

USE OF THE SOLESMES EDITIONS

The Only Possible Means of Obtaining Uniform Chanting

ROLAND BOISVERT
Central Falls, R. I.



GREGORIAN CHANT is so delicate an art that it cannot suffer mediocrity; yet no type of music is rendered more carelessly than is this one. The principal reason for this state of affairs is the lack of knowledge of the subject in question. Many have little sympathy for things they do not understand, or they care less to learn about them, or look into them with a prejudiced mind. One may be a very good musician, know his harmony, counterpoint, and fugue, but have not practical knowledge of Gregorian Chant. Some of them set up systems of their own, dabble in manuscripts, quote medieval authors, as though they had discovered their quotations, and twist facts to preconceived theories. They retard the general acceptance of the SOLESMES EDITIONS more than those who have fallen into a routine and lack the necessary courage to amend themselves or look upon chant as a necessary evil, the less sung the better. All is chaos and confusion outside Solesmes. Separate systems of interpretations is nothing more or less than musical protestantism. There is no branch of human activity where phantasy becomes the rule. Rhythmic freedom exists but for the composer, the interpreter should scrupulously strive to keep that rhythm that gave birth to the composition, otherwise he betrays his most elementary duty towards both the composer and the composition.

We read much about Mensuralism of late. In itself it is not wrong, on the contrary, our so-called Classical School lives by it; but it killed Gregorian Chant in the Middle Ages because free rhythm cannot breathe in this sort of straight jacket. Others persist in maintaining that the word accent indicates the rhythm, so according to them the same melody could possibly possess as many different rhythms as it has several verses. A word is only capable of receiving a rhythm not of giving one. Others accentuate the first note of each neume, or group, ignoring that the construction of neumes are melodic not rhythmic. In a fusion of two neumes thus forming a pressus there can be no rhythmic significance to the first note of each neume moreover the same copyist did not always

use the same combination of neumes in transcribing the same melody no more than did Dom Pothier in the Vatican Edition.

Through the lack of knowledge of some of the Solesmes exponents much harm is done to the cause. It takes more than a summer course to master the Solesmes Method and to overcome years of faulty practice. Others attempt to croon in a sentimental manner the sacred melodies because they lack expression, so they claim! We must never forget that with our dealings with Divinity all elements of sensuality is not only superfluous but out of place. Music can indeed be expressive without being sentimental.

The main cause for the difficulty encountered by the Solesmes Editions in making their way into different centers rests on the fact that these are the property of one publisher, the House of Desclee. All can print the Vatican Edition as such, but the three rhythmic signs can only be used with the permission of the owners. It is a well known fact that certain European publishers criticize the Solesmes Editions in the magazines because of the difficulty they find in selling their own productions. The moment that the right to these signs becomes public property there is every reason to believe that these same publishers will be the very first to print the editions with rhythmic signs, be it for the only reason that they sell well.

The use of the Solesmes is as universal as the Church itself, it is in use in every country where the Church has penetrated; the purity of the chant of some of the Christian negroes of darkest Africa could put to shame many of our prominent cathedral choristers. Its progress has been especially noticeable of late in English-speaking countries. With this method, school children surpass in artistic achievement the singing of adults under other systems. This method is the outcome of Solesmes' hundred years of patient research, and for this they rightly deserve all the credit. These researches made possible the official Vatican Edition which we are privileged to possess.

Solesmes is without a doubt the best equipped workshop to carry on work of this kind. In 1928 it possessed copies of five hundred-fifty complete manuscripts, meaning entire graduale, antiphonale etc.; two hundred-ninety incomplete manuscripts, not to mention thousands of isolated pieces coming from all parts of Europe, and this wealth is being added to constantly. The immortal "Paleographie Musicale" of Dom Mocquereau could but make known a very small portion of this treasure. This publication did much to foster the true melodies of Saint Gregory. But on the other hand it afforded to some the opportunity to dabble with these manuscripts and hinder the restoration by their fantastic findings. But Solesmes has seen many systems come and go and has found itself the stronger for the failures of its opponents.

Dom Mocquereau is the founder of the Solesmes Choir; it gained reputation when he was given its direction, and this fame has gone progressing ever since. People from all parts of the world come to Solesmes to listen to the rendition of the chant—Protestants as well as Catholics! The vigor and freshness of their singing, as opposed to the draggy, ponderous accentuation that often causes off-pitch singing, with which we are so familiar, is, in reality, a revelation to all. The Holy Father never lost an occasion to express his high esteem for Dom Mocquereau. He had become acquainted with him while he was librarian at the Ambrosian in Milan. In his autograph letter to Dom Mocquereau on his golden anniversary in Monastic Life he made an explicit allusion to the rhythmic signs. Also on the occasion of the foundation of the Gregorian Institute of Paris, he congratulates Cardinal Dubois on his choice of the Monks of Solesmes as teachers for this Institute, because "Of their perfect competence in the matter." In a letter dated September 7, 1934, of his Eminence, Cardinal Pacelli, to the Abbot of Solesmes, in reference to the publishing of the "Antiphonale Monasticum", "The Holy Father congratulates you for having reedited this portion of liturgical chants with its versions always more and more conform to the primitive Gregorian melodies."

