhetoric. That is certainly true for the original Gregorian Chant, in which liturgy and music were still entirely integrated and had not yet been separated in order to assign to music the task of framing the liturgy, as became the case from the thirteenth century.

In that context, it is only necessary to refer to the *Rationale divinarum officiorum* (a treatise on the rituals of worship), written in 1286 by the Dominican Wilhelmus Durandus, in which he instructs that the prayers of the *ordinarium* (parts of the Mass that always remain the same) must be said by the priest himself, although they would simultaneously be sung by the schola. This in fact remained the practice until the liturgy was updated by the Second Vatican Council.

All the more remarkable, then, that in the fourteenth century Dante still has those yearning for heaven listening to Gregorian Chant – not as an embellishment, but as an integral part of the liturgy as it is again today – just as we now endeavour to do in the intimacy of prayer and celebration of the Eucharist – especially if that benefits simplicity and transparency and proximity to fellow believers (cf. Second Vatican Council (SC) 34).

Besides the analogy between heavenly and earthly liturgy, there is the analogy between the writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament. We speak of the sacrifice of the innocent Isaac as foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God. We speak of Moses in the Jewish Bible and of Moses, the Messiah, in the Christian Bible. The first anticipates the second.

What is written in the first and second Testaments is also depicted in images. And that also in the age when Gregorian Chant flourished – the period of the early-Christian basilicas from the time of Constantine the Great with the mosaics of the holy secrets and the sacred events. This is an analogy between word (what is written in the Bible) and image (illustration of the written word).

To clarify this we move briefly from Rome to Ravenna to visit the sixth-century basilica of San Vitale. The priest standing at the altar there sees before him in the apse the young Christ sitting in majesty. If he looks up on either side of the altar, on one side he sees depictions of the sacrifice of Abel and the sacrifice of Melchisedech, and on the other the sacrificing of Isaac by Abraham (also showing the three angels visiting him with the promise that Sarah will bear a son).

Here we have three analogies in one: between the Old and the New Testament, between word and image, and between the earthly and the heavenly liturgy.

The priest presents in the liturgy the only sacrifice of Christ and with that he addresses not only on the liturgy in heaven, but also sees prefigurations of that sacrifice depicted in mosaics on either side. Meanwhile, he says the Roman Canon (the current, first Eucharistic Prayer): *Supra quae propitio ac sereno vultu respicere digneris et accepta habere, sicut accepta habere dignatus es munera Tui iusti Abel et sacrificium Patriarchae nostri Abrahae et quod Tibi obtulit summus sacerdos Tuus Melchisedech, sanctum sacrificium, immaculatam hostiam.* (Upon which vouchsafe to look with a propitious and serene countenance, and to accept them, as thou vouchsafed to accept the gifts of thy righteous servant, Abel, and the sacrifice of our patriarch, Abraham, and what the high priest, Melchisedech, offered to thee, a holy sacrifice, an unspotted host or victim.)

After this presentation of analogies, we return to the opening of this lecture: is an analogy, a similarity in differences, also plausible and to be found between distinct art forms in a particular period – in this case between the music of Gregorian Chant and the imagery in the mosaics – that could to some extent enable us to trace the entire cultural-historical context of both?

IV

In her 1981 handbook on Gregorian chant, Helene Nolthenius makes passing reference to *The Commonwealth of Art. Style in the fine arts, music and the dance*, the book by the German-American musicologist Curt Sachs, which had appeared in numerous editions since its publication in 1946, whose perspective on cultural history she apparently shares.

In other words, we are talking here about comparative art studies, just as we have comparative literary studies. But whereas the comparison of literature is concerned with a particular period in distinct cultural circles and languages, a similar comparison of arts is far more comprehensive and both more pretentious and more speculative. We have only to distinguish the differences in the arts, professed also by Sachs, which Gotthold Ephraim Lessing reminded us of in the eighteenth century: some arts exist alongside one another like the visual, or after each other like music; the former occurs in space, the second in time; the first can be encapsulated at once in spatial terms, the second only with the passage of time.

