

On Good Health and Gregorian Chant IV

“No. On the contrary. It is an awakening of the field of consciousness. At the risk of oversimplifying, hypnotic effects are those of relatively lower frequency which play on the more primitive areas of the brain. With Gregorian chant you are directly affecting the cortex, which controls the monkey rather than being led by him...

“The church in which the Gregorian is sung is extremely important, because it must sing at the same time. Its own resonance makes it unimportant whether there are six monks singing or a whole choir. The walls of the church itself are excited, reverberating the sound. And the whole technique of building churches is to amplify the high frequencies, to give the sensation of another center of gravity above the head. Here again is the stress on verticality.

- There is some disagreement on what the optimal reverberation should be for Gregorian in a church. Some say as low as five seconds, others as high as eight. I'm no expert in these matters, so I can't tell what the best is. The reverb in our church is about one second. There is no way to improve it presently, since we do not have the height in the ceiling. Those are the three things you need for good liturgical music – height, length, and solid surfaces (no carpets in churches please). The builders of Romanesque and Gothic churches or cathedrals consciously shaped the stone surfaces so as to create multiple reflections of the higher frequencies. This was to give the feeling of the omnipresence of God, a sense that the sound was coming not from a single identifiable point but from all around.

“The sound produced is not in the mouth, not in the body, but in fact in the bones. It is all the bones of the body which are singing, and it's like something vibrating the walls of the church, which also sings. The voice essentially excites bone conduction, giving the impression the sound originates from 'outside,' from beyond the body. This corresponds to many ascetic ideals. The ascetic does not so much reject the body as demonstrate his dominion over it.

“In the past, some monks believed Gregorian was to be sung like lyric songs. They pushed very hard and sang Gregorian as if they were singing Othello. But this is false, because Gregorian is meant to train one to rise up out of the body.

“Years ago, when I was about 20 or 25, and I began to realize the efficacy of Gregorian, I used to have problems in getting other people to listen to that music. They were people who had something against the Church, or the Mass, and when they heard my Gregorian they'd turn up their noses and say they hadn't come to hear the Mass. Well, I couldn't do anything but play something else. Now, since the Church has suppressed Gregorian, in France at least, people no longer know what it is and it has taken its place again for therapy. So much so that people who are completely opposed ideologically to anything that might be the Church ask me, “What are those extraordinary records that buoy you up so?”

- Well, officially Gregorian was never suppressed. But practically it was. The new Mass is for all practical purposes a vernacular rite of Mass. Very frequently its most ardent

supporters are vehement about the necessity not to “go back” to Latin. True, one hears of churches which put in a Kyrie now and then, but most of the chant will never fit into the Mass of Paul VI. With that being said, there are some chants which were officially suppressed, such as the great sequence called the *Dies Irae*, which is sung at the Requiem. It was judged to be unfitting the theology of the new funeral rite (which is true). But here again we realize that tradition is brand new, with two whole generations that have no experience of it. The subtle power of chant is remarkable. We have a great opportunity to evangelize with this. All the more why we should be singing it in our church!!!

“When a monk has a high awareness of the presence of God, it is God singing through him. To “reach out towards that to which one listens” – in Latin that's *ob audire*, which translates to the word “obey.” Unfortunately, obedience is seen as a constraint; man does not want to. Obedience is to let oneself go completely in listening. And Who is speaking in chant? It is the *Logos*, the Word of God Himself.

- Tomatis was then asked if he knew of any modern musicians who are producing sacred music that achieves the effect of Gregorian. Is anyone writing such music today?

“I have spoken to musicians for years of these discoveries. I show them the curve, but I haven't found a single promising artist. Each seems to have the impression (it's undoubtedly his ego defending itself) that he will create everything, do everything. He forgets that to make music is, like for Blessed Fra Angelico, to paint for others and not for oneself.

“And when we have the man in the street, who thinks he's doing something but who listens to nothing and who obeys even less. It is for a monk and his meditation to bring himself to listening, to the point of absolute obedience. And the psychological problem that I find most widespread today is that we have forgotten the notion, not only of listening, but of obeying. If you look in the scriptures, the word you find most often is “listen.” The *Rule of St. Benedict* begins with the words, Hear, O my son, the words of the Lord, and incline thy heart's ear.” And so everything begins with obedience. That is perfect listening.

- This concludes the series on Gregorian chant and good health.