

The world is getting re-enchanted

What is it about music that so *enchants* us? Why is music so magical and mysterious ... so inspiring and uplifting? In English, the word ‘enchant’ evokes a sense of magic and mystery; of fantasy and other-worldliness. In French ‘*chanter*’ means to sing. In Latin, the same verb is *cantare*, from whence we get cognates such as *incantation* and well ... names of choral groups like *Cantamus*.

It is well known that by the time of Pope Gregory I (circa 600AD) church songs were already called chants. Chants had been for a long time, the manner in which Sacred Scripture was set to music. Probably the earliest chants were a heightened mode of speech.

Because of its intimate connection with sacred words of Scripture and with devotional practice, Gregorian chant had the power to awaken the mind and heart, of both singer and listener, to deeper levels of being. [...] medieval people were well aware of the formative power of music. They knew that setting lines of Scripture to song would imprint them ever more deeply into the memories of the worshippers, and that the words’ effect would be sustained over longer periods of time, with greater intensity. They also knew that sound is causal, that it can bring about changes in the very nature and fabric of society as well as within the individual.

Katharine Le Mée: *Chant – The Origins, Form, Practice and Healing Power of Gregorian Chant*

Artists have always known that there is something magical and mysterious about the world. It is the scientists who try to explain away everything in the universe with their rigid formulas. It is they who tell us that the earth is just a rock floating in space and the sun is nothing but a ball of hot gases. It is they who tell us that angels and demons are figments of our imagination and that the genies and sprites of the rivers and mountains do not exist. They have been telling us for the last many centuries that such beliefs are obsolete, medieval superstition and that we should put all our trust in science instead. But the world is getting reenchanting. The scientific worldview is running out of steam, and the sense of the sacredness of the cosmos is coming back. It is coming back like Aslan returning after a long winter spell in C.S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia* or like Jesus Christ resurrecting after 3 days in the tomb. Can you sense this come-back in popular culture, on social media, in the contemporary movie scene, in public discourse or ... perhaps in your local youth Mass?

The ancient Greeks spoke of “the muses” – the gods who inspired artists to create. It is from the Greek word *Muse* that we get the English word *Music*, by the way. When confronted with the sacred, an artist feels both fear and fascination ... he is both subdued and excited, and reacts by bowing down in awe and adoration. Rather than investigate the world with the cold cutlery of the scientist – scalpels, stethoscopes and scans – the artist senses the need to marvel and contemplate reality with the simple eyes of a child. Rather than speak with mathematical certainty, he prefers to use the subtle language of poetry. Rather than complain, he senses in his heart of hearts, the call of “The Father” to lift up his heart – always and everywhere – in order to give thanks.

V/: *Lift up your hearts.* R/: *We lift them up to the Lord*
V/: *Let us give thanks to the Lord.* R/: *It is right and just ...*

Musicians are artists who are born to re-enchant (and thereby recreate) the world with sung speech – with incantations. Dialogical exchanges such as the *Sursum Corda* (lift up your hearts) invitation mentioned above between priest and congregation would always be chanted in the liturgies of old. These kinds of chanted prayers are quite different from the kind of incantations one may find in the

world of “black magic” ... and it is curious how often such ritual spaces fall back on ancient languages like Latin as the most appropriate mediums for invoking the supernatural or for arousing the sense of the other-worldly.

In general, magic can be used to control the world according to the whims of an evil magician or it can be used to reshape the world according to the Will of a loving father. A more fitting name for the former kind of magic would be *sorcery* or *witchcraft* whereas a better name for the latter kind would be, *prayer*. Yes – prayer is *magical*. The classical definition of prayer in the Catechism is in fact, *the raising of one’s mind and heart to God*. To pray is not only to enter into the mind and heart of the Father in order to “swim” in His immense mysteries; it is also to do so in order to effect real and oftentimes, mysterious changes in the world. Such changes are never achieved whimsically or tyrannically as sorcerers and wizards often do. They are achieved by synchronizing with the patterns and rhythms that are present in the things themselves ... patterns hidden therein from the foundation of the world. Such patterns are anything but arbitrary. They are, as a matter of fact, the very basis of creation and reality itself.

