

# The "Missa de Angelis"

Analysis by A. Gastoué

*Translated by Albert Gingras*

One of the best known Gregorian musical settings of the ordinary of the Mass is, without doubt, the eighth in the Vatican Edition, known as the "Mass of the Angels" (*de Angelis*). This is the only Mass, among all the collections of the ancient chants written to the text of the Ordinary, that does not owe its name to a trope sung to the melody of the Kyrie. (A trope consisted of one or more verses sung either before or after the liturgical text (Introit, Offertory, Communion) or inserted in the piece (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, Ite.) This is not due to the lack of tropes written to this music: years ago, Dom Pothier published a trope set to this chant, one which was not, however, in very general use. At any rate, it probably has been included only in the old Gradual of the diocese of Toul, France (which diocese is now divided in two parts, one part having been added to the diocese of Nancy, the other, to the diocese of Saint-Die.)

This title of "Mass of the Angels" comes from the devotion, established in general use through the efforts of the Franciscans, of celebrating, on Monday, a Votive Mass in honor of the Holy Angels: for this Mass, was selected an ordinary, the one which has since been known as the "Mass of the Angels". Therefore, we can suppose, with reason, that it was the Franciscan Order which gathered together, at that time, all the various pieces of which this Ordinary has been composed, since, approximately, the 16th century.

In the 18th century, we see this collection of chants employed, entirely or in part, for certain degrees of feasts; feasts of either double or greater double rank, or even solemn feast of a secondary order. This is sufficient to indicate at what occasions it is suitable to sing the ordinary of the "Mass of the Angels": Votive Masses, celebrated with some ceremony, or, secondary feasts. Therefore, it is not traditional,—except, perhaps, in the present routine of a few small churches or chapels — to sing the eighth Mass on ordinary Sundays. In those churches or chapels where this is a custom, (a custom which has been only of some 50 years duration), it certainly would be far preferable again to bring into use the real

ordinaries for Sundays and for simple feasts, and to reserve the "Mass of the Angels" for some solemn feasts.

Let me add that, habitually, the third Credo has been sung with the eighth Mass, because the mode, the melodic line, the character of this Credo are so similar to the chants of that Ordinary. As is the case with the eighth Mass, the third Credo was never intended for ordinary Sundays or feasts, and can be sung, with reason, only on special days: feasts of a certain order, but nevertheless, not of the highest rank.

This Mass, and the third Credo, are intended, therefore, for the solemnity of feasts of greater double rank, or even double of the second class.

It is for those days that liturgical tradition has ever prescribed the use of these chants.

Let us now give a few explanatory remarks for each section of this Mass.

## THE KYRIE

I have already stated that this Kyrie does not owe its name to antique trope. However, the composition and the name of this chant are more ancient than has been stated in certain books of the present day. It is already twenty years since I had occasion to speak about the most ancient texts, to this Kyrie, that had been found up to that time: it is a work probably of Norman origin, and dating from the 14th century. At that time the Graduale of the Cathedral of Rouen included this Kyrie among certain chants "ad libitum" for the solemnity of feasts. In the following century, again in Rouen, we find this Kyrie already given the title "de Angelis"; and, in England, where, for the most part, the customs were the same as those of Normandy, we find, from that time, the *Benedicamus* sung thereafter to the air of one of the sections of this Kyrie. In this same era, this same Kyrie is beginning to be sung for certain Votive Masses, for example, like the Mass celebrated in honor of Saint Sebastian by the sodality of Archers; and, soon after, the order of the Celestins also include this Kyrie in their Graduals, with the title "De sanctis Angelis".

Therefore, we see that this chant was written in an era two hundred years previous to the one usually stated, and that from the moment when this Kyrie began to be sung quite generally, it was preferably reserved for Masses to be sung at solemnities, and especially for Masses in honor of the Holy Angels.

