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20

THE POLITICS OF PLAINCHANT IN FIN-DE-SIECLE FRANCE

KATHARINE ELLIS

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

This book tells three inter-related stories that radically alter our perspective on plainchant reform at the turn of the twentieth century and highlight the value of liturgical music history to our understanding of French government anticlericalism. It offers at once a new history of the rise of the Benedictines of Solesmes to official dominance over Catholic editions of plainchant worldwide, a new optic on the French liturgical publishing industry during a period of international crisis for the publication of plainchant notation, and an exploration of how, both despite and because of official hostility, French Catholics could bend Republican anticlericalism at the highest level to their own ends.

The narrative relates how Auguste Pécoul, a former French diplomat and Benedictine novice, masterminded an undercover campaign to aid the Gregorian agenda of the Solesmes monks via French government intervention at the Vatican. His vehicle: trades unionists from within the book industry, whom he mobilized into nationalist protest against Vatican attempts to enshrine a single, contested, and German, version of the musical text as canon law. Yet the political scheming necessitated by Pécoul's double involvement with Solesmes and the print unions almost spun out of control as his Benedictine contacts struggled with internal division and anticlerical persecution. The results are as musicologically significant for the study of Solesmes as they are instructive for the study of Church–State relations.

ROYAL MUSICAL ASSOCIATION MONOGRAPHS

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2013 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

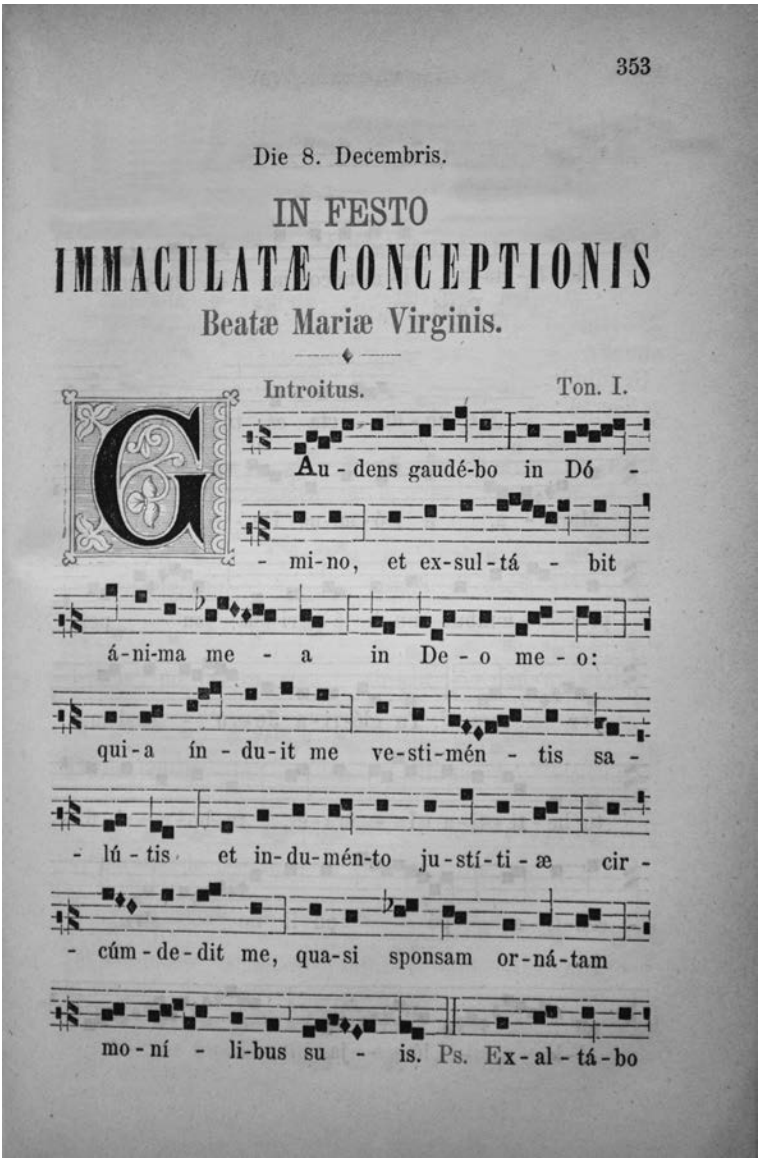
British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Ellis, Katharine.
The politics of plainchant in *fin-de-siècle* France. – (Royal Musical Association monographs ; v. 20)
1. Church music – France – 19th century. 2. Church music – Catholic Church – 19th century. 3. Church music – France – 20th century. 4. Church music – Catholic Church – 20th century. 5. Music publishing – France – History – 19th century. 6. Music publishing – France – History – 20th century. 7. Anti-clericalism – France – History – 19th century. 8. Anti-clericalism – France – History – 20th century. 9. Pécoul, Auguste. 10. Benedictines – France – Solesmes – History.
I. Title II. Series
781.7'1'00944–dc23

