

## TOWARDS THE 'AUTHENTIC': REFLECTIONS ON MUSIC, DESIRE, AND TRUTH

When the recent Synod of Bishops set out to summarise its concern about the current state of Catholic liturgy, it produced the following pregnant statement:

The Synod reaffirms that the Second Vatican Council provided the necessary basis for an authentic liturgical renewal. It is necessary now to cultivate the positive fruits of this reform, and to correct abuses that have crept into liturgical practice. We are convinced that respect for the sacred character of the liturgy is transmitted by genuine fidelity to liturgical norms of legitimate authority. No one should consider himself master of the Church's liturgy.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, three observations are made: first, that the Second Vatican Council initiated a process of liturgical 'reform' whose purpose was to generate 'renewal'; second, that not every effort generated by this movement has been a genuine reform; and third, that the way to tell a true reform from one that is false is to establish whether or not it satisfies the standard of 'authenticity'. This notion is, in its most basic sense, relational and concerned with origins. A thing or statement or quality is authentic in so far as it bears the imprint of its author. The more it has been subject to influences distinct from the principle that originated it, the less it merits the label 'authentic'. This root sense is helpful in defining a criterion of discernment, for it concurs with the norms for liturgical reform laid down in the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Seeing that the liturgy is made up of 'unchangeable elements divinely instituted and of elements subject to change', it recognises that the latter not only 'may' but 'ought' to be changed if they have 'suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy'. This injunction about weeds is followed by one on sowing

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<sup>1</sup> 'Eucharist: Living Bread for the peace of the world', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2 November 2005, p. 6.

and planting: 'care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing' (§§ 21-23). In other words: any established practice proving 'inauthentic' may lawfully be rooted out, while new practices may be introduced only if they can be 'authenticated', that is, grafted into a vibrant stem whose root is Christ, Beginning and End of the Church's cult. From this perspective, 'authentic liturgical renewal' would seem to presuppose, first, continuity of worship and, secondly, continuity of inner truth, and it is the coincidence of these two terms, worship and truth, that I shall go on to address, since it points to a directive placed on the lips of Christ himself, in the fourth chapter of the Fourth Gospel: 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth' (4:25). I propose to unravel some connotations of the word 'truth' as used by St John; then to ask whether this notion can be applied specifically to music; and finally to reflect on the potential of music to be a vehicle of truth in the context of a liturgy 'renewed'.

Given the highly visual construction of St John's Gospel, in which, after the manner of an icon, meaning is often subtly conveyed by a gesture of the hand, a circumstantial detail, a symbolic presence or absence, we can learn much about Christ's instruction to the Samaritan woman by stepping back and considering, as it were, the frame of the picture. The exchange takes place at Sychar, 'close to the estate which Jacob gave Joseph, his son' (4:5). That transaction is recorded in the LXX text of Gen 48:22, where the property is identified as Shechem, a place with ancient cultic associations. It was at Shechem that Abram first saw the LORD and first erected an altar of the patriarchal covenant; it was from here that he went forth as a herald, proclaiming 'the LORD' throughout the land of promise (Gen 12:1-8). It is not, therefore, a fortuitous spot for the revelation of a mode of worship befitting the new covenantal dispensation of 'grace and truth' (Jn 1:17), made at 'the sixth hour', the fullness of day, when the world is bathed in light (4:6). The authority of Christ's words is enforced by the self-designation that follows: the first of the ἐγώ εἰμι revelations that recur to remind us that we are reading, not a mere Life but the narrative of an epiphany.