All created things have forms, formulas, codes or inner patterns. From as far back as the time of Pythagoras, the 7th century BC mathematician-philosopher, ancient and medieval people have perceived the world in terms of mystical fractal patterns – the ones found in say, the 7 notes of the musical scale, the 7-day cycle of the week, the age of 7 at which a child is said to attain the age of reason, the 7 ages of man from birth to death and so on. Modern and Contemporary men and women (though they would be hard-pressed to admit it) also perceive and interpret the world in terms of formulas and patterns. What else are those computer codes and *algorithms* that drive our search engines and in-*form* the trends that go viral on our social media platforms?

In his *Rule*, Saint Benedict, 480-547AD, (his memorial celebration falls on 11th of July btw), Founder of Western Monasticism and Patron of Europe, spoke of 7 offices in the day and one in the night. Eight times a day, his monks met to chant the Psalms, listen to scriptural readings and offer prayers so that the presence of Christ, so strongly evoked in the Mass, would be recalled and consciously maintained throughout the day – and night. In attempting to bring back some semblance of order into a European civilization that had crumbled after the fall of Rome in 476 AD, Benedict came up with a Rule that incorporated the movements of the celestial spheres – the *musica mundana*; the daily lives of men – the *musica humana* and the richness of their voices – the *musica instrumentalis*. He had discovered the musical patterns that governed the heavens and the earth... or as Dante would say later on in the last line of his *Divine Comedy*; “*the Love that moves the sun and the other stars*”. He had discovered the musical patterns that governed the heavens and the earth. The pattern could be summarized with this simple formula: “As above, so below” ... or to borrow from the words of the Our Father: “On earth, as in heaven”. Order is restored into civilizations when the “goings-on” of the earth are (re)aligned with the “goings-on” of heaven.

The world becomes devoid of enchantment to the extent that genuine prayer is absented from it. Ultimately, the force that shapes the world by lifting it up towards the heavens *Love*. This *Love* is not a rigid formula generated by a machine; it is an Ungenerated, Uncreated, Holy Spirit – a Person ... the Third Person of the Most Blessed Trinity. It is this very *Love* that made and still makes up the entity we call the Church. St. John of the Cross very clearly affirmed that a gratuitous and disinterested love for God (e.g. as expressed through acts of prayer and acts of mercy), is what benefits the Church the most and what ultimately the Church has the greatest need of. In his *Sayings*

of Light and Love, he wrote; “An act of pure love benefits the Church more than all the works of the world.” God the Father made the world through his Word (the Son) and in his Love (the Holy Spirit) ... and He likewise continues to renew the world through his Word and in his Love.

This teaching is implicit in the greatest representatives of the Carmelite Order – John of the Cross himself, Teresa of Jesus, Thérèse of Lisieux and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (aka Edith Stein). The story of the Carmelites stretches all the way back to the prophet Elijah who lived around 900 years before the birth of Christ. When Israel lost its “magic” by abandoning the covenant with Yahweh, Elijah remained faithful and was able to offer a true sacrifice to God on Mt. Carmel (See 1 Kings 17-18).

Legend has it that centuries later, a monastery was set up on that very holy mountain by the followers of Elijah. In the 13th century, when Simon Stock became the Superior General of the Order, Our Lady appeared to him and promised her protection to all those who dedicated themselves to a life of prayer in the tradition of Elijah. In the Catholic liturgical calendar, the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is celebrated on 16th of July.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Carmel is the first religious Marian Order of the West. Who, other than Mary, Supreme Pattern or *Archetype* of the Church and privileged channel through which heaven came down to earth in the Person of the Word, the Divine *Logos* (think *Eternal Prototypical “Algorithm”*) ... can help us re-enchant our jaded and crumbling world? Her Rosaries, Scapulars and Chaplets are not charms and amulets that magically protect the superstitious. They are prayer-weapons for recreating, re-incarnating and renewing the world with the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit.