Introduction to Church Modes
An aid to sung prayer

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Three Characteristics of a Mode
1. Tonic
2. Dominant
3. Range

other identifiers: melodic formulas

**Authentic Range**

**Mode 1 (Dorian)**

```
RE mi fa sol La ti do RE
```

**Mode 3 (Phrygian)**

```
MI fa sol la ti Do re MI
```

**Mode 5 (Lydian)**

```
FA sol la ti Do re mi FA
```

**Mode 7 (Mixolydian)**

```
SOL la ti do Re mi fa SOL
```

- **Tonics** are in **Bold**
- **Dominants** are in **Italics**
- **Modern Dominants** are underlined.

**Plagal Range**

**Mode 2 (hypodorian —Aeolian)**

```
la ti do RE mi fa sol la
```

**Mode 4 (hypophrygian —Locrian)**

```
ti do re MI fa sol la ti
```

**Mode 6 (hypolydian —Ionian)**

```
do re mi FA sol la ti do
```

**Mode 8 (hypomixolydian) Dorian**

```
re mi fa SOL la ti Do re
```

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Mode 1

main tune.......................................................... typical Mode 1 cadence

Mode 3

typical Mode 3 incipit main tune................................. typical Mode 3 cadence

Mode 5

main tune.......................................................... typical Mode 5 cadence

Mode 7

main tune beginning typical Mode 7 melodic formula main tune resumes........ shorter Mode 7 cadence
What is a mode?

A mode is a way of arranging certain tones—sometimes in a formulaic way—with some tones having more prominence than others, thus allowing the ear to discern the rise and fall (tension and release) and the variety of movements and colors within the human soul via the melodic line.
MOTHER MODES (C, D, E)

Cantillation: sung stylized reading

C: g a * C d e (f)
   sol la DO re mi (fa)

D: a * c D e (f)
   la do RE mi (fa)

E: c d E (f) g
   do re MI (fa) sol

ex. In Manus tuas (p. 269)
ex. In splendoribus (p. 395)
MODAL EVOLUTION DURING THE FIRST 11TH CENTURIES OF THE CHURCH

• Cantillation —stylized reading
• Psalmody without refrain—ornamentation over some syllables
• Responsorial Psalmody—a choral response by the choir after each line
• The antiphon—a unique melody that compliments the Psalm tone
• Frankish-Roman confluence, Gregory’s Schola Cantorum, and the birth of the OCTOECHOS (8 Ecclesiastical Modes)
Solmization

That your servants may sing with deeper notes of your wondrous deeds, St. John, cleanse the guilt of unclean lips.
The Gamut: (gamma + *ut*): here, a succession of seven hexachords

```
1. ut re mi fa sol la
G A B C D E F G A B C D E
2. ut re mi fa sol la
3. ut re mi fa sol la
4. ut re mi fa sol la
5. ut re mi fa sol la
6. ut re mi fa sol la
7. ut re mi fa sol la
```

---

In the system, the names of all the various solmization syllables each could sustain. Thus the lowest note notes within the hexachord system were identified with the different solmization syllables. The F a seventh higher, in turn, could function as a succession of gently rising and falling arches. The verse (which was a movable pitch. Only much later did the solmization syllables come to be associated with fixed pitches in certain languages such as French, in which *ut* was used today to indicate the pitches C, D, E, F, G, and A.

In theoretical terms, the pitches used in plainchant melodies do not derive from a system of successive diatonic octaves, but rather from a series of interlocking hexachords. In medieval theory, a hexachord is a group of six notes, all separated by whole steps except the third and fourth notes, which are separated by a half step. The individual hexachords were considered "hard" if they included a B♭, "soft" if they included a B♮, and "natural" if they included no B at all (that is, running from C to A). Individual solmization syllables could only be an *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*.

The gamut. (gamma + *ut*) ed unambiguously by combining the *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*.

