

Pride of Place: Gregorian Chant in the Liturgy Mundelein, The Liturgical Institute, 2006

written by Colleen Carter

It should be said, for those who have never been to the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary, that the grounds are beautiful. The buildings on the campus are all red brick and of a unified architectural style. The grounds, at least in late September, are lush and green. It is very quiet there, very removed from the bustle of the city only a few miles distant. In this meditative atmosphere, 35 people gathered to talk about and sing Gregorian chant, from Sunday evening until noon on Wednesday.

The main presenter was Dr. Edward Schaefer. The Liturgical Institute hosted a similar conference two years ago, which was entitled “The Place of Chant in the Liturgy Today,” and Dr. Schaefer had been the main presenter at that conference as well. I was a member of Dr. Schaefer’s schola at Gonzaga University at the time, and most of the schola went to the conference to sing for Mass and Vespers and to provide examples. The schola as a whole could not attend the conference this year, but Dr. Schaefer asked two of his former students, Margaret Rankin and myself, to accompany him and to take charge of the workshop for beginners. Margaret is a graduate student in philosophy at Gonzaga, and I am a graduate student in music history at the University of Southern California. We both sang in the schola for four years, meaning we sang chant roughly four hours a week, including Mass each Sunday, nine months a year. For this conference, we modeled our presentations on the music that the Gonzaga schola uses, and the way in which the schola sings Mass and Vespers.

I. The Liturgies

Vespers

We sang Vespers each of the three nights of the conference. Vespers was completely sung in a fairly monastic style, with Margaret and I seated on one side of the sanctuary facing Dr. Schaefer and the acolytes on the other. The psalm verses we sang in English, and everything else was in Latin. Dr. Schaefer acted in his capacity as deacon (he is a deacon of the Diocese of Spokane). We used the old form for Vespers, not modern Evening Prayer. We sang Sunday’s Vespers all three nights because we thought it would be less confusing for those participants not familiar with Vespers if we did not have to sing different psalms and antiphons every night. It seems to have worked, as everyone was singing along beautifully by Tuesday evening, although I’m not sure everyone got all the sitting, standing, and bowing right.

Morning Prayer

Fr. Douglas Martis and Dr. Denis McNamara of the Liturgical Institute led Morning Prayer for the conference participants, using excerpts from the forthcoming Mundelein Psalter. I confess I only attended Morning Prayer on one morning, both because I needed

to prepare for, and because I am not at all fond of the modern version of Morning Prayer. Nevertheless, I was impressed with the attempt that they have made to make it easier for people to chant these prayers. The Mundelein Psalter uses St. Meinrad tones rather than traditional psalm tones. These tones are very easy to pick up—you can sing them almost instantly. If someone wanted to start a group of non-musicians singing Morning, Evening, or Night Prayer together, the Mundelein Psalter might be a good choice. Someone with more musical ability might be bored by the extremely simple St. Meinrad tones, and the lack of more melodic or melismatic music for the antiphons, although Fr. Martis said that a composer is working on more interesting music for the antiphons. Further information about the Psalter can be found on the Liturgical Institute's website under "projects."

Mass

The Liturgical Institute's own Fr. Martis was the principle celebrant for Monday evening's Mass. Conference participants Fr. David Austin of Carey, IL and Fr. Brian Muzas of New Jersey were courageous enough to volunteer to sing Mass on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning, respectively. Another conference-goer, Mr. Gerald Chalupka of Chicago, kindly provided us with organ music for the offertory and recessional on the chapel's handsome instrument.

The chapel at Mundelein has ideal acoustics for chant. Its rectangular shape, its marble floors and plaster ceiling, and total lack of tapestries, carpeting, or curtains of any kind combine to provide a reverberation time of what must be at least six seconds. Hymns probably produce something like cacophony in such a setting, but the free rhythm and monodic line of the chants were displayed to their best advantage. Margaret and I sang the Introit (*Da pacem*) each day. We received several compliments on the beauty of our rendition, but I think it was at least partly the delightful acoustics; to the best of my recollection, we do not usually sound so nice in the schola's carpeted chapel at home. A picture of the interior of the chapel at Mundelein can be found on the history page of the seminary's website.

The Masses were all chanted—everything but the homily was sung. The priest's parts were mostly in English, but the Propers and Ordinaries were in Latin. The *Missa Cantata* book and congregational booklets published by Priory Press were used. On Tuesday morning, both the beginner and advanced workshop participants came together to discuss the first Mass. The reaction of many is best described as culture shock. Some of the conference participants had almost no previous experience with chant, and some had no experience with chant other than having grown up with it before the Second Vatican Council. For them to experience, as one person put it, "chant by immersion," was quite as shocking and bewildering as traveling to a foreign country. Despite the strangeness of the experience, all but one reacted unreservedly positively, and the reactions became even more enthusiastic by the end of the third Mass the following morning. Wednesday's Mass, by the way, was the feast of Sts. Andrew Kim, Paul Chong Hasang, and companions.

