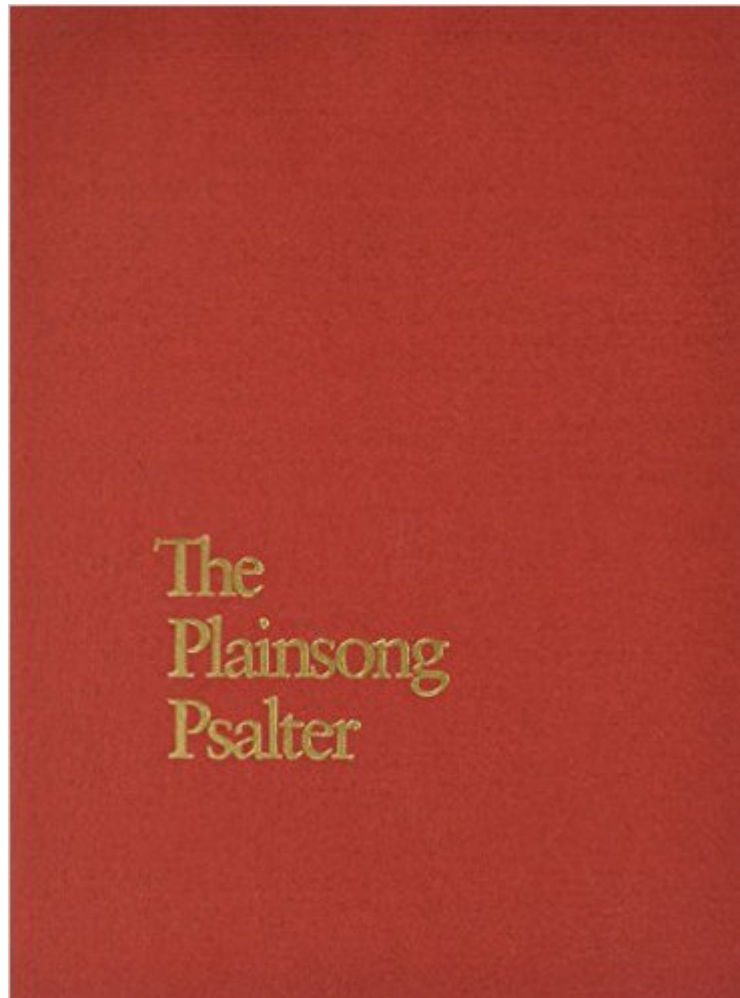


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Plainsong Psalter



Synopsis

The one hundred fifty psalms of David set to plainsong psalm tones with antiphons as selected and compiled by Howard E. Galley, Jr. and published in The Psalter section of his The Prayer Book Office (The Seabury Press, New York, 1980, Out of print). Where no antiphons exist in that resource, editor James Litton has followed the work of Dr. Richard Crocker and Ronald Haizlip in the Gradual Psalms (Church Publishing, 1981) both in choice of psalm tone and method of pointing or other current resources. This psalter is intended for use in the Daily Office. Contains a preface, an introduction and performance notes. The Appendix also contains examples of the psalm tones and their various endings. (320 pp)

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Customer Reviews

This is a complete Psalter (all 150 Psalms) with each Psalm set to (and pointed for) an appropriate Psalm tone. The translation used is the U. S. Episcopal Church's 1979 Book of Common Prayer Psalter translation, which is perhaps the best of the modern English language translations for liturgical use, being based on the 1662 English Book of Common Prayer translation. A wonderful feature of the Psalter is that it includes English-language seasonal Antiphons for each Psalm, meaning that there are different antiphons for the various liturgical seasons. Each antiphon is set to a simple appropriate Gregorian Chant tune. This is a wonderful Psalter for use in Daily Office; it is also wonderful for just chanting the Psalms, perhaps for individual spiritual practice. The quality of the work is very high, with almost no errors. The pointing is excellent, and the tunes for the

antiphons are lovely (and the modifications necessary to set an English text to them are done well). My only issue is the cost of the book: at \$40 per copy, it's very expensive to get individual copies for a congregation for Daily Office. It's about twice as expensive as the Hymnal 1982, for instance, but it has far, far less material (and none that is licensed from other companies). The Psalm tones are simple enough for anyone to learn (with some practice) and the antiphon tunes are also quite simple--the hardest thing is getting used to church modes (all different from the major and minor scales we know in classical and pop music). Congregations that want to chant the Psalms CAN do it, and a reasonably-priced Psalter would be a big help. Despite the cost, however, I've bought many copies for myself and as gifts. This book is a real gift to the English-speaking (and English-singing) world. I only wish Church Publishing would realize what a gem it has and produce an edition that was priced so that more people would buy it and enjoy chanting the Psalms, and so that congregations could use it as the Psalter for Daily Office with their congregations.

