

## HIST302

### Subunit 5.4.1: “Chant”

In Christianity, chant is the singing of prayers that accompanies the liturgy during a religious service. Gregorian chant, sometimes referred to as plainchant or plainsong, was named for Pope Gregory I “the Great” (ca. 540–604). Pope Gregory I was elected to the papal throne in 590 and began standardizing aspects of the Christian Church in Rome. He regulated the Church calendar and dates of religious festivals. He also selected texts and melodies to be sung in the liturgy. Stemming from Christianity’s roots in Judaism, in which psalms were sung in the synagogue, singing during the Christian service was a concern of the Church Fathers in late antiquity. St. Augustine expressed apprehension about singing texts during the liturgy because of the pagan tradition of singing or chanting poetry and narratives. To distinguish Christian singing from what went on in the pagan world, St. Augustine encouraged Christians to mark their singing with a speaking quality or plainchant. This was the style adopted by the Benedictine monastic order and sung in their monasteries multiple times every day.

Plainchant, or plainsong, was the style Pope Gregory I endorsed in his reform of the liturgy at the end of the sixth century. Plainchant was monophonic. One line was sung at a time and there was no harmony. Sometimes chants were in a call and response style, with a choir responding to a single voice or antiphony. At other times, two choirs sang alternating passages. During the Carolingian reform of the ninth century, in which Charlemagne sought to bring uniformity to the liturgy in his empire, those texts and melodies approved by Pope Gregory I for the church in Rome were enforced throughout Charlemagne’s realm. The need for coordination for the alternating passages prompted the use of musical notation as early as the eighth century. Marks were used to indicate on which syllables the voice moved and to indicate the primary tone, or pitch, of the melody. Shortly after, voices in different tones, some in the higher range, or tenors, and some in the lower range, or bass, began chanting in unison, a performance style called *organum*. Those times in which the parallel voices sounded pleasing inspired experiments in harmony. By the eleventh century, musical notation began to reflect this awareness. Notations were used to indicate how much above and below the primary pitch the voice should move and when. By the twelfth century, rhythmical notation appeared, and a little later, polyphonic compositions—singing of two or more independent voices—to accompany the liturgy appeared.