But what is the ‘truth’ required for worship? It is not a form of cultic orthopraxy, for any such category is explicitly transcended (4:21). Nor can it, in a recommendation to a person banned from dealings with Israel (4:9), indicate ethnic credentials. It is not reducible to ‘right knowledge’, given that the hour will come – ‘and is now’ – when it will be accessible both to the Jews who ‘know’ what they worship and to the Samaritans who ‘do not’ (4:22-23). And it cannot be a moral requirement: for such considerations, Jesus here shows remarkably little concern (4:17-19). To understand, we must look at two other texts. Christ’s nocturnal discourse to Nicodemus reached its climax in a sharp, metaphysical distinction drawn between ‘workers of untruth’<sup>2</sup> and ‘workers of truth’, the former cowering in darkness lest their vain deeds be exposed, while the latter hasten towards light and exposure: they are fearless, for their works were ‘wrought in God’ (3:20f.). ‘Truth’ here appears less as the object of a given action than as the state of soul in which the action is performed. To ‘work truth’ is to ‘work in God’, and such work is a quest for light. When, at a later stage in the narrative, Christ identifies himself as ‘the light of the world’ (8:12) and promises his hearers a truth that will ‘set them free’ (8:32), those in his audience apparently equipped to fathom the import of his words—who possessed ‘the truth’ in the above aspects: cultic, ethnic, intellectual, and moral—were impervious. They called him a Samaritan and ‘picked up stones’ (8:48, 59). At Sychar, however, a weary, undistinguished woman responded spontaneously to the voice of ‘truth’ when she heard it, in full exposure to the noonday sun. She thereby became the first to hear a message for which her heart hardly dared to hope: ‘I am the one you have been waiting for. I bring the water that will quench your thirst. You need not look for another’ (cf. 4:26, 10ff.).

This woman of irregular life thus appears to qualify as a ‘worker of truth’. She was able to offer the response withheld by those other hearers, self-designated ‘sons of Abraham’ (8:33, 39), who by their rejection prompted one of

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<sup>2</sup> Whereas St Paul twice uses φᾰύλος as a straightforward antonym to ἀγαθός (Rm 9:11; II Co 5:10; cf. Tit 2:8), the simple meaning ‘evil’ seems improbable in Jn 3:20-21 (there has already been talk of ἔργα πονηρά in the preceding verse). The nature of the conflict is metaphysical rather than moral: we are dealing with degrees of reality. It would appear natural, therefore, to interpret φᾰύλος in terms of its root meaning: ‘slight, trivial, vain’, a sense that occurs in the LXX, occasionally with the added shade ‘deceitful’. Cf. Pr 5:3; Jb 6:3, 25; Si 20:17.

the most heart-rending cries of the Scriptural canon: *διὰ τί τὴν λαλιὰν τὴν ἐμὴν οὐ γινώσκετε;* (8:43). While this phrase is conventionally rendered, 'Why do you not understand what I say', there is a strong case to be made for another, more urgent, interpretation. The noun *λαλιά* does not so much denote the content as the act and manner of speech, as is evident in the high priest's maid's challenge to Peter in Mt 26:73: *ἡ λαλιά σου δῆλόν σε ποιεῖ*—'your accent exposes you'. So Jesus's anguished questioning in Jn 8 could plausibly be invested with the sense 'How can you fail to know the way I speak?' or even 'How can you mistake my voice?', especially if we bear in mind the discourse following in chapter 10, where the ability to recognise and trust the Shepherd's 'voice' is the one requirement for entering the sheepfold. If we adopt this reading of Jesus's words, they begin to ring with the full pathos of the Good Friday Reproaches, and we recognise his hearers' failure to accept the 'truth' as not merely a failure to understand: it is a failure to listen and to recognise. They could not receive the 'truth' because they would not hear the 'voice' that proclaimed it. The woman at the well, in contrast, heard and was enlightened, exactly as another woman would later hear and be enlightened, going forth to proclaim Jesus as risen, not because she 'understood' but because she had recognised the timbre of a loved voice speaking her name (20:16-18).

The perception of 'truth' in Johannine usage, then, begins with an ability to recall and recognise. It grows through self-abandonment in trust and is carried by a momentum from shadow to light. These several layers of meaning are woven into the fabric of the Evangelist's vocabulary, for the Greek notion of *ἀλήθεια* conveys the full force of an active struggle against darkness. Compounded of the *α* privative and the noun *λήθος*—'forgetting' or 'forgetfulness'—it has grown out of the root *ΛΑΘ* from which we also get the verb *λανθάνω*, meaning, in the Active voice, 'I escape notice', and in the Middle voice, 'I let something escape me', that is, 'I forget purposely'. Forgetting, to a Greek way of thinking, was not primarily an involuntary privation caused by inattention or diminished mental faculties, but a conscious act, a willed relinquishing of memory. Were such deliberate forgetting to become a state of soul, it might produce a thirst for oblivion to which 'lethargy'—morbid

drowsiness – represents a parallel on the level of the body, and of which we find a mythical representation in Lethe, the dark river of the underworld from which the Shades drink to forget their past.<sup>3</sup> Over against this narcotic twilight, ἀλήθεια stands for a resolute clinging to consciousness. It denotes a refusal of disintegration that reaches its highest degree in the revelation, made in Jn 14:6, that the fullness of ‘truth’ possesses a face and a voice and that it speaks ‘I am’. Christ is the Truth. And the tragic irony of Jesus’s last real dialogue in St John’s narrative, when he stands before Pilate in the Praetorium, is that, in one man’s blasé recital of a trite enquiry, ‘What *is* truth?’ (Jn 18:38), we see Everyman, ourselves, with eyes unfit to see and ears unfit to hear, oblivious to the silent, beckoning presence of Truth incarnate. To live and to worship in truth is to educate our heart, mind, and senses to perceive this real object of our desire. It is an endeavour to swim upstream from the murky pool of oblivion, protectingly overshadowed by the Spirit (who in the Fourth Gospel ‘consoles’ precisely by ‘calling to mind’ (14:26)), towards a fullness of light and remembrance, a radiant, personal Presence, before which any man or woman ‘standing in truth’ (cf. 8:44) will bend the knee, adore – and sing.

For surely it is not merely by virtue of iconographic convention, a dear but useless sentimentality, that the heavenly host, those intelligent beings caught up in the vital flow of eternal Truth, is thought of as a choir? When ‘grace and truth’ appeared in the flesh (cf. Jn 1:14), angels were heard singing across the plains of Judah (Lk 2:13-14), echoing a hymn that resounds through the scriptural canon from Isaiah to the Apocalypse. Among the blessed in heaven, St Thomas assures us, the praise of God is ‘vocal’ (ST 2a2æ 13, 4), and if western religious art has accustomed us to the sight of angels playing the harmonium, this is a pictorial expedient designed to convey the inexhaustible harmonies of the ‘new song’ chanted eternally before the throne of the Lamb. The earthly pilgrimage of Christians is guided by the distant sound of that song. It inflames and informs their hope that, in the perfection of the ‘rational worship’ enjoined by St Paul on

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the penetrating lexicographical analysis of Paul Florensky in *La Colonne et le fondement de la vérité*, trans. by Constantin Andronikof (Lausanne : L’Age d’Homme, 1975), p. 19f.

the Romans (Rm 12:1), body and mind will one day unite in an unceasing Alleluia that is but the vocalisation of an entire being become praise.

If man's celestial participation in divine truth is celebrated with song, music can likewise express his search for truth while on earth. Several giants of modern musical composition deliberately wrote to this end. When the critic Fritz Volbach refers to Johann Sebastian Bach as 'the greatest German mystic', this is no reckless hyperbole.<sup>4</sup> The ageing Franz Liszt produced works of extraordinary contemplative intensity;<sup>5</sup> while Francis Poulenc, many of whose lyrical works are coloured by mockery, spoke of his transparent opera *Dialogues des Carmélites* (1957) as a work 'about grace' that, far from being out of character, had sprung from the depths of his being.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, to two other instances of truth in music (closer to us in time, and perhaps also in experience) that I should like to turn before speaking more specifically of music and worship.

In 1975, Ingmar Bergman made a production for television of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. At first sight, this work seems out of place in his cinematography: a burlesque interlude in the sombre existentialism of a sequence that, for present purposes, we might date from *Persona* (1966) to the *Autumn Sonata* (1978). Yet these three very different films draw on the same musical metaphor. In the first, a celebrated actress immures herself in silence after the realisation that her stage 'personae' are in fact expressions of an ego locked in a cycle of shifting identities. Muteness is her baffled response before an aspiration to integrity that is hopelessly compromised by speech. The depth of this conflict is conveyed when by chance she hears the Andante movement of Bach's Violin Concerto in A Minor through a radio broadcast. For a long time we see her lying motionless, transfixed by the music, until she brings her hand to her mouth in a gesture at

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<sup>4</sup> Johann Sebastian Bach, *The High Mass in B Minor*, musical edition from the score of the Bach-Gesellschaft, with a foreword by Fritz Volbach (London: Eulenburg, [n. d.]), p. i.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *Les Jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este*. 'Towards the middle of the piece the obvious, shooting, leaping water-effects calm down and a reflection of the composer is seen in their now stilled waters. In the manuscript at this point (where the key changes to D major) a Latin text from St John's Gospel is written: *Sed aqua quam ego dabo, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in uitam aeternam*' (Stephen Hough, *Liszt: An Italian Recital*. CD Virgin Classics. 1992. Sleeve notes, p. 6)—Christ's words to the Samaritan woman. It is not far-fetched to hear the remainder of the piece as an act of worship aspiring to truth.