Documents notate this Kyrie sometimes with the final do: do, mi, fa, sol, sol, with the do clef placed on the fourth line; and sometimes with the final fa, with the do clef on the third line, and with si always flat, as has been recognized by custom. (1)

This Kyrie from the "Missa de Angelis" is a pleasing composition, and is very well written. Despite the fact that it is one of the least ancient of the chants, composed for the Ordinary of the Mass, it follows exactly the plan of Gregorian music.

Though this chant is composed in the traditional manner of the ancient Gregorian chants, the mode used in the writing of this Kyrie is of more recent usage. It is really a major mode, which began to be generally employed in the 13th century. Compare this chant, as regards the general structure of the melody and the grouping of the notes, to the Alleluia of the proper of the Mass for the feast of Saint Louis and also to the Alleluia for the Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart. These two compositions are found in the chant books of Paris. They were written in the 13th century. The similarity, as regards this general structure of the melody and the grouping of the notes, will be evident. (2)

However, here is a criticism that I will make as regards this Kyrie. The melody is more suitable for an Alleluia, a song of praise, than it is for a Kyrie, which is a cry of supplication. In this chant, we find a melody of "joyful" supplication; the reason for this is, perhaps, if we consider the paintings and the sculptures of the middle ages, that the contemporaries of that time conceived the pure heavenly spirits praying God for humanity, with this calm joyfulness.

The mode of this Kyrie, fifth tone, with the dominant do, indicates that, for practical purposes, it must be transposed: either with dominant b flat, to be read as if written in the g clef with a signature of three flats, or with

(1) The versions of the ancient documents differing from this are of little importance: the Vatican Edition gives the text employed most generally, which is notated with the final fa.

(2) We even find the first traces of these melodic ideas in the Alleluia of the feast of the Assumption, and in the Alleluia of the feast of Saint Martin. Each Alleluia is notated with the final do, with the do clef on the fourth line. These chants were written during the ninth or tenth centuries.

dominant a, with the do clef on the fourth line, and with a signature of two sharps. In the first case, the key would be e flat major, and in the second case, d major. As has been stated, this Kyrie contains a b flat, in the original key. I read this chant as if the flat were in the signature, instead of being repeated each time. This procedure is more logical. The antiphon, O sacrum convivium, a chant written at about the same time as the "Missa de Angelis" is notated in this manner.

As concerns the rhythm take care to lengthen the notes which precede immediately the spaces between the groups. It is the customary rule. In singing the first notes of this Kyrie: fa, la, si, do, this last do would be lengthened; then continuing: re, do, si<sup>b</sup>, do, this last do would again be lengthened. (In various manuscripts, this note is written as a Bistropa; interpreted as a note doubled in value.) As concerns the accentuation, the first syllable Ky must mark the first accent, the starting point of the melody. The group of notes written for the syllable re is subservient to this accent. According to the musical customs of the time in which this Kyrie was composed and began to be sung quite generally, a group thus placed would be quickened in tempo, the three notes being sung in the same time as a group of two notes.

For the last Kyrie, the asterisks indicate the alternation of the two choirs, as I have explained previously in speaking of chants of this kind. The Kyrie up to the first asterisk is sung by the soloists or by the first choir; the e up to the double asterisk is sung by the other choir; then, the eleison is sung by all the voices.

## THE GLORIA

Though the documents so far known, which are concerned with this Gloria in excelsis, date only from the beginning of the 16th century, there is not sufficient reason to believe that this chant is not more ancient than might thus be indicated. On the contrary, we find the essential motives of this music in a mass for two voices, "Lombardi", so-called, one hundred years more ancient than the date just mentioned. Also, the religious public does not know that in the ancient Spanish liturgy, "mozarabe", so-called, which, in part, is still in use in Toledo, this melody is used both for the Gloria and for the Sanctus, with a rather odd intonation.