---

Example 1–4

Ut queant laxis, F solmization syllables. The Alleluia began on C, and was thus known as a hexachord beginning on C, F, or G. The opening of the hymn *Ut queant laxis,* a succession of gently rising and falling arches. The verse (which was a movable pitch. Only much later did the solmization syllables come to be associated with fixed pitches in certain languages such as French, in which *ut* was used today to indicate the pitches C, D, E, F, G, and A.

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The Gamut (full range of notes) used in Gregorian Chant
THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MODE

1. Tonic, root note, home base
2. Dominant, tenor, reciting tone
3. Range, compass
**AUTHENTIC AND PLAGAL MODES**

*tonics and range*

Modes 1 and 2 — “Re” is tonic

Modes 3 and 4 — “Mi” is tonic

Modes 5 and 6 — “Fa” is tonic

Modes 7 and 8 — “Sol” is tonic
## AUTHENTIC AND PLAGAL MODES

### tonics, dominants, and range

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**Mode 1**
- Tonic = Re
- Dominant = La
- Range: Re - Re

**Mode 2**
- Tonic = Re
- Dominant = Fa
- Range: ia - RE - ia
**AUTHENTIC AND PLAGAL MODES**

*tonics, dominants, and range*

- **Mode 3**
  - Tonic: Mi
  - Dominant: (ti) Do
  - Range: mi - mi

- **Mode 4**
  - Tonic: Mi
  - Dominant: (sol) La
  - Range: ti - Mi - ti
AUTHENTIC AND PLAGAL MODES

TONICS, DOMINANTS, AND RANGE

Mode 5
Tonic: Fa
Dominant: Do
Range: Fa - Fa

Mode 6
Tonic: Fa
Dominant: La
Range: Do - Fa - Do
**AUTHENTIC AND PLAGAL MODES**

*tonics, dominants, and range*

**Mode 7**
Tonic: Sol
Dominant: Re
Range: sol - sol

**Mode 8**
Tonic: Sol
Dominant: (ti) Do
Range: re - Sol - re
**Modes**

**Authentic Range**

**Mode 1** (Dorian)

- RE, mi, fa, sol, La, ti, do, RE

**Mode 3** (Phrygian)

- MI, fa, sol, la, ti, Do, re, MI

**Mode 5** (Lydian)

- FA, sol, la, ti, Do, re, mi, FA

**Mode 7** (Mixolydian)

- SOL, la, ti, do, Re, mi, fa, SOL

**Plagal Range**

**Mode 2** (hypodorian — Aeolian)

- la, ti, do, RE, mi, fa, sol, la

**Mode 4** (hypophrygian — Locrian)

- ti, do, re, MI, fa, sol, la, ti

**Mode 6** (hypolydian — Ionian)

- do, re, mi, FA, sol, la, ti, do

**Mode 8** (hypomixolydian) Dorian

- re, mi, fa, SOL, la, ti, Do, re

- Tonics are in **Bold**
- Dominants are in *Italics*
- Modern Dominants are underlined.
Modes and their ethos
Some have attributed general feelings to each mode. Dom Guido D’Arrezo (11th cent.) gives us these.

- Mode 1  seriousness  *(e.g. Solemn Salve Regina, Kyrie XI, Ave Maris Stella, Ave Maria)*
- Mode 2  sadness  *(e.g. Offertory De Profundis, Lenten tracts)*
- Mode 3  mystery  *(e.g. Pange lingua from Vesper hymn for Chorpus Christi)*
- Mode 4  harmony  *(e.g. Sanctus Mass X)*
- Mode 5  happiness  *(e.g. Viderunt omnes Christmas Day gradual. Christus factus est)*
- Mode 6  devotion and rest  *(e.g. Requiem introit)*
- Mode 7  angelic  *(e.g. Puer natus est (Christmas), Hosanna filio David (Palm Sunday)*
- Mode 8  perfection  *(e.g. Ad te levavi—Advent I Introit; Easter Vigil canticles)*
MODE 1