<sup>6</sup> *Entretiens avec Claude Rostand*, cited in the sleeve notes to *Francis Poulenc: Oeuvres lyriques*. CD EMI. 1998.

once of pain and desire. That movement is duplicated seconds later before a newsreel of Thick Quang Duc, the Vietnamese monk who in 1963 immolated himself in protest against the religious intolerance of the Diem regime. The sight of this martyr for truth, of a sublime sacrifice brought unbearably close, had made manifest the imperative voiced by the violin. In the *Autumn Sonata*, it is the truth of a relationship that is unmasked by music. A mother and daughter are reunited after long estrangement. They strive to hide their scars, to present an invulnerable countenance to one another, yet all efforts collapse when, on their first evening together, they sit down at the piano and in turn play Chopin's tortured Second Prelude. Before its deliberate dissonances, sometimes resolved, sometimes left to linger, pretence is no longer possible. Love and hatred, pain and anger fly across either woman's face: passions that explode in a paroxysm of rage during the night, when the furies unleashed refuse to return to confinement.

Standing between these two probing works, the *Magic Flute* offers, for all its apparent simplicity, an exegesis of a theme common to both: man's yearning for integrity, for life in the truth. The potential of music to be, in this quest, a standard and sacrament is given material form in the flute entrusted to Tamino in the Act One Quintet, whose message is plain to read in Schikaneder's libretto: the ideal of love and wisdom presupposes the vanquishing of lies; it unfolds by transforming passions and softening hardened hearts. These are terms the flute has power to effect if it is played from a pure heart: the Queen of the Night depends on a virtuous intermediary to make it serve her own purpose. The three occasions on which Tamino plays the flute all arise from inner darkness. The first, in Sarastro's temple, follows the cry 'Perpetual night, when will you flee?', betraying a confusion of both mind and senses; the second is prompted by the temptations of the House of Trials; while the third accompanies his passage, with Pamina, through fire and water, from ignorance to enlightenment. In this, there is a clear progression from discernment of truth through purification of the passions to the overcoming of death itself. Bergman renders the metaphysical dimension of the final trial—implicit in the opera—through a scenario drawn from Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. Halfway through this novelistic account of the problem music-truth, the Luciferian composer Adrian Leverkühn encounters

the real Prince of Darkness, who describes his dominion. Hell, reveals the devil, is a place whose quintessence

is that it leaves its denizens only the choice between extreme cold and an extreme heat which can melt granite. Between these two states they flee roaring to and fro, for in the one the other always seems heavenly refreshment but is at once and in the most hellish meaning of the word intolerable.<sup>7</sup>

The unquenchable thirst for comfort informs much of Bergman's art, and it is his dogged resolution to depict its anguish that places him among the very great exponents of the human condition. So his attachment to what he calls the 'gospel of the *Magic Flute*'<sup>8</sup> is all the more striking. Led by its music, Tamino and Pamina traverse infernal extremes, devouring flames and numbing frost, enveloped in a love stronger than death. Bergman is always suspicious of words and conscious of man's propensity to deceit. But he never yields to cynicism. Through the bleakness of his vision, flashes of light explode in sudden moments of glory: signs of faith in a vital truth whose essence is no doctrine, no word of promise susceptible to betrayal, but the incorruptible tone of a magic flute.

While Bergman was staging Mozart's opera in the early months of 1975, the Abbess Maria Gysi lay dying at the Monastery of the Assumption near Whitby. Secondary cancer had been diagnosed, and although she did not slip away until 25 November 1977, her eyes were from then on deliberately, expectantly set on death. The entire adult life of this woman had been a single-minded pursuit of the Logos. As a companion of Maria Skobtsova in the 1930s, she had experienced the intellectual ferment of Russian émigré life in Paris and embraced Orthodoxy with heart and mind. After a short career in nursing, she returned to her native Switzerland in 1943 to undertake a systematic intellectual formation, first at the Basle faculty of theology, then in philosophy under the Platonist Hermann Gauss, who introduced her to the 'perfect clarity and stillness

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. by H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Penguin, 1968; repr. 1981), p. 240. Bergman acknowledges his dependence on Mann in the documentary film *Tystnad, Tagning, Trollflöjten*. Dir. Katinka Faragó and Måns Reuterswärd. SR 2. [1975 (?).]

