

*BY FLOWING WATERS — Chant for the Liturgy*

Paul F Ford

(Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1999)

*The contents of this book are best summarised in the notes for the accompanying CD: 'This book contains nearly 700 authentic chants and songs based on authentic chants for use by assemblies, cantors and choirs. It is intended to be an example of the best and most accessible of the Roman Catholic plainsong tradition. It is also intended to be ecumenical in its use of the New Revised Standard Version Bible, its design for eucharistic worship in liturgical churches and its adaptability by free churches . . . It includes the entire repertory of the *Graduale Simplex* and *Jubilate Deo* with fresh English lyrics as well as the original Latin and Greek . . . The style of the songs is what is could be called litanic or responsorial. The music is drawn from plainsong (Gregorian chant), containing Mozarabic (Old Spanish) and Ambrosian (Milanese) chants . . . The litanic style is its greatest virtue. The call and response way of singing makes the assembly work, and it makes cantors and choirs work at making the assembly work (the chief vocation of the pastoral musician) . . . This work drives home the meaning of the text of the word of God.'*

*First and foremost, *By Flowing Waters* is an amazing work of adaptation done with immense care and skill. It is superbly edited — everything has been thought of which might simplify performance (there is even a long section entitled 'I performance Notes' at the end of the book). There is a huge amount of music available for all possible types of assembly. Permission is given, under certain conditions, to reproduce words and music for assembly use without charge. Full copies of the book will, however, be needed for choirs and cantors.*

*So what is the verdict? I think that every church and choir where there is serious music making should have a copy of *By Flowing Waters*. It is a wonderful source book and full of ideas. It also makes plainsong*

*accessible for those who like it but cannot reasonably expect it to be sung in Latin from plainsong notation. It fulfils all the expectations of Vatican II in preserving the Church's musical inheritance, while opening it up to averagely musical congregations. Its responsorial character makes it very userfriendly and ensures that choir/cantor and congregation are in continual dialogue. But for any church where plainsong has disappeared (or was never there) the style will take hard work to master. I have to admit also that the pointing of the psalms makes them look very difficult. Only time will tell how an average choir or cantor would succeed in singing them.*

*There is also the question: why go to all the trouble of singing plainsong to a language for which it was not written, and which does need considerable bending and flexing to make it fit? Why not sing it in Latin and do it properly? In the end I think it will be possible to answer this question only by saying that (a) singing in Latin is impossible in my circumstances; and (b) plainsong adds something very special to our liturgy, a prayerful element that cannot be found elsewhere. No, better to sing plainsong to English words than not to sing it at all. And no better sourcebook could be found than *By Flowing Waters*. Perhaps the Foreword to the book sums it up well: 'Modal music in free rhythm wears well. Surely the use of this volume would enrich our lives in many ways'.*

*Philip Gaisford OSB*