

# CRISIS

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## A New Dawn for Latin Chant?

By Arlene Oost-Zinner and Jeffrey Tucker

Catholic musicians are haunted by the question: Is the music in our parishes getting better or worse? Supposing we agree on what that means (and granting that some members of an aging generation are still attached to guitars and folk styles), it is a very difficult question to answer. The experience of the local parish reveals only so much.

However desperately many of us hope and pray for a return to sanctity in music, along with chant and music especially suited for the liturgy, there are very few markers available to tell whether progress is being made.

What about commercial trends? Gregorian chant has sold steadily in secular markets for many years now. Recordings of the great music of the age of Palestrina are available as never before. Choirs that specialize in this music are to be found in every major city in the Western world, most often performing in purely secular venues. All of this is encouraging insofar as it has breathed new life into a repertoire that might otherwise have become extinct.

But what about our parishes? It turns out that trends here are also driven by commercial concerns. The bishops having long ago surrendered control over this aspect of the liturgy, it is left to the powerhouse publishers to fill the gap. Church music publishers are in a competitive race for parish dollars, each publisher vying with others to offer the most useful, practical, and popular hymnbooks and musical arrangements. As for style, the Church has always insisted on chant and its descendants. In real life, however, our parishes are buffeted by the winds of changing musical fashion.

How can chant and traditional liturgical music compete?

It seems that the dominant player in the liturgical music marketplace has just added a line of products supporting Gregorian chant. Not only is the publisher offering the materials, it is promoting them with e-mails to its massive list of customers and enthusiastically recommending their use.

The publisher in question is Oregon Catholic Press (OCP), which is known today for its progressivism and commercialism in liturgical music, as well as its marketing savvy. OCP has always understood what others have not: Most parish musicians are not scholars but enthusiastic amateurs on deadline. Because of their practicality and ease of use, OCP's materials are in two-thirds of American parishes. Until recently, marketing the new and departing ever further from preconciliar practice has been its bread and butter.

It publishes not only *Glory & Praise* but another dozen or so hymnals that year by year continue to make even greater inroads into U.S. parishes. Its missals are the most widely used in the country, and its primary liturgy periodical, *Today's Liturgy*, is the main reference source for choosing hymns from week to week. It offers a workshop every weekend of the year. OCP also publishes the music of most Catholic composers whose work departs most from tradition and the simple instructions concerning music in the Roman rite.

But suddenly, OCP is offering recordings of chant alongside its other audio products. This is a wonderful development, even a breakthrough. It's offering the book *Western Plainchant* by David Hiley, a wonderful scholarly resource, as well as *Chant Made Simple* by Robert M. Fowells, published in 2000 as a clear and practical introduction.

But the change that is most notable is that OCP is, for the first time, offering and promoting materials from the chant tradition:

- *The Liber Cantualis*, a core selection of the best-known chanted Mass parts and hymns
- *The Liber Hymnarius*, 400 Latin hymns for the Liturgy of the Hours
- *The Gregorian Missal*, Latin texts for the Mass for all Sundays and Solemnities
- *The Graduale Romanum*, the Mass propers for the entire year, plus the entire Kyriale with all chants

- *The Graduale Triplex*, the *Graduale Romanum* plus neumes from Laon and St. Gall family manuscripts to assist in interpretation.

Every one of these books is published and approved by the monks of the Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes in France, the monastery that has safeguarded Gregorian chant for a thousand years and that still works today to keep liturgy and music integrated historically and theologically.

It's true that these books have long been available through other booksellers and publishers, though they have not always been easy to find. OCP is not publishing them but is buying the books wholesale and offering them in its large catalog and through its lucrative online business.

OCP now joins GIA Publications, which goes out of its way these days to advertise its "early" music and to claim that it has "more Gregorian chant resources than anyone, including the highly respected Solesmes." And, indeed, GIA offers all the main chant resources of Solesmes. The *Adoremus Hymnal* of Ignatius Press offers a solid selection of chant for parishes, as does the *Collegetville Hymnal* of Liturgical Press. Even the old *Liber Usualis* continues to be available in new printings from St. Bonaventure Publications.