<sup>8</sup> The phrase is used in *Tystnad, Tagning, Trollflöjten*.



of thought'<sup>9</sup>. She would refer to him for the rest of her life as a model of philosophical living. Like her teacher, it was in Plato that she found the essential direction for her own mind, assiduously pursued through a doctoral thesis on Ralph Cudworth and the Cambridge Platonists that brought her to England. In 1951 she was clothed as a nun by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh and moved to West Malling, where she lived in seclusion until 1965, when a small Orthodox monastery was founded at Filgrave. This foundation later moved to Whitby, where Mother Maria stayed until she died. Throughout her monastic life, she maintained a stringent discipline of the mind, translating and writing works on liturgy, Scripture, prayer, and philosophy. She displayed an unfailing delight in, and respect for, words. However, with death before her eyes, she yearned for music.

The gift of a gramophone unexpectedly met that need, and in March 1975 Mother Maria confided to a correspondent: 'I used to play the violin and it was like coming into another life of mine to hear the violin again: my first experience of the transcendent in early life' (p. 79). That early experience was now analogously repeated in a profound engagement with Schubert's String Quintet in C major. The outstanding position of this work in the history of chamber music is, of course, undisputed. Completed a few weeks before the composer's death in 1828 (in the circumstances of its composition, it corresponds to the *Magic Flute*, whose overture Mozart wrote barely ten weeks before he was carried to a pauper's funeral), the Quintet stands as a testament to man's spiritual combat. The home key of C major, sounding vigour and vitality, sings determinedly, sometimes defiantly, within a range of troubling modulations. The opposing forces culminate in the grim Neapolitan second that haunts the Fourth Movement coda in a dialectic of hope and despair enduring to the final chord. It was this meeting of opposites, experienced as encounter, not conflict, that impressed itself on Mother Maria. 'How I love the Quintet', she wrote in April:

the melody which ever wants to go further and yet is lovingly held, and lets itself be held, alone and not alone; and in the going forward yet [...] plays with the others in unity and in full and loving suffering together, a

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<sup>9</sup> *Mother Maria: Her Life in Letters*, ed. by Sr Thekla (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), p. xxi. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

unity which cannot be fulfilled on earth. It is as if it were played in the 'centre' – the wide, wide country between heaven and earth. I now live very starkly in this 'between', where, in spite of many building worries, the earthly is already finished and shut away, and the new has not yet begun (p. 112).

In Schubert's musical idiom, she had found a reflection of herself that corresponds to Gueric of Igny's arresting image of the monk – the paradigmatic Christian – suspended in the vast space between heaven and earth, raised high on the glorious cross of his desire (*I Adv.* 3). A few months later, she spelt out the philosophical basis of that experience in a letter discussing man's inability to establish a rational 'criterion' of Truth. It is futile, she maintained, to hope for such reassurance, since it would suggest that 'we could place ourselves outside Truth and judge it as a possession. But we are inside it, surrounded on all sides, unable – even in hell – to fall out of it' (p. 82). A reality so immense cannot be articulated, for it transcends words. It can only be hinted at, pointed to, and ultimately, inhabited. Towards that end, the expressive resources of a string ensemble may prove a more accurate indicator than discourse. For at the limits of human desire, where speech, unless it resorts to self-subverting apophaticism, must fall silent, music continues to sound, capable of uniting opposing forces in euphony and so, mysteriously, of voicing the ineffable.

I have dwelt on this couple of individuals because they represent, I suggest (with the reservations due to any categorisation of human experience), two archetypes of the modern truth-seeker: one rooted in faith, purposefully seeking a personal Truth through prayer, asceticism, and intellectual striving; the other distrustful of religion yet seeking wholeness, haunted by death and a need to make sense of pain. The cinematographer and the philosopher-nun work within different conceptual frameworks; they appeal to different vocabularies, different grammars of thought. Yet both spontaneously acknowledge music as being potentially among the loftiest expressions of the truth they seek. That truth corresponds, in both instances, to the outcome of our excursus above. It is a principle that directs hearts and minds away from illusion towards what they really desire. It involves a passage from darkness to light, from isolation to communion, and a full integration of remembrance. Bergman's fascination with

this latter theme is echoed by Mother Maria's assertion that Christ offers, not the exclusion of evil, but its transformation (p. 95). To both of them, truth is a state of being that offers the resolution of conflicts, the healing of wounds, and that finds in the language of music perhaps the highest degree of similitude compatible with our world of strife.

