

REVIEWS

Entrances: Gregorian Chant in Daily Life

By *Rembert Herbert*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1999. Pp. 358. \$23.95, paper.

Reviewed by Katharine Le Mée

THE INTENT OF Rembert Herbert's insightful, inspired, and yet eminently practical book *Entrances: Gregorian Chant in Daily Life* is to place Gregorian chant, the monophonic liturgical plainsong of the Roman Catholic Church, in its historical and traditional setting. The author shows that chant is intimately connected with the words of the Bible and the teachings of the early Church Fathers. With expertise gained through years as a music specialist for the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., Cantor of St. James's Episcopal Church, Capitol Hill, and Director of the Schola Cantorum of New York, Herbert shares with us the fruits of his penetrating study of Christian sacred scripture and wisdom writings and his profound and devotion-filled understanding of chant, inviting us to use all three as entrances to the Church's contemplative tradition.

Quoting from Paul the Apostle, Origen, Gregory the Great, John Cassian, Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, and others, Herbert draws attention to the habitually scattered condition and instability of the human mind. This mental confusion is due, he points out, to our attachment to opinions, ideas, emotions, and images of

ourselves and the world that have very little substance. As long as our minds are continually darting from one random thought to another, we have no perception or appreciation of the wealth of the inner life which lies below the surface agitation; spiritual realities appear far away and of little importance or interest.

In this condition of forgetfulness of our true and deeper nature, the singing of Gregorian chant can provide us with both a diagnostic tool and a sure remedy. With consummate mastery, Herbert teaches the way for church choirs or individuals to use traditional chant as a means first to perceive and then to calm the aberrations of the ordinary mind.

The author emphasizes the importance of inner listening, of noticing when attention has veered away from the sound of the chant and of calling it back again and again. In the singing of the Psalms, the core of the Gregorian repertory, singers must cut across habit and observe a longer, more reflective pause between phrases and a shorter, energy-filled silence at the end of the lines. Ego must be sacrificed so that no one singer leads or dominates the group and so that unity of pitch, volume, pace, accentuation, and treatment of vowels and consonants may be attained. No attempt should be made to sing "with expression" or to "create a melodic line"; rather, the chant should be allowed to proclaim itself to each individual singer or listener. Choirs should create a careful balance between a light,

free articulation of the text and a careful listening and watchfulness.

Once the exigencies of chanting have been met, singers are able to enter the experiential, contemplative world so often missing in the lives of contemporary Christians.

In what is essentially a holographic approach, Herbert explains that

in order to enter the Fathers' world, we must become comfortable with this allegorical or symbolic language. We must first of all accept at least the possibility that every word of scripture is true in an exact symbolic sense, and that symbolism is the necessary language of the inner world of the spirit. . . . To enter that world, we must also adjust our habits of mind to accommodate multiple meanings, multiple types of meaning, the often unexpected behavior of inner forces, and different ways of "receiving" meaning.

Herbert emphasizes that access to this inner world is not reserved for visionaries or, for that matter, singers of extraordinary skill. His book provides everything needed for choir or individual to begin a contemplative practice: texts of monastic writers to study; guides to the Psalm tones, chant notation, and the pronunciation of "Church Latin"; instructions on how to chant in English, if that is desired; and a number of glorious examples of chant liturgy, fully explained and annotated, to practice. We have, of course, to offer our voices, our attention and, most of all, our listening.

Herbert offers us an accessible, clear, and nourishing guide, indispensable for any choir desiring to introduce Gregorian chant into the life of its church and for any individual wishing to gain a more profound understanding of the contemplative world where the chant lives.

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