With OCP's concession to offer Solesmes publications, however, the potential reach of this music into our parishes has taken a huge leap forward. The music that was once inseparable from the rite is at least on par again with the tunes that first displaced chant in the late 1960s and 1970s.

And consider the promotional material that OCP is offering as well. The publisher points out that these books are perfect for "introducing your parish to the church's rich and ancient tradition of Latin chant in the liturgy." These are words many Catholic musicians never imagined they would see printed by OCP.

Until recently, jibes at anything preconiliar in sensibility have been a continuing theme in its monthly literature. But now OCP is going so far as to quote the Second Vatican Council: It is important to "take steps so that the faithful may also be able to say or sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 54).

The psychological effects of OCP's new offerings could be very powerful indeed. Parish musicians, who typically have not had practical exposure to chant and are in constant need of musical guidance, have long considered OCP authoritative. Musicians often assume that so long as they are using music published and promoted by this publisher, they are on solid ground. Advocates of authentic sacred music have been at a disadvantage because chant has been largely shunned by modern publishers.

So, why is OCP doing this? Why the dramatic departure from its contemporary offerings? In response to our query, OCP editor Michael Prendergast offers three reasons: "recent Roman documents," renewed interest, and the desire to satisfy customers. More and more parishes are seeking out this material, and OCP is highly sensitive to these considerations. This is the publisher, after all, that sends a lengthy questionnaire to all the parishes that use its materials. OCP has never been shy about its policy of publishing based on popularity.

If we consider that music is integral to liturgy itself, the error of such a method becomes obvious. That OCP may be yielding to market pressure to offer chant resources is ironic and sweetly so. Catholics, after all, are the first to celebrate redemption.

But there is another factor at work here, too. Chant is being rediscovered by a new generation for whom the post-Vatican II period of artistic upheaval and nasty politics isn't even a memory. Young people can hear the music with fresh ears and don't comprehend breathless warnings that chant will bring back the Inquisition.

To today's listeners, chant sounds like Catholicism put to music: meditative, prayerful, and impossibly beautiful. Hardly anyone can remember a rationale for why it was swept away.

Catholic composers are rediscovering chant, too. As a result of past articles for *Crisis*, we have received correspondence from well-known composers of contemporary songs who have expressed regret at not knowing of the chant tradition and have pledged themselves to rediscovering its beauties.

Is a revival in the works? Perhaps so, and perhaps the very market pressures that seemed to assist in unraveling Church music traditions will now work to restore some of what has been lost.

There are dangers, however. Might chant be added to a Sunday mix of music that will include all styles, creating a kind of liturgical mélange? Is chant in danger of becoming part of this year's Catholic Top 40 only to fall out of the list next year?

This would be a tragedy. Chant isn't an ornament; it is intrinsic to the Catholic liturgy, having grown up with it over the centuries. It should not have been permitted by a growing bent toward secularism to "fall out of favor." Musical choices in liturgy must always go beyond questions of preference, style, and marketability. They must point toward an ultimate sense of meaning, which is what chant does.

Another danger is that publishers will begin adding chant to their catalog, or musicians will begin adding it to liturgies, as a strategic device merely to cover their bases (perhaps even with the purpose of bolstering the legitimacy of the prevailing contemporary offerings). Again, chant should not be treated as a choice in the Catholic jukebox but as the music proper to the rite itself.

Because chant and liturgical music generally are integral to liturgy, it does not lend itself to the à-la-carte approach to the liturgical arts that now dominates our parishes. Parish musicians who hope to integrate sacred music into liturgy need time to study, read, attend workshops, and go about their task with utmost attention to detail. It needs to grow and develop on its own terms within a framework of security, pastoral commitment, and sound theology.

So far have we traveled from the vision of Pius X, and other great champions of sacred music, that it will take more than new catalog offerings, books, and CDs to restore its "pride of place" within the Roman rite. And yet, we might have turned the corner.

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