Was it a similar insight that, in 1963, prompted the Council Fathers to declare that, in the context of worship, the Church's musical tradition is a 'treasure of inestimable value', outstanding among all other forms of artistic expression? The reverence for music, whose purpose is 'the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful', is a conspicuous feature of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* though, evidently, the music in question is not just any music (§ 112). The document refers to a 'treasury of sacred music' embracing both polyphony and the repertoire for pipe organ. It urges that contemporary composers should increase this store of riches by worthy creations (§§ 114-121). But above all it defines a particular kind of music as the proper possession of Latin Christendom, the prize jewel in its treasure chest. Gregorian chant, it specifies, is the music that, better than any other, can give voice to the Roman liturgy. To it, by right, belongs pride of place in worship. The practical nature of that recommendation is seen when the text goes on to commission typical editions of the chant for universal use (§§ 116-117). No other council has established a similar privilege, and Vatican II reserves it exclusively for the domain of music, in contrast to the visual arts, where the Church 'has not adopted any particular style' as her own (§ 123). Why this predilection? It is certainly no nostalgia for the liturgical splendour of the European centuries of faith. Any such sentiment is ruled out by the document's resolutely forward-looking perspective. When the Council Fathers brought the Gregorian heritage to the fore, it must have been because they thought it fit to express the 'authentic liturgical renewal' they sought to engender, fit to impart 'a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem', and fit to facilitate the 'actuosa participatio', the 'effective participation', of the faithful (cf. §§ 5-20): fit, in other words, to be worship 'in spirit and in truth' here and now, amid the complexities of the third millennium. That their estimation rests

on firm foundations may be seen from even a cursory look at Gregorian chant in three of its constituent elements, as servant of the Word, as perfection of musical form, and as the song of the Church in her worship, through Christ, of the Father.

Music, no less than speech, has a singular aptitude for association and allusion. In drawing on this potential, Gregorian chant imitates the Word it sings. For even as the Scriptures form a vast symphony whose individual parts must be played within the totality of sound to yield the impact intended by the Composer, so the body of chant constitutes a wonderful network of internal reference, in which musical signs and symbols point towards a confluence of heightened meaning. This dynamic operates on three levels. First and most importantly, we have the homophony by which one piece cites another as a commentary on itself. A striking example is the Transfiguration antiphon *Christus Jesus* from the Cistercian antiphonal whose text reads, ‘Christ Jesus, splendour of the Father and form of his being, bearing all things by the power of his word and effecting the cleansing of sinners, today deigned to appear in glory on the mountain’. Its first phrase is set as follows:

VI  
 C HRIS - TUS Je - sus splen-dor Pa - tris

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in square neumes. Below the staff, the text 'CHRIS - TUS Je - sus splen-dor Pa - tris' is written in a Gothic-style font, with hyphens indicating syllable placement. A large 'C' is placed at the beginning of the text line.

This introduction, and in fact the entire antiphon, is a paraphrase of another tune, which anyone familiar with the Gregorian repertoire will be quick to recognise:

VI  
 S AN - CTUS, San-ctus, San - ctus

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in square neumes. Below the staff, the text 'AN - CTUS, San-ctus, San - ctus' is written in a Gothic-style font, with hyphens indicating syllable placement. A large 'S' is placed at the beginning of the text line.

The eleventh-century pre-consecration chant from the *Missa de angelis* is drawn into a contemplation of Christ on Tabor, with momentous implications. We have before us, the antiphon proclaims, God thrice holy, enthroned on the cherubim: God, Lamb of God, whose body and blood sustain us. By the simplest of compositional devices, three moments of revelation are simultaneously present, to the senses as much as to the mind: Isaiah’s vision in the temple, the appearance of Jesus in glory, and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist; three

degrees of communion united in one, with an immediacy that no sermon could achieve. Worship in truth, we have seen, is linked to remembrance. It would not be outrageous to say that a simple antiphon, here, effects anamnesis. A second form of association found in chant books is the extended application of a Proper composition, as on 4 October, when the commemoration of St Francis of Assisi is introduced by the Introit for Maundy Thursday. Appearing out of season, it places the career of the Poverello squarely in the context of Christ's Pasch, which in turn is heard to be present and active in the saints. Finally, once assimilated, the Gregorian heritage orchestrates the Scriptures themselves through the interdependence of Logos and Melos. Andrew's call to Peter rings with the energetic modulations of an eighth-mode Communion; the wise virgins are roused in the night by the Gradual's bugle call on a major triad; while the forty-fourth Psalm resounds with the cadences of *Audi Filia* in homage to the Mother of God.<sup>10</sup> The Church's theology in music comes to inhabit the Biblical text in such a way that, to a careful, silent listener, the revealed Word itself begins to sing.