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:
Ellis, Katharine.
The politics of plainchant in *fin-de-siècle* France / by Katharine Ellis.
pages cm.—(Royal Musical Association monographs)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4094-6373-3 (hardcover)
1. Church music—France—19th century. 2. Church music—Catholic Church—19th century. 3. Church music—France—20th century. 4. Church music—Catholic Church—20th century. 5. Music publishing—France—History—19th century. 6. Music publishing—France—History—20th century. 7. Anti-clericalism—France—History—20th century. 8. Music—Political aspects—France—History—20th century. I. Title.

ML3027.4.E45 2013
781.7100944—dc23

2012031457

ISBN 9781409463733 (hbk)



Graduale de tempore et de sanctis (Regensburg, New York and Cincinnati: Friedrich Pustet, 1871), p. 353 showing Franz Xaver Haberl's chant for the introit 'Gaudens gaudebo in Domino'. It opens the Mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, for which Pius IX had commissioned new Proper texts in 1863.

For Sonia, wise and true friend

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Preface

This book arose by accident. The research catalysed by a single folder in the Archives Historiques de l'Archevêché de Paris in 2005 developed into a detective investigation of unforeseen complexity and obsessive grip for which I can only apologize to those indulgent souls – my husband Nigel above all – whom I have regaled with its intricacies. Enabled by an AHRC Small Grant in the Creative and Performing Arts and a British Academy Research Development Award, on an intellectual level the project benefited decisively from the knowledge and scholarly openness of various people: Catrina Flint de Médicis led me towards the initial archival find in Paris; Jean-Pierre Noiseux gave invaluable and generous advice about sources and commented on the entire manuscript, as did David Hiley; and last but certainly not least, a single sentence from Daniel Saulnier transformed the map of the entire book. Sincere thanks also go to staff at the archives of the Archevêché de Paris, to Br Thomas Zanetti O.S.B. at the Abbaye Saint-Wandrille de Fontenelle, to Dom Louis Soltner, Dom Daniel Saulnier and Dom Patrick Hala O.S.B. at the Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes, and to all those whose hospitality made my Benedictine visits as restorative as they were fruitful. Among the many librarians and archivists in regional French libraries, who were unfailingly helpful, I owe special thanks to staff at the Archives Diocésaines in Lyon, and to Philippe Ferrand at the Bibliothèque Méjanes, Aix-en-Provence – for granting me access to the seven boxes of uncatalogued papers that comprise the Pécoul archive on Gregorian chant, for allowing me to number its folders, and for providing photographs. I am of course greatly indebted to my anonymous referees, to Mark Everist and Simon Keefe as former and current editor of the RMA Monograph series, and to others who have provided suggestions, support and information: Katherine Bergeron, Tony Cross, Fr Richard Finn, O.P., Rachel Moore, Susan Rankin and Sonia Taylor. Finally, warm thanks are due to the team at Ashgate, who have supported the project through production with efficiency and care. The misapprehensions and errors of fact that inevitably remain are mine alone.