According to Sachs, says Nolthenius, 'the creative impulses underlying every art in a given period are the same, whether the people are building, sculpting, painting or composing. The period itself has its place in the cyclical pattern of action and reaction, which are also recognised by other cultural historians and are referred to by Sachs as ethos and pathos' – introvert and extrovert, abstract and concrete – as in the transition from Classicism to Hellenism, from Renaissance to Baroque, from Enlightenment to Romance.

One of those other cultural historians would be Sachs' contemporary, the German art historian Wilhelm Worringer, who refers in his thesis in 1907 to *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (also the title of the book): Organic, the life-affirming art, which is spatial, is linked to empathy. Inorganic, life-denying art, which avoids space, is linked with abstraction. That Worringer is not, as Sachs is, concerned with periods, but with contrasting German and northern painting with Italian and southern, is irrelevant here as regards the chosen classification of the two scholars. In my view, Sachs' concept pair pathos/ethos gains in objectification in Worringer's pair, empathy/abstraction. In my view, that also makes the classification more accessible for us.

The boom period of Gregorian Chant as an original artistic expression lasted from the sixth to the ninth century, when the Carolingians/the Franks documented the oral traditions. It was the age of the Great Migration of Peoples, the uncertainty in the earthly vale of tears, the growth of the abbeys that became islands of civilisation and valued, saved and reproduced the surviving treasures of Antiquity.

It was the period when perspective disappeared from mosaics in favour of the flat surface with hieratic representations of religious scenes. At the same time, in music there was a shift from polyphony to the simpler monophony. Both artistic expressions exude stillness, reflection, harmony in the longing for God, representing more a search for Him in his infinity than bearing the relativity of daily unpredictability.

It must have been a time when people sought internalisation, and as such a stark contrast to the mood of externalisation in Western Europe in our day, where superficiality and pointlessness struggle for primacy of meeting one another in personal creativity over artistry of purported originality and talent.

And in as far as liturgy still really matters, that which places humans at the centre is preferred to that which places Christ as its centre. And that, not even noticed by the participants, in the most careless and lazy possible formless celebration. Everything easy and

contemporary, and above all common: 'Good evening everyone. It's nice to see you all here and that you could spare the time to come. Thank you.'

The worship of the centuries is not invented – not even in our arrogant and so-called 'makeable' age. It is encountered, simply found, and is therefore a gift. It comes more from angels than from humans. After all, people here on earth turn for honouring God to angels there in heaven close to God Himself. That, at least, is what they are expected to do; it would at least be greatly fitting that they do.

Changes in celebration of the liturgy occur only organically, as Joseph Ratzinger stressed in his book *Der Geist der Liturgie* in 2000 (and elsewhere before and after). The German writer Martin Mosebach – following Ratzinger – also stresses that in his appeal in 2002, *Haeresie der Formlosigkeit. Die römische Liturgie und ihr Feind*: The Christian cult is pure and clean, when all subjectivity is removed from it. But when changes in the cult do occur, they happen organically, unconsciously, unintentionally, without an intellectual concept; they flow from the practice of the cult, just as wind and water alter the form of a landscape over thousands of years.

While Nolthenius follows Sachs' theory, in my opinion when it comes to the mosaics she is in practice guided by Frits van der Meer's 1949 book, *Christus' oudste gewaad. Over de oorspronkelijkheid der oud-christelijke kunst*, although she only mentions both scholars a few times. The theory of the alternation in the combined arts in each era from pathos to ethos, from empathy to abstraction, and yes, from haptic to optic, says something about the forms used, and therefore about the style of a period, but does such an observation actually say anything about the content that has been given shape. However interesting, that remains speculative.

Van der Meer's study evidences an entirely different point of departure. He investigates the religion, and thus the content of the mosaics, and draws two conclusions: 'the time style is nothing more than a contemporary robe' and 'the iconology is the key to Christian art history'.