The recent publication by Desclée of the "Antiphonale Monasticum" although intended only for the Benedictine Order, marks an epoch-making date in the history of the restoration, of Gregorian Chant. This restoration divides itself naturally into three periods. . . . In the first, we find the names of Dom Gueranger and Dom Pothier. The publication of the "Liber Gradualis", "Les

Melodies Gregoriennes", the "Vatican Gradual" and "Antiphonal" belong to this period. However, these works were more scientific than practical. In the second period we find the name of Dom Mocquereau with his "Paleographic Musicale" and his two volumes of "Le Nombre Musicale" carrying further the work of his predecessor and teacher, Dom Pothier. In the domain of interpretation, his work is complete but there remained much to be done in the reestablishing of the original versions. The publication of the "Antiphonale Monasticum" afforded this opportunity. We know, of course, that his Antiphonale is not identical with the "Antiphonale Romanum", so they did not have to reproduce the Vatican Edition. They were left free to reproduce the original as such. Credit for this splendid accomplishment comes to Dom Gajard, Dom Mocquereau's worthy pupil and successor. The Antiphonale Monasticum corrects the following abuses and omissions, common in the Vatican Edition: the abuse of the B flat to avoid the so-called harshness of the tritone, thereby falsifying in numerous cases the modal sense of the piece in question; certain leading tones at the cadences; wrong dominance of recitation notes of certain modes; the absence of the oriscus, the apostropha, punctum liquescent; the failure to deferentiate between the scandicus and salicus.

The compiling of the Vatican Edition was at first given to the Monks of Solesmes under the immediate direction of Dom Mocquereau and the revision to a commission presided by Dom Pothier who had left Solesmes in 1892. After several meetings of the joint commission it was evident that an understanding was impossible on any version, on account of the numerous factions. Pius X then gave the compilation of the Vatican Edition to Dom Pothier. So that the Vatican Edition is his own personal work and not that of Solesmes. The Edition while being a fine work is really only a melodic version. His timidity is evident throughout the work; and then and there, only a return to tradition, pure and simple, would have been the solution. Some years later the compilation was given back to Solesmes and we do not find the above weaknesses in the work of the new commission of Dom Feretti. With each succeeding release of the Vatican Press, Dom Mocquereau added his three rhythmic signs to the already existing Vatican Edition which he published through the House of Desclée. In 1904 Solesmes had ceded to the Holy See the results of all her researches. In return the Holy See

reserved for her the ownership of the Rhythmic Signs. Some of these already existed in editions published prior to the official Vatican Edition. It is quite true that Dom Mocquereau did not incorporate and add all the Rhythmic Signs to be found in the manuscripts in his editions, but the responsibility for these so-called omissions rests not with him. For years the opponents of Solesmes tried to have the rhythmic editions of Solesmes condemned by Rome; according to some, the condemnation was already signed. This forced Dom Mocquereau to use much reserve and to reduce the number of rhythmic signs. Little did he dream that these same opponents would some years later accuse him of omissions instead of inventions. But the condemnation never came, on the contrary, the Sacred Congregation of Rites accorded them a legitimate canonical and official situation that the good monks had not asked for. The imperfections of the Vatican itself made it impossible to add the other signs to be found in the manuscripts so that the opponents of Solesmes while condemning Dom Mocquereau were forced to invent their own signs.

In the Vatican, alone, all is vague, there being no note values. Here are in short the three famous rhythmic signs, The first is the MORA VOCIS or dot, which doubles the value of the note. The second is the EPIS-EMA or horizontal bar, which lengthens the value of the note but does not double it; it is an expressive sign. The third is wrongly termed ICTUS, or vertical episema, or better referred to as rhythmic support, it is purely rhythmic and not dynamic; it is a sign of musical punctuation. None of the above signs indicate intensity. It is to be noted that outside of the horizontal bar none of these different signs appear as such in the manuscripts; no more than do the bars of division incorporated in the Vatican Edition. With the help of these signs nothing is left to chance, the rhythm is indicated in such a manner that even the most humble country-church choirs can sing their chant as correctly as those of the largest cathedral.

Notes, groups of notes, and even the value of rests are regulated. These rests, says Dom Mocquereau, are elements of the rhythmic composition to the same title as the sounds of which they are taking the place. These rests have exactly the same quantitative values as the notes and syllables expressed. Bishops can declare the Solesmes Rhythmic Editions official in their own diocese. The Cardinal Vicar in his letter of February 2,

1912, recommends their use for the sake of greater uniformity.

