

# FOREWORD

regorian Chant would have a history of 1400 years, if Pope St. Gregory the Great (590-604) were chosen as the starting point of this chapter in the History of Music. However, Pope Pius XI (1922-1939), in his Apostolic Constitution “*Divini cultus sanctitatem*”, reminded researchers that St. Gregory the Great was only the person who “gathered, reorganized, and extended the great patrimony transmitted by the Fathers, i.e. the treasury of plain chants”. In other words, the history of Gregorian Chant is longer than 1400 years. At the same time, Pius XI commended Guido d’Arezzo (c.992-c.1050), a Benedictine of the eleventh century, for his “stroke of genius” in inventing the musical scale and the musical notes (the progenitor of the ‘do-re-mi’ scale). The usefulness of these inventions was verified in the presence of Pope John XIX (1024-1032). After listening to Guido’s explanations and reading his score, the Pope himself could sing impromptu an antiphon. The result of Guido’s inventions was that “these traditional sacred chants, transmitted for so many generations, not only became popular in his own epoch, but were also faithfully preserved for future generations, thus contributing greatly to the development and beauty of the Church and of art itself”. This quotation bears witness to the fact that Gregorian Chant has had its own golden age in history.

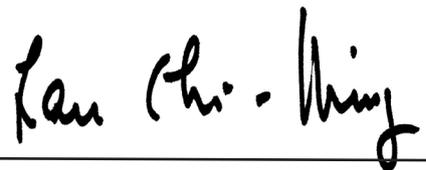
Later, of course, Plain Chant (as Gregorian Chant is also called) hit its low tide when polyphony was introduced into musical history. This was the result of changes in the social environment and in the taste of people who appreciated more novelties than tradition. With the beginning of the era of melody, the production of Gregorian Chant came to a stand-still. This is not to say that it stopped completely, but only that the production of this era is not acceptable to purists who uphold the orthodoxy of traditional music. For artworks that have to enter common use it is only natural that they adapt somewhat to the demands of the age. This should be accepted without scruples.

There is one age in history in which the prestigious status of Gregorian Chant is beyond doubt. In the last one hundred years the Church has called Gregorian “the Chant proper to the Roman Liturgy”. The Church, however, will never say that it is the only liturgical chant, because to

say this would be to go against nature and against Sacred Scripture. The Bible, in fact, says: “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6) and “Praise the Lord, all you nations!” (Psalm 117[116]:1). A very good exegesis of these scriptural texts is what the Second Vatican Council says in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy at no. 119: “there are peoples who have their own musical traditions, and these play a great part in their religious and social life; for this reason due importance is to be attached to their music, and a suitable place is to be given to it”.

This booklet has adopted the same format as the preceding one, entitled “Short Reflections on Gregorian Chant”. In eight articles, independent from one another, the paths trodden by Gregorian Chant in history are traced out. The simplicity of the description cannot, of course, fully satisfy the reader, but it may at least serve as a pointer to deeper investigations.

Finally, I must express my deepest gratitude to all members of the Sacred Music Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. In the process of writing this book, they have been of great help to me under several respects. May God bless them all!



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February 21 MMVII