II. Substance of the Lectures

In the morning, there were two workshops available for the participants. Margaret and I were in charge of the session aimed at beginners, and we began with the assumption that those attending our workshop knew almost nothing about chant. We started off with reading chant notation and brief explanation of the modes, went over the tones for the Mass and the readings, and taught three sets of Ordinaries--the three that the Gonzaga schola uses for Mass: the first was the Sanctus and Agnus Dei from the Requiem Mass with Kyrie from Mass XVI and Gloria from Mass VIII, the second was Mass XI with Kyrie B, and the third was Mass XVII with Kyrie C. When Dr. Schaefer put together the materials for the Chant Mass at Gonzaga, he chose settings that he thought people would be likely to have heard or know, if they were at all familiar with chant. If three settings seem like very little for a really good schola, remember that Gonzaga's schola only sings for Sundays during the school year--the only major feast on their calendar is Easter, and they do a polyphonic ordinary for that.

Dr. Schaefer talked about the chants of Holy Week with the more advanced group of musicians. He also taught them to sing the Gradual for the week of the conference and a brave soul volunteered to sing the verse at Mass (she did very well). Beyond that, I have little idea of what they discussed.

Monday and Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, both groups met together and Dr. Schaefer lectured. Margaret and I provided occasional musical support for examples. We spent most of Monday afternoon going through Vespers so that everyone would be able to sing or at least follow along. In relation to this, we also discussed psalm tones.

In the above section on Vespers, I mentioned that the Gonzaga schola uses the old form of Vespers, and not the modern Evening Prayer. There are some practical reasons for this decision. One is that Evening Prayer is considerably different, and does not fit with the old chants. There is no official notated version; Evening Prayer, as it stands, is not really meant to be sung. Another reason for using the older form of Vespers is the one-week cycle. Our Sunday psalms are our Sunday psalms, and the schola does not need to learn new music each week to sing Vespers.

On Wednesday morning, we talked about resources for chant and also for polyphony. CanticaNova received several mentions, as did Choral Public Domain Library, the Solesmes books of course, many of which are available through GIA, and also the Missa Cantata book and other resources available through Dr. Schaefer's Priory Press. Dr. Schaefer discussed the pros and cons of the Graduale Simplex and By Flowing Waters.

Dr. Schaefer and I were somewhat disappointed in the reaction of many of the conference when asked what they thought they might take back to their parishes out of all this. About six of the 35 people had had to leave already, and I would have been very interested in what they might have had to say about it, but many of those who remained seemed to have missed the most important point we had tried to get across. Maybe we didn't stress it enough. Our point was this: don't just sing at Mass, sing the Mass. Constantly switching

between chant and normal speech is jarring and can make the chant seem somewhat out of place, and the more the choir chants, the more transitions between chant and speech there will be, and the more uncomfortable it will be for all who listen. Just adding a few chants here and there is a good start, but ultimately, it is not enough.

III. Praying Together and Socializing

More than person told me that they found their prayer lives much enriched by the liturgies of the conference, and one said he missed daily prayer in community after the conference was over. I miss it too. There is something about praying the Divine Office together that makes me a little jealous of those who are called to monastic life. I wish that I could start a group to sing Sunday Vespers each week, but at the moment I have neither the time nor the resources to do so. I hope that some of you out there will consider having sung Vespers in your parishes on Sundays, even if it's only in Advent and Lent, as the schola at Gonzaga does.

It was fun to socialize with other Catholic musicians who are serious about beautiful, authentically Catholic music. There was one Episcopalian in attendance, and I am afraid he may have felt a little left out of our evening festivities. I really enjoyed meeting folks from all over the country, sharing jokes and songs, and finding out about their interests outside of liturgical music. One of the priests is an erstwhile rocket scientist and another a wine enthusiast, one of the nuns likes to play ragtime piano, and one of the music directors was also Chicago's 2005 Close-up Magic Champion (he proudly showed off some of his card trick skills). Many of us stayed up until midnight or thereabouts on Monday and Tuesday nights, sharing jokes, playing the piano, and telling each other our life stories. We told the kind of jokes and stories that wouldn't be funny or interesting to many of the people I usually work with. Most of my coworkers and classmates are not Catholic, and unlike my table companion on Tuesday night, wouldn't have the slightest interest in trading vocation stories, although they might have thought that our somewhat elaborate speculations on how to rig a computer to accept burnt offerings were amusing. Said table companion and I plan to remain in touch.

Personally, I came away from the conference with several things: new friends and contacts in liturgical music; confidence in my own, previously untested, ability to teach chant; renewed frustration that all liturgies are not as beautiful as those I took part in for three short days; and finally, a sense of hope that there are others out there who are trying as hard as I am to bring as much beauty as possible to the Mass.