

GLOSSARY of Gregorian Chant Terms

by Anthony Ruff, OSB

accentualist – An interpretational approach in which the rhythm comes from the natural text accents. Modern *semiology is accentualist. Also called oratorical.

asterisk – Placed after the first few words of an antiphon to indicate how far a solo singer intones, although it is now recommended that the asterisk be ignored and all begin together; also used to indicate the middle point of a psalm verse.

e u o u a e – The vowels used as an abbreviation for “saeculorum, amen,” the last words of the doxology ***Gloria Patri**, under the pitches of the variant *terminations of a *psalm tone.

antiphonale – A book for the Liturgy of the Hours (office) consisting primarily of psalm antiphons, canticle antiphons, and hymns. Historically, the Roman office was a different rite than the Benedictine Office.

Antiphonale Monasticum – The 1934 antiphonale issued by *Solesmes for monastic use.

Antiphonale Romanum – The 1912 antiphonale issued by Rome for the Roman office.

authentic – A *mode in which the melody moves primarily in the octave above the *final; this is true of Modes I, III, V and VII. See also **plagal**.

Cardine, Eugene – The monk of *Solesmes who began the field of *semiology.

Carolingian era – 8th and 9th century; from the L. “Carolus Magnus” (Charlemagne).

common – A chant or set of chants useable for many similar liturgical days; the *Graduale Simplex provides commons for use any time throughout a season.

communion / L. communio - The *proper antiphon sung during communion, with the option of several psalm verses between each antiphon.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy / L. Sacrosanctum Concilium – The 1963 document of the Second Vatican Council calling for a reform of the liturgy, active participation of the people, greater use of the vernacular, preservation of Latin chant, creation of a simpler chant book for smaller churches, and a (melodic) reform of the existing chant books.

custos – The “guide” at the end of a line indicating the first note on the following line.

dominant – In the 8 modes, the *reciting tone which forms the second melodic pole, alongside the *final.

dot – In the *old Solesmes School, a *rhythmic sign indicating doubling of the note value.

episema – In the *old Solesmes school of interpretation, a horizontal line over a note indicating a slight lengthening (in practice, virtually a doubling).

equalist – Schools of interpretation in which the notes are of equal value. The *old Solesmes school is semi-equalist, with even eight notes that are lengthened by the *episema or *dot.

final – The last pitch of a piece, which in the 8 modes is determinant of the *mode (along with the melodic range), and in the *ur-modes is identical with the *reciting tone.

final cadence – see **termination**.

flex – A downward drop in the first half of a *psalm tone, used when the psalm verse has three lines rather than two.

Gajard, Joseph – The monk of *Solesmes who brought the “old Solesmes school” to a high peak in his conducting of the *schola on recordings through the 1960s.

Gloria Patri – L. for “Glory to the Father,” the Trinitarian doxology done after psalms of the Office, and generally as the last verse of the *introit and *communio of the Mass.

gradual / L. graduale – 1. The *proper psalm after the first reading, at one time sung from the *gradus* (step). 2. The book containing the Mass *propers and settings of the *ordinary.

Graduale Romanum – The book issued in 1908 by Rome, and issued also by *Solesmes with *rhythmic signs added; then revised after Vatican II and issued in a private edition by *Solesmes in 1974. Note that Benedictines follow the Roman rite for Mass (not Office).

Graduale Simplex – A book of *commons for Mass, created by drawing from easier psalm antiphons of the Office, issued after Vatican II as called for in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

Graduale Triplex – A version of the 1974 *Graduale Romanum with two additional notations added, above and below the staff, from the earliest *neumes (for rhythmic interpretation).

Gregory the Great, Pope St. – The legendary author of Gregorian chant who in fact was not involved in the creation or organization of the repertoire.

ictus – In the *old Solesmes school of interpretation, a small vertical mark above or below a note indicating the beginning of a melodic rhythmic group of 2 or 3 notes.

intonation – The first few pitches of a *psalm tone to which the psalm verse is begun; the text to the intonation is *pointed by being in italics in the *Graduale Simplex and *Psallite Domino.

introit / L. introitus – The *proper entrance antiphon of the Mass.

Kyriale – A collection of Mass *ordinary settings (named for the first chant in the *ordinary).