The Greeks along with Aristoxenes discovered the fundamental laws of rhythm and the indivisibility of the primary beat or first beat. In Chant, the approximative value of this indivisible beat is the eighth-note. This beat, in other types of music, may be a note other than the eighth-note. The wonderful examples in slow sixteenth-notes in the chorals of Bach convey the same feeling of calm and serenity so characteristic of chant sung according to the free rhythm of the Vatican Edition, that rhythm so desired by Pius X. The expressive signs of the Solesmes Edition protect this indivisible beat from mathematical dryness and equality. Very far are we from the jumpy and jerky way in which all words of the dactyl ending are usually sung and where the climacuses are sung as triplets; and this, only to mention a few characteristic aberrations of the apostles "of any old way."

One of the largest obstacles in the path of correct singing of chant is faulty Latin accentuation. In these few words upon this important subject we do not pretend to cover the subject thoroughly. Dom Mocquereau found himself obliged to give it several chapters in his "Nomber Musical." The Tonic Accent of the Latin language began by being a simple elevation of the voice on the accented syllable. At that period this aforesaid elevation was not accompanied by any intensity or lengthening. As early as the eleventh century, and probably under the influence of the Barbarian Invasions, the accent became more and more intense and as it grew stronger it was lengthened correspondingly; and this condition still exists in our day and time, despite the fact that Rome urges the use of the Roman pronunciation. Some of the Latin grammars used in our Catholic colleges still teach the above fallacies. Under their system the normal dactyl ending composed of three syllables like "Do-mi-nus" becomes "Dom-inus" or the ante-penult is lengthened to such an extent that the penult barely gets the equivalence of a sixteenth note. It is precisely this denatured, crushed, and lengthened accent that gave birth to the Romance languages; but under its tyranny the sacred principle of the indivisible beat becomes an impossibility. The Latin accent is by its very nature and origin short, light and acute. Even the polyphonic writers understood and applied it in that manner, although composing at a time when Mensuralism was rapidly tolling the passing

away of free rhythm. Unity of pronunciation will never be attained by accentuating according to our own mother tongue but according to the Roman pronunciation.

One of Solesmes' greatest achievements rests on the fact that it was the first to dematerialize the accent, in chant at least. It proclaims the mutual independence of the rhythmic ictus and the literary accent. It teaches that intensity has no fixed place in the essential analysis of rhythm. Length alone in certain cases can awaken a rhythm. The accents are distributed among all beats except in certain kinds of music with which we are not concerned here. All we organists know that at the pipe-organ we can accentuate without modifying intensity, in fact, in most cases we are not able to do so. Let us remember that accentuation is only one of the elements of expression. Rhythm to most people only means periodical stress. Its misunderstanding comes from the confusion of the different elements of sounds, namely: duration, intensity, pitch, and timbre. Rhythm is the passage from movement to repose; these two elements are required, a rise, and a fall. At the base of rhythm there is a series of small but complete steps, each having a rise and a fall, or more commonly called an arsis and thesis. To the fall of this elementary rhythm corresponds the rhythmic ictus.

Here we touch upon the most misunderstood point of the Solesmes Doctrine. Again we must repeat that the ictus belongs to the rhythmic and not to the dynamic order, that it is not synonymous with intensity. Both the ictus and the tonic accent fulfill a different purpose. The tonic accent is the life of the word while the ictus shows the grouping of the notes. The ictus is the rhythmic support or beat one of the binary and ternary measures. It is wrong to assimilate it with the first beat of our modern musical system. The ictus possesses its own individual importance according to the syllable to which it corresponds and to the place it occupies in the melodic line. The ictus being by its nature independent of the tonic accent it may or may not coincide with it. It is strong if it coincides with one, and weak if it coincides with a non-accentuated syllable, a penult or final syllable. Antiquity teaches us that the music is to be preferred to the grammar or form of the word: "Musica non subjacet regulis donati." The ictus belongs to the fall of the rhythm and therefore is adaptable to the final syllable of a word. On the contrary the tonic accent belongs to the

rise of the melody. This arsic character of the tonic accent fits it thoroughly because it is alert, and light, (Quantitative Order) acute (Melodic Order) moderate and free from heaviness (Intensive Order) short and almost spiritual (Accentus Animae Vocis).

For a better understanding of the Solesmes Method we recommend the study of the two volumes of "Le Nombre Musical" without which one can hardly claim to possess workable knowledge of the subject especially if he happens to be a choir director. The ten monographies are also very good but they are, at the present time, available only in the French language. The two best methods in the English language are the English translation by G. M. Dunford of Dom Sunol's text book and Mrs. Ward's Music Fourth Year; this is entirely devoted to the study of Gregorian Chant. Although meant for children, we all can learn much from it, because of the fact that we have so many preconceived notions on the subject, it might be well to study this excellent method slowly, and step by step, as do children.