Psalm Tone


Typical Antiphon

1. Ant. Omine, * quinque ta-lénta tradidísti míhi :

Typical Incipits

1. Ant. Uge sérve bóne, 

1. Intr. Tá-tu-it
The Lord made unto him a covenant of peace and made him a prince; that the dignity of the priesthood should be to him forever. Ecclus. 45:30
Introit for a Confessor Bishop

Typical Mode 1 incipit rising to the dominant

Typical Mode 1 cadence coming to final rest on tonic Re

La becomes a new tonic acting like re in mode 2 with Do becoming new dominant a minor 3rd above

Cadence the same as “pacus” only a 5th higher

Seriousness

Typical Mode 1

Intr.

Tá-tu-it * é-i Dó-mi-nus te-staméntum

pá-cis, et príncipem fé-cit é-um: ut sit fí-li sa-
cerdó-ti-i dígni-tas in ae-
tér-num. T.P. Alle-
lú-ia, alle-
lú-ia. Ps. Meménto Dómine Dá-vid : *
MODE 2

**Psalm Tone**


**Typical Incipits**

Ant. 2. D Sa-pí-énti-a,

Grad. 2. O-di-e * sci-é-tis,

Intr. 2. Alve * sáncta Pá-rens,

Offert. 2. E pro-fún-dis

transposed mode
“la” = tonic re
typical Mode 2
incipit rising from the depths
highlighting tonic re
and the dominant fa
along the way

Offertory 13th Sunday after Pentecost
In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped:
I said, Thou art my God,
my times are in Thy hands.
Ps. 30: 15, 16
MODE 3

Psalm Tone


Typical Incipits

Intr. 3. V  
O-cem jucundi- tá-tis

Hymn. 3. P  
Ange língua glo-ri- ó-si
I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, and my soul shall exult in my God, for he hath clothed me in the garments of salvation and hath wrapped me in the robe of justice, like a bride adorned with her jewels. (Is 61:10)

Nearly identical to the typical mode 3 incipit at the beginning of the chant

Cadence in Mode 8, which also has “Do” as its dominant

Introit
Immaculate Conception Dec. 8

Ps. Exaltabo te,
MODE 4

Psalm Tone


Typical Cadence

al-le-lú-ia.

nó-stris.
“centonization” from the Greek cento: “patchwork garment” later became known as a poem completely made of quotations from other poems.

Here the music is borrowed and made to fit the different text.

The Alleluia’s are the same. The verses both begin on La dominant and use similar melodic sequences and formula.

$Llélú-ia. \quad * \quad ij. 
\begin{align*} \overline{V. \text{Ascéndit Dé-}} 
& \text{us in jubi-la-ti-ó-ne, et Dómi-nus} \\
& \text{in vó-ce * tú-bae.} \end{align*}

$Llélú-ia. \quad * \quad ij. 
\begin{align*} \overline{V. \text{Emí-te}} 
& \text{tur: et renovábis fá-cí-em * tér-rae.} \\
& \text{Spí-ri-tum tú-um, et cre-a-bún-} \end{align*}$
The sorrows of death surrounded me, the sorrow of hell encompassed me: and in my affliction I called upon the Lord, and He heard my voice from His holy Temple. (Ps. 17:2,3)

Cadence on “la” alludes to mode 2, a more sorrowful mode.

The Tonic and Dominant is once again established followed by a typical Mode 5 cadence.
MODE 6

Psalm Tone


Typical Formulas

Intr. 6.

ε -sto míhi

é- is.
Jesus saith to them:

Fill the waterpots with water and carry to the first steward of the feast.