An artist faced with a large and complicated material, Ingmar Bergman once remarked, depends for its expression on rigour of form.<sup>11</sup> We see that principle vindicated in the verse of Racine, the iconography of Rublyev, the fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. It is also evident in Gregorian chant, whose sense content is nothing less than man's redemption. On that account it can at first seem monotonous and austere. Its sound material is minimal, restricted, in most pieces, to the range of an octave. Only a limited number of intervals is permitted a melodic line that never departs from monody, is guided by laws of modality and often built on conventional formulae. Most pieces, as settings of a single sentence of text, are brief. Yet the variety of beauty and expression achieved within these parameters is astonishing. The Lauds antiphons of Christmas Morning, for example, form a sequence of miniature tone poems, each of which is a model of expressive density, stretching from bold angelic proclamations on trumpeting intervals of a fifth, through the perplexity of the shepherds (who, in *Quem vidistis?*, need to be gently questioned four times before

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<sup>10</sup> *Graduale Triplex*, ed. by the monks of Solesmes (Solesmes: Éditions de Solesmes, 1979), pp. 263; 507; 406.

<sup>11</sup> *Ingmar Bergman; Intermezzo*. Dir. Gunnar Bergdahl. Göteborg Filmfestival. 2002.

they burst out with ‘We have seen the Saviour!’), to the paradox that this ‘little child’, introduced by the minor-coloured range *re-la* in the eighth mode, is also ‘mighty God’, greeted with a fanfare on *do*. Notwithstanding this capacity for drama—and we need only think of the serenity and awe mingled in the *Requiem* Mass to hear it in another register—Gregorian chant is never self-indulgent. Refined through centuries, it has, at its best, reached the transparent objectivity that, if we return to Thomas Mann’s novel, so intrigued Wendell Kretschmar, the stuttering prophet whose alpine vision relied on the keyboard for fluent telling. ‘When greatness and death come together’, he declared, and the Church’s chant does flow from an encounter with death, a death destroyed forever,

there arises an objectivity tending to the conventional, which in its majesty leaves the most domineering subjectivity far behind, because therein the merely personal [...] once more outgrows itself, in that it enters into the mythical, the collectively great and supernatural.<sup>12</sup>

The liberated form unselfconsciously enters the service of a purpose that transcends it. The collective greatness of the vast, homogeneous body of chant, not a single part of which bears an individual’s signature, is so much the greater for rising from the merely anonymous into a personal unity in Christ, the one Precentor, whose song it endeavours in a thousand ways to express.

As outpouring of the Church’s soul, passed on, received, and interiorised from age to age, Gregorian chant is unique and irreplaceable. Certain pieces demand respect by their extreme antiquity, such as the Vespers versicle ‘May my prayer, O Lord, rise like incense before you’. In its archaic form,



D I-RI-GA-TUR, Domine, o-ra-ti-o me-a.

it provides a palpable link between the Christian cult and its synagogal roots.<sup>13</sup> For almost two thousand years, it has carried the ‘evening sacrifice of praise’. Anyone seeking a return to the sources has, in it, a conduit that has never run

<sup>12</sup> *Doctor Faustus*, p. 55 (altered).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Daniel Saulnier, *Le Chant grégorien* (Solesmes: Éditions de Solesmes, 1995; revised edn 2003), p. 59f.

dry. Even as the Church's worship has always inspired song, so song has fashioned worship.

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 his divine song of praise. For he continues his priestly work through his Church (SC § 83).

