

## Excerpt from:

### *The Politics of Plainchant in fin-de-siècle France*

By Katharine Ellis (2013)

and a hatchet-like sign translating the *pressus* neume element, alongside metronome and *rallentando* or *ritenuto* markings. The vocal parts contained nothing additional save for the *punctum mora* used mostly to mark a breathing space at phrase-endings. These were innovations about which Dom Delpech, who was working with Dom Mocquereau on the project, had strong reservations; but a letter of 1901 reveals a further problem. Dom Mocquereau, it seems, wanted to add more signs to the vocal line. Writing from Solesmes on 28 February, Dom Delpech spoke his mind, outlined new dangers to Dom Delatte and began to bargain over what he would and would not do, editorially.

The immediate reason seems to have been that, on sending his manuscript of the fifth instalment of the *Livre d'orgue* to chant scholar Peter Wagner for his opinion, Delpech had received a warning shot in reply: Wagner hoped Delpech would be allowed to publish it as it stood and that he would not be 'obliged to adopt a system which has no serious scientific basis'. Moreover, Delpech added that the organist Don Giovanni Pagella had written recently, objecting to the harmonization style of the 'Dies irae' (already published in the fourth *livraison* of March 1900), lamenting that Mocquereau had become 'so very hardened in his view' of how to write an organ accompaniment, and adding that it was only his affection for Solesmes that prevented him writing a journal article about it.<sup>58</sup> Delpech then treated Dom Delatte to a disquisition on Dom Mocquereau's obsession with non-accentualist approaches to chant delivery and accompaniment.

What to do? In the face of criticism from experts on these two fronts, Dom Delpech suggested two courses of action: to seek a second opinion from Vincent d'Indy, and to ask Dom Mocquereau to withhold his rhythmic signs from the vocal part in the fifth *livraison*. Assuming Dom Mocquereau granted this concession, Delpech undertook to apply himself to the task of accustoming the public gradually to his unusual style of accompaniment. This he would do for texts in prose, where some flexibility between accentualist and non-accentualist approaches was warranted; but where verse was concerned he was implacably opposed to Dom Mocquereau's practice. He closed with an attempt at strategy:

Eliminating the rhythmic pointing would be a first step on the new path. It would enable us to say to one set of people: 'I am a bird; just look at my wings'. To another set: 'I am a mouse; long live the rats.' Besides, it is always easier to move ahead than to retreat.

[La suppression des points rythmiques serait un premier pas dans la voie nouvelle. Elle nous permettrait de dire aux uns: 'Je suis oiseau, voyez mes

<sup>58</sup> 'obligé d'adopter un système qui ne repose sur aucune donnée scientifique sérieuse'; 'tellement *induratus* dans sa manière de voir'. Delpech to Delatte, 28 February 1901, included in *SO (paléo)*: Corr. Mocquereau.