When the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, he saith to the bridegroom:

Thou hast kept the good wine until now.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in the presence of his disciples. Jn. 2:7-11
Psalm Tone

Typical Incipits


Ant. 7. e
V

3. Ant. 7. b
C

Lamá- vi, *

4. Ant. 7. a
M

Agni-fi-cávit Dómi-nus

Intr. 7. P

U-er * ná-tus est nó- bis,
The Parish Book of Chant

Final Prayer, when the body is present

O God, whose property is ever to have mercy and to spare, we humbly entreat Thee on behalf of the soul of Thy servant N., whom Thou hast bidden this day to pass out of this world: that Thou wouldst not deliver him/her into the hands of the enemy nor forget him/her for ever, but command him/her to be taken up by the holy Angels, and to be borne to our home in paradise, that as he/she had put his/her faith and hope in Thee he/she may not undergo the pains of hell but may possess everlasting joys. Through Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

Final Commendation (or at the Burial)

May the Angels lead you into paradise: may the martyrs receive you at your coming, and lead you into the holy city, Jerusalem.

May the Choir of Angels receive you, and with Lazaru's, who once was poor, may you have everlasting rest.

Antiphon and Canticle at Graveside

May the Angels lead you into paradise: may the martyrs receive you at your coming, and lead you into the holy city, Jerusalem.
MODE 8

Psalm Tone

Typical Formulas


Intr. g.

Canticle

Ex. 15, 1 and 2

Ubi-lá-te Dé-o

Anté-mus * Dómi-no : glo-ri-ó-se e-nim

Ene-díco te,
Mode 8 beginning establishing the range and tonic and then dominant with the leap of the fourth up to do.

The phrase begins on the dominant communicating an emphatic affect.

ending on note below tonic renders the idea of resignation but hope in what is to come

Introit for Advent I

Unto thee, O Lord, will I lift up my soul; my God, I have put my trust in thee: O let me not be confounded, neither let mine enemies triumph over me. For all they that hope in thee shall not be ashamed. Ps. 25:1-2

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Recapitulation
Identifying a mode by its characteristics and applying it

• Look for the tonic notes at cadence points
• Look for the dominant (tenor, reciting tone)
• What is the range/ambitus of the melody (in relation to tonic)
• Look for other important “architectural” notes that make up the melodic skeleton
• Look for typical melodic constructs or familiar formulas (sequences)
• Discern how the “ethos” of the mode relates to the scriptural text
• Discern how similar modes and formulas are used for other parts of the liturgical year and what that means for the specific chant in question
Reasons We Should Pay Attention to Modes

• Modes help us sight-read and recognize patterns; allowing us to focus more on praying the text

• Modes help us recognize tonic notes and helps us to tune against them, thus achieving a more artful and prayerful rendering of the chant

• Modes help us to analyze the chant and give insight into its text and placement within the liturgy. i.e. allowing for more prayerful contemplation

• Modes help us to pray by giving our intellect an ethos to meditate on and interact with in addition to contemplating the text
Sacred chant appeals to the higher part of the soul. Its beauty, its nobility depend in large measure on the fact that it borrows nothing, or the least possible, from the world of the senses. If it passes through them it does so without tarrying to parley, for it has nothing to say to the passions or the imagination. It can voice terrible truths, express forcible sentiments without ever departing from its characteristic restraint and simplicity.

Modern music can be the mouthpiece of violent and gross passions (thou there are great exceptions as we know); it may even give birth to such; whereas plainsong cannot be thus abused. It remains always wholesome and serene, it does not act on the nervous system nor seek to waken a response in that fallen world of which it refuses to make the least use.

With its frank tonality and entire absence of chromatic progressions, expressing incomplete notions by semitones, it seems incapable of representing anything short of perfect beauty, pure truth. The ear which has once become attuned to its wonderful freshness can no longer bear to listen to those soft airs which infect with a sort of sensualism even the very music which is meant to be expression of heavenly love. There is something angelic in the rigidity of the plainsong scale, impervious to the least shadow of alteration.

L'Art grégorien, son but, ses procédés, ses caractères, Solesmes, 1896