I was fortunate to find this psalter at a used-book store for about \$7. It was a true serendipity. As a tertiary in a religious order, the practice of some daily offices and the use of the Psalms are natural. This psalter, I found, was quite easy to follow. Having never sung plainchant, the instructions were simple enough. The structures of chant for the psalms themselves are relatively easy to learn, yet not so easy as to make the chanting a thoughtless yet emotional process (which modern worship has often fallen into). The concentration expected, again not difficult, keeps the chanter thinking about the words and music. And once the music is known at a comfortable level (not memorized), fuller concentration can be placed on the words, and such concentration is still necessary. This style protects one from mindless "worship" (an oxymoron). Also, for those who enjoy a more medieval or liturgical approach, this book works great for the individual. And since it is more difficult to teach entire congregations the art of chanting, the simplicity of this style (say, verses the Gregorian style) is inviting. The antiphons are not written with a reciting tone, so the melody is more intricate, but not complicated. As an aid for learning the tunes, I've used the appendix in the back which lists each of the psalm tones and variations used. I wrote the number of each psalm next to each chant tone used. Then I chanted each psalm that used that chant tone. For instance, next to chant tone V.1, I've written 1, 21, 96, 142 and other psalm numbers using the same tone and variation. The translation is fine for singing, but not a suitable one for translation. Not that one would use a chant psalter for Bible study; but it needs to be realized that the translation is not what one which holds as strictly and accurately to the Hebrew as would be needed, say, for study, and therefore this means that the translation, even for singing, may be a bit misleading regarding certain

spiritual ideas or historical thoughts. Nothing major or heretical, but not as accurate as a study translation would provide. On the other hand, I'm not sure that a strict translation from the original would fulfill the needs that singing and chanting require. The book, even for a hardbound, seems a bit expensive; but then books are not cheap anymore (a 200-page paperback can cost \$20 these days). When I find a book that I will cherish, I like to have a leather-bound version (if I can afford it). If this one were to be produced as such, I would pay for it; it's worth it. I recommend this psalter for all members of religious orders, and for any individuals who simply wish to add a new dimension to their personal worship. For churches that still sing part of their liturgy, this psalter would open the door much more easily for the congregation to directly participate. Sing to Yahweh and bless His Name!

I follow a program of praying the psalms daily with a four-week rotation. Because I love music and because using music, adds another dimension to my prayer, I use the chants in this book. The antiphons (with choices for the church seasons) are lovely and add much to my experience. The chant, while based on ancient chant tones, is printed in modern music notation making it much easier to read and follow. I periodically reread the instructions at the beginning to help me improve my chant. I don't see why a person who has some music background could not learn chant from this book alone but I know having studied chant at Saint Helena's Episcopal Convent in Georgia made it easier and more rewarding for me to use this book. I have the sister's breviary but it is so cumbersome and so complex, that this book combined with the psalter adapted for laypersons by the Community of Jesus are perfect for me for my daily practice of praying the psalms as a layperson. I have ordered books on chant for years trying to find something like this book. I could have saved a lot of money on books I ultimately did not use if I had found this psalter earlier.

I've been curious about learning more about Gregorian chant since majoring in music in college, many years ago, but never invested myself. This resource has been a rich blessing as I've begun chanting a few Psalms each day. As the weeks pass I find myself focusing more on the text and less on the mechanics. The format for notation was fairly easy to pick up. The only thing I would add to this work is other scripture songs, the canticles beyond the Psalter.

This is exactly what I needed and expected. My only complaint is that I wish each Psalm was printed on its own page, for ease of copying for bulletin inserts.

Was very familiar with this book long before I ordered it, so I knew just what to expect. Works well for a cantor or two. For a choir, get the green one.

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