We can never be too careful about the choice of written accompaniment to the singing of Gregorian Chant. This for several reasons; first, it was never meant to be accompanied. Even the best accompaniments embarrass the rhythm but most of them are only an awkward, aimless succession of chords. All accompaniments that do not change chord at the ictuses (not at every ictus) should be tabooed, regardless of the prominence of the harmonizer. These can be quickly recognized by the complete absence of rhythmic signs. With the constant successions of chords in fundamental position and the total lack of dissonances, these accompaniments are lifeless and stagnant . . . no wonder the singers drag and their chants sound like a dirge! Dissonances give vitality to an accompaniment. It is the very life-blood of our polyphony. With it the choir is unconsciously urged to go on. The use of chords of rest too often contradict the arsic movement of the melody. The abuse of the B flat in the accompanying parts in the immediate proximity of a B natural destroys all modal feeling; not to mention the use of the dominant seventh with its leading tone imperiously demanding a resolution on the tonic. The only method published so far in the English language that is a hundred percent Solesmes is that of Potiron. His recently published written accompaniments of the Proper and the Common are the best yet. They are much superior to the written ac-

companiment of the Kyriale written in collaboration with Dom Des Roquettes. These accompaniments are in use at Solesmes and those who have had the good fortune of hearing the monks' rendition of chant, never notice the accompaniment because it is rhythmic and discreet. Many capable organists need no written accompaniments they are capable of harmonizing as they read from the chant notation, therefore adapting their accompaniments in the keys suitable to the range of the singers' voices.

Let us leave all disputes to specialists and to genuine paleographers who are experts in these matters, and may I say, that they are rare, if any are to be found on this side of the ocean; there being only a handful of available manuscripts outside of Solesmes. Too much time has been lost over these unnecessary discussions. Holy Mother the Church has given us an official edition . . . it does not pretend that it is impeccable no more than does Solesmes hold that their system is unattackable. The fact that Dom Mocquereau found many mistakes in the Vatican, he nevertheless had the common sense of bowing before the official text. To those who are still certain that some of

the Solesmes' affirmation are hypothetical, we say that they are well worth following nevertheless, because of the fact that no one else has anything practical to offer. Roman circles in particular show themselves more and more favorable to Solesmes. It is a well known fact that upon hearing the Solesmes Records, the Holy Father's admiration was most evident. Does he not use this same method in his own school, The Pontifical School of Church Music in Rome? And does he not pontificate to the tunes of these chants sung according to the method of this same school? Does not every seminary in Rome use the same method? . . . We know of the Holy Father's personal interest in the fostering of the Ward Method in his native Italy . . . Is not this method the most perfect reproduction of the teachings of this same school? What other Schools can offer such credentials, It is not elsewhere that we must look for the practical thought of the Church in this important affair. Let us be content to do as the Romans do in this matter as in all others.—The use of the Solesmes Editions is our only hope, our only possible means of obtaining uniform singing of Gregorian Chant.

CHURCH MUSIC IS TOO FAST

Lack of Unity, Also, in the Services

By R. FRANZ REISSMANN

When I began my services as organist I had been in this country about a year and a half. I had been brought up and confirmed in the German Lutheran Church; I also played many times as a student at church services in Germany. As a boy I sang in the old St. Thomas Church, at Leipzig, where a boy choir has sung since J. S. Bach's time. So when I first observed church music in this country, and by that I mean congregational singing, solos, and organ playing, I was naturally very much surprised. Being used to the old stately chorals and "Motetten" of the German church, I found it rather difficult to familiarize myself with the lighter hymns of our hymnbook, the livelier anthems and the organ music required.

After forty years of service, I still believe that all music, may it be organ, hymn, anthem or solo, must first of all be devotional, and devotion can be expressed not only in slow serious music, but also in joyous music, glad a n t h e m s , joyous post-

ludes. But my observation has been to "speed up" everything unnecessarily. I distinctly remember the choir leader of my church admonishing me to "speed up" the doxology, that I had been taught to play twice as slowly as I was required here. I have always felt that hymns are played too fast, even the chorals of some of which are in our hymn-books, for instance, "Ein feste Burg," by Martin Luther, or the hymn that is sung a good deal during Holy Week, "Passion Choral," by J. S. Bach. The religious devotion of these hymns can only be expressed by a slow and solemn movement. Of course these are the so-called old hymns, but it is a proof of their worth, that they are still sung.

My observation also has shown me that very often the music used at services is not in harmony with the religious service. It is selected at random and consequently is not in tune, as I might say. Besides being devotional, church music (prelude, hymn, an-