



Dom Jean Claire, OSB (1920–2006)

This issue of *Plainsong and Medieval Music* honours the memory of a former vice-president of the Plainsong and Medieval Music Society, Dom Jean Claire, OSB, who died on 25 April 2006. A monk of Solesmes, he was appointed choirmaster of his abbey, director of *Paléographie musicale* and editor of *Études Grégoriennes* in 1971 as the successor to Dom Joseph Gajard. These responsibilities and his own scholarly work made him one of the most important figures in the chant world.

Jean Claire was born in Tarbes (Hautes-Pyrénées) on 31 January 1920. From his youngest years, he experienced the church's liturgy intimately, first as a choirboy, then as an organist. On a visit to the Abbey of Solesmes he was overwhelmed both by the music he heard and by the dignified and profoundly spiritual celebration of the liturgy. His entrance into the community had to be postponed for two years because of a severe pulmonary illness that sadly rendered his voice almost useless for singing. While recovering, he studied music at the Institut Grégorien and theology at the Institut Catholique in Paris.

Entering Solesmes in 1944, Jean Claire made his monastic profession in 1946 and was ordained a priest in 1951. Two years later, he became secretary of the *Revue Grégorienne*, a distinguished journal of chant research that survived only a year or so after the introduction of the new Roman Catholic liturgy in the vernacular. Dom Claire's earliest contributions to chant scholarship appeared in the *Revue Grégorienne*, and he went on to publish more than eighty articles, one of book length: 'Les répertoires liturgiques latins avant l'Octoéchos: L'Office férial romano-franc', in *Études Grégoriennes* 15 (1975). A bibliography of his writings was included in *Requiescentes Modos Musicos* (1995), a collection of essays in his honour.

As choirmaster of Solesmes, Dom Claire continued the tradition of the 'Solesmes style', initiated by Dom André Mocquereau and continued by Dom Gajard, but he soon took note of the new research being undertaken by semiologists and others who were exploring the rhythmic nuances of certain neume notations. A complete discography of his recordings (and reissues), compiled by Fr Jerome F. Weber, will be found in this issue of *PMM*.

A dominant aspect of Dom Claire's scholarship was his theory about the origin of the modes. He postulated the existence of three 'cordes-mères', each distinguished by a distinctive surrounding pattern of tones and semitones (e.g., C, D and E – though no specific pitches are implied). These 'cordes-mères' function sometimes as focal

points of the melody, sometimes as the final. Various elaborations transformed this 'modalité archaïque' into the evolved eight-mode system that emerged during the Carolingian era.

In this commemorative issue of *PMM*, Marie-Noël Colette, one of Dom Claire's students, applies the 'corde-mère' principles to an analysis of Kyrie melodies, noting the presence of the CDE 'nucleus' in both older and newer compositions. Dom Claire discussed at length his theories about the origin of modality and the various Western chant repertoires with Thomas Kelly of Harvard University. Through the kindness of Professor Kelly, who translated this 'interview', Dom Claire speaks in his own words about themes that he pondered during the course of a long and fruitful lifetime as musician, scholar and monk.