In the Mass of this ancient liturgy, which Mass has such a peculiar ritual, documents give, for this Gloria, two intonations which

are very similar in structure. One of these intonations is of the fifth tone:

fa so la si flat do re—re do si flat la si flat do  
Glo-

re re do si flat do do do do do do si flat la  
ri-a in ex-cel-sis-De- o-

The rest of the chant is about the same as we know it.

The other intonation is of the seventh tone:  
sol si do re mi—(mi) re do si do re mi  
Glo-

re do re re  
ri-a, etc.

This leads us to believe that, in this ancient liturgy, this chant has undergone a change of mode (1).

However, only the fifth tone melody, just as we know it today, has remained in practical usage. The similarity in style between this chant and the Kyrie "de Angelis" is, no doubt, the principal reason for the adjoining of this Gloria to the Kyrie, in the eighth Mass. This was done beginning with the 16th century. Moreover, just as was the case for the Kyrie, "tropes" were set also the melody of this Gloria. (2)

In spite of its relatively "modern" coloring, the Gloria "de Angelis" presents itself in a favorable light. Easy, and at the same time, festival in style, this chant is very well liked, even though the same motives are often repeated; but these motives are well adjusted in the ensemble. However, this in itself is a danger. To state one example: the formula la sol fa sol la sol fa is set to different words which are not accented in the same way. Therefore, the choir director must take care that the correct rhythm, that is, the rhythm of the words, is always observed. Let us insist especially that the following words be correctly pronounced:

fa sol la sol fa . . . sol la do re do

pax ho- m'i-ni-bus . . . u-ni-g'e-ni-te

sol la sol fa

Spi- ri-tu

The mode of the Gloria being the same as that of the Kyrie, it will be natural to take the same pitch for both these chants. As concerns the alternation of the choirs, I have explained that in a previous treatise, in which I wrote on all these chants in a general way.

### THE SANCTUS

The Sanctus of Mass No. VIII is one of the melodies which were the most celebrated near the end of the middle ages. It was not com-

(1) However, in the Roman rite, the intonation of this chant has varied through the ages.

(2) Without doubt it would be interesting some day to publish these tropes. They would make pious hymns, that could be sung, for example at Communion or at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

posed for the text of the Sanctus, and we find this melody in the famous anthem, O quam suavis est, the music adapted differently, because of the difference in the words.

Like the Kyrie, this melody must be of Norman origin. It is used in the office of Saint Nicholas, the thaumaturge of Myre, which office was composed in the eleventh century by an abbé of Saint-Pierre-sur-Dive; it is still sung in the dioceses of Lorraine with the original text, O Christe pietas, in honor of the same saint.

This melody owes its élan in great part to the fact that, though it was composed in the compass of the sixth tone, several incursions are made to the fifth tone, fa la do do, where the high position of the dominant, thus gives a considerable effect. The adaptation of this music to the Sanctus is well done. Each word coincides well with the melody, the imitation of the Pleni sunt by the Benedictus is logical, and the two Hosanna have a character of gradation or amplification found in the best models of original music. The march and the expression of the melody coincide so well with the meaning and the disposition of the words that, were we not fore-warned, we could believe that it really had been composed for the Sanctus.

Let us take care, in singing the group fa sol la do la, which is one of the predominating motives of this chant, not to crush, so to speak, this last la, because it is doubled by the following note. This is not a real "pressus", but only an "apposition" of neums. The notes which carry the melodic accents are: fa (sol la) do (la) la (sol fa). The la of the "scandicus flexus" fa sol la do la, which is the la in question, must be light, and there is a strengthening of the voice on the following la, which begins the "climacus". The same remark applies to the anthem to the Blessed Sacrament, O quam suavis est, which has the same melodic disposition.

### THE AGNUS DEI

The melody which we have just discussed was adapted to the Sanctus of the "Missa de Angelis" during the 12th century. This same melody was so well liked that soon it was adapted—often with rather poor success—to several other liturgical texts. Among these texts was the Agnus Dei: it is not so very long ago that, in most chant books the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei of the "Missa de Angelis" were both given with the same melody.