So when we now examine the visual arts from the centuries when Gregorian Chant was born in terms of state of mind, in terms of mentality, following Frits van der Meer, we learn more, not from its style but through its content, about this unique music whose influence perseveres – although possibly no longer in terms of content. And what is the content, as everyone understands it? It is the belief in the revelation of God in Christ, in the Bible and the Tradition, celebrated in the liturgy of the one Church in which heaven timelessly kisses the earth. All Christian cultural expressions from that time help us to pray, to be alone and together with God and to seek a likeness with the angels before His throne, with whose voices we join our own in singing Gregorian Chant.

V

On the feast of the Dedication of Notre Dame Cathedral on 16 June 2021, Michel Aupetit celebrated mass there for the second time since the fire on 15 April 2019. The first time, in 2020, also on the anniversary of its dedication, the cathedral was still in an uncertain and pitiful state. In contrast, the restoration work was now clearly visible. While the archbishop

of Paris preached, the television also broadcast encouraging pictures of the thirteenth-century cathedral shrouded in scaffolding.

The commemoration of the dedication reminded us of this sacred place where God Himself is the host. God's house on earth is the sign of the heaven where Jesus is preparing a place for every one of us. But this cathedral is also the symbol of the revival of the Church founded by Jesus two thousand years ago. Like our cathedral, the Church itself will survive. After all, as the archbishop said in his homily, Christ has promised that the gates of Hades will not overpower it (cf. Matthew 16:18), before concluding with some quotes from St. Augustine: 'What we have achieved physically here with stones, we must create spiritually with souls.' We are living stones of the Church, according to the apostle Peter (cf. 1 Peter 2:5). 'You were old, you were not a house for Me. Go lay down for dead. Come out of your old situation, to leave your ruins, love each other.'

The loving stones will restore the Church, just as Notre Dame is being restored with the material stones through loving care. Which briefly brings us back to the fire during Holy Week two years ago.

People wept as they watched the collapse of the burning crossing tower against the night sky, followed in the ensuing days by foolish creative ideas for uses that the national monument could be put to instead of that of a house of prayer – its original purpose. And with that we go back even further – naturally to the construction of the cathedral in the thirteenth century, but perhaps even more to the nineteenth century, when Notre Dame had also become practically a ruin as it was now – then through neglect, now through fire.

VI

We recall the iconoclastic French Revolution, the establishment of Temples of Reason in the churches devoted to God, but also the appeal for restoration of the Church, and hence of its house of worship Notre Dame, with Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris* in 1831 and with the commissioning of Eugène Viollet le Duc to restore the cathedral in Paris in 1843. That mentality is also reflected in the attempt to revive Gregorian Chant, while the reinvention of the purity in that music seems very closely linked to the rediscovery of the purity of architecture – rediscovering Romantic originality, reclaiming the origins of Gregorian music and Gothic architecture, and even humbly improving their usefulness.

It is in the breath of that age of recovery from the aimless destruction in revolution and humanity-diminishing emphasis on reason – from this dual poverty of arrogance, in other words – that the figure of Dom Prosper Guéranger has to be placed.

The North American musicologist Katherine Bergeron wrote her thesis on the revival of Gregorian Chant in nineteenth-century France in 1998. The book's subtitle, *The revival of Gregorian Chants at Solesmes*, fits, but the title, *Decadent Enchantments*, does not. It is dictated by the image of the United States, hopefully merely apparent, as a country that combines superficiality with condescension. The revival of Gregorian Chant arises from a deepening of belief. The decadent movement, literary and artistic, later in the century – from Baudelaire to Proust and with Huysmans as flagbearer with his conversion to the Mother Church after being enchanted by the singing of the liturgy in Gregorian Chant in

Benedictine abbeys in his country – is no more than a by-product of the rediscovery of the heaven-bound music devoted solely to God.

It is not from Bergeron's book, but from that of the musicologist David Hiley in 2009 – *Gregorian chant* – that I learned that the Gregorian Chant on my old gramophone records – which I have listened to time and time again – was invented by Solesmes with Dom Joseph Gajard as leader of the schola.

VII

Just as Eugène Viollet le Duc and his followers sought to restore and improve the Gothic architectural style and in the process introduced the neo-Gothic style, Prosper Guéranger and his followers did the same with Gregorian Chant and created the neo-Gregorian style. Although neo-Gothic and neo-Gregorian spring from the same mentality and perception, we confine ourselves here to the music, however closely related it is to architecture as an art form.

But before we explore the further development of Gregorian and neo-Gregorian, we first need to return to the practice of Gregorian Chant since the notation was documented in the ninth century with the Metz singing school as the focal point, and through the efforts of Notker Balbulus, a monk in St. Gallen, towards the end of that century. Notker restored a certain unity to the Frankish and Roman chants, which had separated in the eighth century, and assigned a syllable to every note, which greatly enhanced the sequences in the liturgy until the Council of Trent (1545-1563) reduced their number to four: *Victimae paschali laudes* at Easter, *Veni Sancte Spiritus* at Whit, *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* on the Feast of Corpus Christi and *Dies irae dies illa* for the Requiem mass. This latter sequence fell into disuse after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) – evidently being regarded as too threatening on the subject of damnation.

From the ninth century the *ordinarium* (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei) were usually polyphonic, with the result that only professional singers could perform them and the ordinary churchgoers could only listen. Pope John XXII objected to this and with the papal bull *Docta sanctorum Patrum* in 1324-1325 he curbed the use of polyphonic singing, but without reconnecting the music and the liturgy or giving congregants a part to play in the music.

Apart from expansion of the Gregorian Chant, for example in individual monastic orders and for deeply venerated saints in particular locations, and naturally for greater worshipping of Mary, the Mother of God, the simple, unembellished Gregorian Chant was retained until the most recent Vatican Council in the twentieth century.

Simplification occurred in every branch of the arts during the counter-Reformation after the Council of Trent. With respect to music, the Council decided on 10 September 1562 that in every Holy Mass, however it was sung, the text must be clearly executed so that it reaches the ears of the listeners and penetrates their hearts. Nothing profane should be intermingled with polyphonic music or the playing of an organ. The performance of the music as a whole ought not to be aimed at the vain pleasure of the ear, but the words must be sufficiently understandable for the listeners to be moved with a longing for the sacred

harmonies. The most important thing was the text, to which the music was secondary. That was the case with the pure Gregorian Chant, and should be so again. The neglect of Gregorian Chant from the fifteenth century was wrong and had to cease in order to revive Gregorian Chant and once more make it the focal point in order to achieve the greatest possible unity of the liturgy. Everything was about purification, simplification, returning to the original nakedness of the Biblical texts, only underlined by music.

But because music was also only a framing of the liturgy and its clericalisation had widened the separation of the presbytery and the choir, polyphonic music flourished in the centuries after the Council of Trent, with Rome itself preferring the 'Palestrina style' – polyphonic, but in a relatively sober and simple style.

VIII

Although the symbol of the return to Gregorian Chant in the Romance period is attributed to the monks of Solesmes after the re-establishment of the abbey by Dom Guéranger in 1833, the nostalgia for the true music of the Church already existed in France, and equally in Germany, where in 1863 it led to a revival of the monastic tradition (including Gregorian Chant) with the establishment of the Benedictine Beuron Abbey. It was there that Anselm Schott would publish the first translation and commentary on the *Missale Romanum* in 1884 and where, eight years later, in 1892, he would be one of the monks who re-established the Maria Laach Abbey from Beuron.

To that extent, the restoration of the cathedral in Paris is – in architectural terms – similar to the completion of the cathedral in Cologne (to mention another parallel between musical and architectural design in those days).

The authority of Solesmes with respect to the rediscovery of Gregorian Chant also seems to have been so great in the 1890s that Rome entrusted the general reform of the original liturgical music to that abbey. And that is still the case today.

Inter plurimas pastoralis officii sollicitudines, better known by the opening words in Italian of the letter *Tra le sollecitudini dell'ufficio pastorale* (Among the cares of the pastoral office), a *motu proprio* on sacred music promulgated by Pope Pius X, fits perfectly into that context.

The concerns expressed applied to the liturgy, and in particular the music, which, like the liturgy as a whole, must possess the qualities of sanctity, goodness and universality – music that excluded any profanity/sacrilege.

Under point 3 of the document, Pius X discusses Gregorian Chant:

'These qualities [sanctity, goodness and universality] are to be found, in the highest degree, in Gregorian Chant, which is, consequently the Chant proper to the Roman Church, the only chant she has inherited from the ancient fathers, which she has jealously guarded for centuries in her liturgical codices, which she directly proposes to the faithful as her own, which she prescribes exclusively for some parts of the liturgy, and which the most recent studies have so happily restored to their integrity and purity.

On these grounds Gregorian Chant has always been regarded as the supreme model for sacred music, so that it is fully legitimate to lay down the following rule: the more closely a

composition for church approaches in its movement, inspiration and savour the Gregorian form, the more sacred and liturgical it becomes; and the more out of harmony it is with that supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple.

The ancient traditional Gregorian Chant must, therefore, in a large measure be restored to the functions of public worship, and the fact must be accepted by all that an ecclesiastical function loses none of its solemnity when accompanied by this music alone.

Special efforts are to be made to restore the use of the Gregorian Chant by the people, so that the faithful may again take a more active part in the ecclesiastical offices, as was the case in ancient times.'

IX

The papal instruction concerning the divine service had far-reaching consequences. Firstly, through his instruction to allow the faithful to participate more actively in the liturgy, and secondly through his urging that Gregorian Chant should be regarded and used as ideally suited to the Church.

With the stipulation of active participation (*actuosa participatio*), Pius X expressed a development that was already underway in the Church and which would become the so-called 'Liturgical Movement'. This movement is not discussed further in this paper, but its wishes would be fulfilled by the Second Vatican Council.

By stipulating Gregorian Chant, Pius X reflected the desire for the *sacrum* in the liturgy – a desire that Pope Benedict XVI would reflect in *Summorum Pontificum*, his *motu proprio* of 7 July 2007, but which seems to have been equally quickly contradicted by *Traditionis Custodes*, the *motu proprio* promulgated by Pope Francis on 16 July 2021.

The first fruit of the Second Vatican Council was the papal bull on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on 4 December 1963.

'In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy [...] we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army.' (SC 8).

'Sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites.' (SC 112)

'The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as specially suited to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services.– *Ecclesia cantum gregorianum agnoscit ut liturgiae romanae proprium: qui ideo in actionibus liturgicis - ceteros paribus - principem locum obtineat.*' (SC 116)

'The typical edition of the books of Gregorian Chant [by the monks of Solesmes] is to be completed.' (SC 117)

X

In the introduction to her 1989 book *Muziek tussen hemel en aarde. De wereld van het Gregoriaans*, Helene Nolthenius is sombre about the future of Gregorian Chant in the liturgy. For the older among us, is Gregorian Chant not too closely connected 'with the recollection of perfunctory bungling by old-fashioned parish choirs?' she wondered.

'Gregorian Chant has been discarded in most churches. It has left little regret behind, since its beauty was tarnished. [However] it is not the first time in history it has disappeared [...] Only this time it has been driven out together with the Latin liturgy, from which it was inseparable.'

Certainly, today Gregorian Chant is sung professionally outside religious services more than in the liturgy, but nonetheless such a performance, however aesthetically pleasing, lacks the intimacy of the sound of the singing of the praise, pleas and supplications to God in the liturgy.

Is Gregorian Chant a *meditatio mortis continua* (a constant meditation on death), as the German theologian Klaus Berger argued in his book *Jesus* in 2007? Yes, singing with the angels in the heavenly choir lifts our hearts and temporarily connects us with eternity there. In the liturgy time is suspended and disappears in the meeting with Holy God, Jesus Christ. And death? That is the ever-present gateway of responsibility that keeps our conscience awake here in order to rest for eternity in the eternal fields of the Lord that will always remain.

However, this lesson remains: when we sing God's praises with our voice, we sing God's praises no less with our lives; because those two methods of honouring are inseparable. *Ore vitaeque canta* (Sing with your mouth and no differently with your life).

Vertaling: Hugh Quigley