Liber Hymnarius – The 1983 reformed “hymn book” for the Office; the second volume of the reformed *Antiphonale Romanum, of which the first volume has not yet appeared.

liquescent – A notational indication suggesting care in pronunciation and (according to semiology) a corresponding rhythmic addition or reduction in note value.

melisma – A group of several notes over one syllable.

melismatic – A style of chant in which many syllables have longer *melismas.

mensuralist – Schools of interpretation in which the rhythms of the notes are in some proportion to each other (such as 2 : 1 or 3 : 1), resulting in a certain recurring “downbeat.” Also known as **proportionalist**. From the Latin for “measured.”

Missa – L. for “Mass.” The genitive is Missae, as in *proprium Missae, “*proper of the Mass.”

mediant cadence – In a *psalm tone, the melodic formula used at the end of the first half of the tone before the *asterisk.

Mocquereau, Andre – The monk of *Solesmes who put forth the *equalist theory known as the *old Solesmes school.

mode – A scale pattern which determines the pitches and their inter-relations within a chant, and also the ethos of a chant. There are 8 modes which are used for most chants. See also **ur-mode**.

neume – A figure of notation; for *semiologists, used to mean all the notes over a syllable.

offertory / L. offertorium – the *proper antiphon sung at the preparation of the gifts and altar.

old Solesmes school – An interpretation proposed by *Mocquereau and used by *Gajard with *rhythmic signs for smooth even eight notes in melodic groups of two and threes.

oratorical – see **accentualist**.

ordinary / L. ordinarium – The unchanging texts of the Mass, consisting of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus-Benedictus, Agnus Dei.

paleography – The study of manuscripts (literally, “old writings”).

palgal – A *mode in which the melody moves predominantly both above and below the *final; this is true of Modes II, IV, VI, and VIII. See also **authentic**.

plainsong, plainchant / L. cantus planus – A term first used in the 12th century, probably indicative of the *equalist manner of singing in use by then.

pointing – The indications (by underlining, bold face, or italics) for how a text is matched to a *psalm tone.

Pothier, Joseph – A monk of *Solesmes who advocated *accentualist singing.

proper / L. proprium – The changing texts of the Mass proper to a given day, such as the *introit or *communio.

proportionalist – See **mensuralist**.

Psallite Domino – A collection of *Vatican edition chants issued by *Solesmes Abbey by Alberto Turco of the Cathedral of Verona for congregations and choirs. L. for “Sing Psalms to the Lord.”

psalm tone – A melodic formula to which a psalm text is *pointed and sung. It consists of an *intonation, (sometimes a *flex,) the *reciting tone, a *mediant cadence, and after the *asterisk, the same *reciting tone, and the *termination.

quilisma – The jagged note (punctum) sung lightly.

reciting tone – The pitch on which most of the psalm verse is sung, however many syllables it has; also called the tenor. In the 8 modes, it is the *dominant.

rhythmic signs – In the *old Solesmes school, the *ictus, *episema, and *dot added to the notation of the *Vatican edition.

schola – Term for a smaller choir of singers, from the Latin “schola cantorum” (= school of singers).

semiology – The application of *paleography, literally “reading the signs.” The modern interpretational approach begun by *Cardine.

Solesmes Abbey – The Benedictine Abbey founded in France in 1833 by Abbot Gueranger; home of *Pothier, *Mocquereau, *Gajard, and *Cardine. See also *old Solesmes school.

Solesmes Editions – The editions of the chant that include the *rhythmic signs. See also **Vatican edition**.

syllabic – Chant in which most of the syllables have just one pitch over them; not *melismatic.

tenor – see **reciting tone**.

termination – The melodic formula at the end of a *psalm tone. A *mode or *ur-mode may have several terminations; these are sometimes indicated by *e u o u a e. Also called the final cadence.

ur-mode – According to recent research, the original scale patterns, of which there were three, C, D, and E, which cantors used in improvising. These later developed into the 8 modes. Unlike the 8 modes, the ur-modes have the same pitch for the *reciting tone and the *final. These three ur-modes appear in the *Graduale Simplex and succeeding books.

Vatican Editions – The chant editions from Rome, lacking the *Solesmes *rhythmic signs.