However, in the 15th century, one of those same documents from Rouen which gave us the Kyrie, gave also a new Agnus Dei, by an unknown composer. This chant evidently was inspired by the Agnus Dei already in use, but

differed sufficiently from it so that it is apparent that, though there is relationship between the two chants, the second is not a copy of the first. Therefore, it is with reason that Dom Pothier replaced the older *Agnus Dei* by the new one, in the "Missa de Angelis", in the first Edition of Solesmes. It was then placed in the Vatican Edition.

As is the case for the *Sanctus*, this *Agnus Dei* does not call for many special remarks to explain its execution. Here is a hint for the rendering of the *miserere* and the *dona nobis*; in these two passages, the voice, starting on the first syllable, rebounds, so to speak, on the third; *mi-(se)-re-(re)*,—*do-(na no-(bis))*. The *podatus*, which are found here and there in the melody, will be submerged in the accentuation of the words; as these *podatus* fall on weak syllables they will be weak also in accentuation, for the reason that the words influence the rhythm of the melody.

The *Ite missa est* and the *Benedicamus*, having the same melody as the *Kyrie*, do not call for any observations than those already made.

We believe that all these remarks and explanations will contribute to a good rendition and a more perfect rendition of the "Missa de Angelis", a work which ancient tradition justly has judged worthy of being presented with other Masses more classical or more original.

In 1904, at the occasion of the 13th centenary of Saint Gregory the Great, a Solemn High Mass was celebrated in the church of Saint Peter in Rome. The singing was given entirely in Gregorian Chant, this not having been done for a long time. For this mass, Pope Pius X himself chose the *Kyrie* and the *Gloria* of the "Missa de Angelis".

Among the great masters of religious music who have been inspired by this Mass, let us mention Boely, who really can be called our national organist, surnamed by Saint-Saens, "the French Bach". Boely wrote several verses and an Offertory on the themes of the "Missa de Angelis". We must mention also Mgr. Perruchot, whose memory is so deeply regretted. He composed music to alternate with the Gregorian Chant. This work, which is of fine effect, is for two voices and for organ, and has this same title of "Missa de Angelis".

### CORNER STONE CEREMONIES AT NORTH EVERETT, MASS.

On Sunday, October 22nd, the corner stone was laid for the new Church of St. Therese, North Everett, Mass. Rt. Rev. Msgr. McGlinchey of Lynn, was the dedicator, and many priests were present.

St. Therese's senior choir of 40 voices, directed by Miss Marie M. Hagman, rendered the musical portion of the program, including the Benediction service at the close of the corner stone ceremonies.

\* \* \* \* \*

### NEW HYMNAL ANNOUNCED FOR CENTENARY OF SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME

At Mount Mary College, Milwaukee, John Singenberger's setting of "Jubilate Deo" for four women's voices, will be heard at the celebration in honor of the Order of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

This piece was written by the composer for the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of this Religious Order in Milwaukee. The original manuscript was in possession of Sister Mary Gisela S.S.N.D., for some years after its performance in December 1900, but was subsequently returned to Mr. Singenberger's son.

The jubilee year of this Order began October 24th, with High Mass and Exposition of The Blessed Sacrament, all day. Other important observances were held in Baltimore, and St. Louis, on the same date. The Milwaukee Motherhouse will observe the event December 7th, 8th and 9th, and there will be celebrations on different anniversaries during the next twelve months.

Sister Mary Gisela, S.S.N.D., has prepared a new book, "Mount Mary Hymnal" as her contribution to the Order, in its Centenary year. The music is from past supplements to THE CAECILIA, arranged for women's voices, and when issued will appeal to college glee clubs, convent choirs, etc. It is now being prepared for the printer, and some pages will appear in THE CAECILIA during the next few months, so practical are the compositions. It will be issued in two editions. One with the organ accompaniment, and another with the voice parts for singers.

---

Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year

---