The history that has resulted from this research is so complex, and much of its archival source-base so unruly, that I would be foolish to claim that I have reached every corner of it. But this extended essay offers what I hope is a useful step forward. One aspect of the narrative is likely to appear strikingly topical. It concerns the tension between individual and collective intellectual property rights that became fatally enmeshed with the process of chant restoration and liturgical publication at Solesmes. Just as the move of its senior palaeographer, Dom Joseph Pothier, to another abbey in 1893, raised questions of ownership and dissemination rights no one had hitherto needed to ask,

so, as I write, my own academic community in the United Kingdom faces new intellectual property challenges relating not only to research ownership but also, in a flexible and competitive labour market, to the institutional right to claim credit (and associated State funding) for any demonstrable public benefit or 'impact' the active dissemination of that research might yield over a period of up to 25 years. We are engaging in an experiment as to who owns what, and for how long, after a researcher's first or further move to an institution other than that which fostered the initial work. Where academics' research is concerned it is even unclear how much longer the traditional waiver of employer copyright, in favour of the individual scholar, will last. Furthermore we are grappling with the niceties of what should happen if the research itself is split between institutions, either from the outset or over time, and of rights over 'impact' if a researcher who has changed institution returns to earlier work, to revise it in light of new evidence. Yet these are not new problems. Those faced by the French Benedictines of the 1890s and 1900s were strikingly similar, which makes the monastic politics of *fin-de-siècle* plainchant, and their shifting relationship with the state and with government, appear suddenly resonant. Given the fraught nature of what happened, they also appear discomfiting enough to force the question: if this aspect of the Solesmes story can be read as an allegory – and I think it can – will we collectively heed its message?

Katharine Ellis

List of Abbreviations

Archives and Libraries: French Regions

AIXm	Aix-en-Provence: Bibliothèque Méjanes
Boa	Bordeaux: Archives Départementales de la Gironde
Lad	Lille: Archives Départementales du Nord
LYai	Lyon: Archives Diocésaines
Rad	Rouen: Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime
Sad	Strasbourg: Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin
SO (mon.)	Solesmes: Archives Monastiques de l'Abbaye de Saint-Pierre
SO (paléo.)	Solesmes: Archives Paléographiques de l'Abbaye de Saint-Pierre
**SWF*	Saint-Wandrille: Archives de l'Abbaye Saint-Wandrille de Fontenelle

Archives and Libraries: Paris

**AHAP*	Archives Historiques de l'Archevêché de Paris
**MAE*	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
Pan	Archives Nationales
Pn	Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Other

SCR	Sacred Congregation of Rites

* Asterisked archive sigla are supplementary to those in RISM listings.

Prologue

In a book chapter of 1991 colourfully entitled 'Why Republicans and Catholics Couldn't Stand Each Other in the Nineteenth Century', the historian Ralph Gibson took issue with Theodore Zeldin on the thorny matter of Third-Republic anticlericalism in France. Contrary to Zeldin's view that after 1870 more united these opposing factions than divided them, Gibson argued that the superficial similarity of Republican and Catholic views on family, property, alcohol, sexual mores, and women's subservience to men, could not compensate for deeper antipathies of principle which effectively rendered them two incompatible religions locked in civil war. Moreover, he added, even when the Dreyfus affair of the late 1890s allied the clergy to the army, the two sides were irreconcilable on questions of national loyalty and patriotism. Catholics, especially within the religious orders, were Catholics: they looked to Rome first, and France second; Republicans were citizens, and looked to France alone.[1] Perhaps because questions of nation, identity and Republican enthusiasm for ideological control of French culture have come under particular scrutiny and have thereby spotlighted an essential point of dispute, recent work within musicology has tended to sit closer to Gibson's view than to Zeldin's.[2]