The Church's song, as much as her texts and rituals, is an expression of Christ. By it she conveys, not only her Master's teaching but also his tone of voice. We must therefore be alert when the Gradual, the Church's great prayer book, provides each part of the liturgical cycle with a distinct tonality, a procedure that is especially evident at the beginning of the main seasons. With consummate skill, the Introit *Ad te levavi* communicates the joyful waiting of Advent; the Tract *Qui habitat*, if left out, deprives the first Sunday of Lent of the 90<sup>th</sup> Psalm's unshakable confidence, which St Bernard considered so essential to the Forty Days that he preached a series of seventeen sermons on it; the *Resurrexi* of Easter morning rises beyond human triumphalism to the silent rejoicing of the Trinity; while Assumption Day's *Viri Galilæi* firmly redirects the Church's gaze to earth, where Christ will come again, and where, meanwhile, the apostolic task is waiting. In referring to these melodies as the voice of Christ, I am not speaking metaphorically. Sprung from within the biblical text, as Word become song, chiselled and polished in the Spirit-led Church, transmitted through times lean and fat as acts of 'rational worship', they continue the hymn Christ brought from the Father's bosom into our world of tears. It is a poignant fact that contemporary western society, allergic to religious rhetoric, recognises this voice and attends to it. Gregorian chant seems to presage the rest and healing it yearns for. We might object that secular enthusiasts do not know *whose* voice attracts them. But neither did the woman at the well. If it is a fact that Truth surrounds us on all sides, that we cannot fall out of it even in darkest hell, then the song of Truth will resound at unexpected times, in unexpected places, and to unexpected people. Who knows whether the message of that song—even when it is initially perceived as 'the gospel of the Magic Flute'—might not be a path to heaven?

It is time to summarise. We saw to begin with that the Gospel call to ‘worship in truth’ is concrete and practical, and we established the terms of this ‘truth’; next we observed that music can be one of truth’s noblest expressions, potentially more immediate, more universal than speech; this insight we found reflected in the teaching of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which led us, finally, to examine the music there defined as best suited for worship. In Gregorian chant beauty and truth are one, wrote John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists* of 1999, echoing the council’s teaching: by it, our souls are ‘lifted up from the world of the senses to the eternal’ (§ 7). Certain implications follow from these findings. First of all, that sacred music, like sacred texts and sacred rites, is a truth-bearer in worship. Mediocrity and compromise should no more be tolerated in this domain than in any other. Secondly, that Gregorian chant is given to the Church in the present age as a standard, a paradigm, and a living expression of worship. Its intelligent, prayerful rediscovery in a way that transcends ideological division is an urgent challenge bearing the promise of great joy. Thirdly, that any renewal of sacred music must be oriented towards its founding principle, which is the Son of God whose song is ‘sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven’. Authentic renewal must go beyond human measures and aspire to reach the stature of Christ, by which alone it can offer fitting worship of Truth, in truth.

But I should like to end with something better than a conclusion, that our final note may be a soaring jubilus from the lips of an authority infinitely greater than I. St Augustine was a man sensitive to beauty in many forms, but especially to music. The abstruseness of his early treatise *De musica* belies a depth of experience that famously finds expression in Augustine’s account of his baptism, in the ninth book of the *Confessions*, when the song of his heart found an echo in Milan’s cathedral liturgy: ‘The sweet singing of your Church moved me deeply. The music surged in my ears, truth seeped into my heart, and my devotion overflowed in tears. But they were tears of gladness’ (IX, 6). Throughout his works, the metaphor of song recurs as an expression of desire. The Christian, he says, is irresistibly drawn by the song of the angels with its promise of the heavenly banquet (*Enarr. in Ps. 41, 9*). Even the simplest strains of music could



move him deeply: the melody of a Psalm overheard in the street, lovers' serenades, the rhythmic chant of labourers in the field. And so it was that this man of paradox, who concluded the greatest discursive treatise in Latin theology with the prayer 'Free me, my God, from the multitude of words!' (*De Trin.* XV, 28), drew his most vivid image of the soul rapt in worship, not from the crystalline realm of rational contemplation, but from a song rising out of the soil he inhabited, in hearts inspired with joy:

Men who sing like this – in the harvest, at the grape-picking, in any task that totally absorbs them – may begin by showing their contentment in songs with words; but they soon become filled with such a happiness that they can no longer express it in words, and, leaving aside syllables, strike up a wordless chant of jubilation (*Enarr. ii in Ps. 32, 8*).<sup>14</sup>

For the Church's song to rise strong, melodious, and true, no condition is perhaps more essential than such communion in rejoicing.

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<sup>14</sup> Trans. by Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 258.