This book picks up aspects of the same conversation from a new perspective. It uses the history of plainchant publication to illustrate how even the hardline government anticlericalism of the 1890s and 1900s could be neutralized, reversed, circumvented or subverted, given the right cultural conditions. Touch the correct Republican buttons – workers' rights, national pride, cultural supremacy, or the preservation of a glorious heritage – and anticlericals could find their loyalties split and their decision-making suddenly complicated. They could also find themselves working willingly in support of Catholics who displayed the requisite care and consideration for official French values, or be persuaded to set aside the idea that a cause was itself 'Catholic' and to concentrate instead on its more obviously Republican merits. The results are not simply a reflection of the effectiveness of Pope Leo XIII's plea of 1892 for 'Ralliement' – for French clergy and lay Catholics to find a way to cohabit productively with the Republican government to which he had given belated official recognition. Neither do they confound the familiar binaries of Catholic and Republican; indeed,

[1] Ralph Gibson, 'Why Republicans and Catholics Couldn't Stand Each Other in the Nineteenth Century', in Frank Tallett and Nicholas Atkin (eds), *Religion, Society and Politics in France since 1789* (London, 1991), pp. 107–20, at pp. 107–8; pp. 116–17.

[2] For two important studies of such questions see Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: from the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York and Oxford, 1999) and Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2009).

they sometimes depend on them. Instead, they do something more interesting. They offer a precious case study of anticlerical boundaries and trade-offs – of the maximum social, cultural and economic price the French government was willing to pay to weaken Catholic influence on French life, and of the level of potential benefit necessary to transform anticlerical policy into supportive action in matters of Catholic concern.

Plainchant, then, tested the mettle of French anticlericalism. It could do so partly because of the manner in which it was itself highly politicized within Catholic circles. Different traditions of plainchant in parts of Spain, Germany and Italy were a matter of local and national pride, yet in the name of unity officials at the Vatican spent the last third of the century guiding its notated form towards the status of canon law. Whose plainchant would emerge victorious, and which runners-up would be permitted to remain in use? These were matters of international importance liturgically, culturally and commercially, and French Catholics and the French government each had a recognizable stake in the outcome. Moreover, on a cultural and musicological level, while progress theories thrived elsewhere we find a countervailing view gaining ground vis-à-vis plainchant. Unlike youthful genres such as the symphony, for instance, or opera, plainchant did not 'develop' as it aged through history. It degenerated. According to this view, which was most successfully pursued by Benedictines at Solesmes in the north-west of France, while organic and local change weakened a 'pure' Gregorian chant through centuries of practice, the Counter-Reformation fatally stunted its medieval beauty when the Council of Trent commissioned an abridged edition of the Gradual – the so-called Medicean [Medici] Edition of 1614/15 – as part of the imperative to rebuff Protestant charges about luxuriant aesthetic abuse by restoring textual clarity and intelligibility to the sung liturgy. Thereafter, degeneration had merely accelerated, in France as elsewhere, and in the teeth of opposition from those who preferred modern music in church, and those who used plainchant but were settled in post-Tridentine ways, from the 1860s onwards it became the French Benedictines' signature project to stop the rot and to replace post-Tridentine chaos with a full restoration of the 'original' Gregorian vision. The musicological detail of their controversial project would fill another book, and is of only secondary importance here. What matters more is the standard narrative that after four decades of research, public advocacy, publication, and diplomacy at the Vatican, the Solesmes Benedictines eventually won the plainchant competition: their Gregorian revival finally attained generalized Vatican approbation under a new pope, Pius X, in November 1903, followed in April 1904 by the award of an explicit leadership role in the production of a model plainchant text to be used internationally. The outcome was not only the production of the first Vatican Edition (1908–13) but, thereafter, the placing of the monks of Saint-Pierre de Solesmes at the head of chant research on behalf of the Catholic church worldwide.