ISTITUTO DI PALEOGRAFIA MUSICALE

ALBERTO TURCO

GREGORIAN CHANT

TONES AND MODES

translated by Stefano Concordia O.S.B.

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Collana diretta da
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In the past thirty years our knowledge of the Gregorian modes has made notable progress. The system of the eight church modes, or the *octoechos*, traditionally taught since the time of the Carolingian theorists, has been the object of severe, but ultimately constructive, criticism. Today it is no longer considered as the obligatory point of departure for all research in the field, but rather as a point of arrival in a long evolution. It is none other than the systematization, a bit forced, of a repertoire that had been constituted on a completely different basis, now much better understood.

Alberto Turco has come to occupy a predominant place in the elaboration of this new modal vision. His doctoral thesis, defended in 1972 at the Pontifical Ambrosian Institute of Sacred Music: "Traces of original modal structures in the psalmody of the Temporale and Santorale cycles" ("Tracce di strutture modali originarie nella salmodia del Temporale e del Santorale"), continued my own research on archaic modality of the Ferial Office.

In his meticulous work, developed during long visits at Solesmes, he has succeeded in synthesizing an enormous amount of modal information scattered in the thousands of comparative tables that had been prepared for the edition of the Monastic Antiphonal of 1934. In this way he had anticipated, to those most demanding, the justification of the modal improvements that had to be introduced in the books re-done after the Council: the Monastic Psalter (1981) and the Roman Antiphonal (Liturgy of the Hours) in process of publication: the resurrection of the three archaic modes and of the two evolved modes, that had disappeared in the rationalization of the *octoechos*, *Protus* at the fourth (between *Protus* at the fifth or Mode I, and *Protus* at the third or Mode II) and *Deuterus* at the third (under *Deuterus* at the fourth or Mode IV and *Deuterus* at the fifth or Mode III).

In this volume he explains with order, clarity, and simplicity, the historical and technical development of the Gregorian modes, in the way that he saw them outlined in the course of his many sojourns at Solesmes. He is the first to utilize the *Graduale Simplex* in his teaching, a book published 20 years ago (1967), the modal richness of which has not been generally understood - and much less put to good use - and which could very well be called the manual of archaic modality. It is in fact from the *cantillatio* that the explanation of what is properly called chant must begin; it is from the recitatives on the various "mother tones", embellished by the creativity of the soloist, that were born the melodies of the Gradual and of the Antiphonal, in their structure (modal tones) and in their ornamentation (melismas). These melodies in evolved modality make their appearance successively along with the enrichments of new forms in the liturgy, so that the history of liturgical forms and the history of musical forms is one and the same. There is nothing more reassuring than this perfect agreement among the two disciplines. It is certain, that, in the research that we have been doing for thirty years now, we may have been mistaken here or there, in one point or in another, but it is certainly not mistaken on the whole and everywhere. If it is still too early to affirm that the synthesis is complete - but will it ever be? - one can be sure that the foundational points affirmed at this moment in time indicate the right path, that which will lead to a profound knowledge of the nature and of the evolution of Gregorian modality, studied not from a point of departure of ab-

stract notions, but rather from the liturgical and musical documents that have survived.

I am pleased to congratulate Alberto Turco for this work, destined as it is to be only an initiation, without pretending to be exhaustive. I willingly recommend it's being read and studied by all those who want to push forward in the comprehension of the marvellous art which is Gregorian Chant, certainly the most splendid flowering of sacred music of all times and a treasure of inestimable value, according to the expression of the Council, that God has inspired in the Church to be the privileged form of its praise and of its adoration.

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fr. Jean CLAIRE
Choirmaster of the Abbey
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Solesmes 1987

Note on the English Translation

I have chosen to use letters (A, B, C, etc.) to indicate the note names that in the Italian original appear as "*solfege*" names (*La, Si, Do*, etc.). The solfege names perhaps have the advantage of being more relative – that is, generally not indicating fixed pitches – but the letter names are probably more familiar. Neither system would have been entirely satisfactory.

Some of the terms used in the text require a word of explanation:

"Mother tone" seems closest in meaning to the Italian "*corda madre*" or to the French "*corde-mère*", if 'tone' is understood as referring to a pitch.

"Modal template" is used to translate the Italian "*timbro modale*" (*timbro* indicates a rubber or metal stamp) where 'template' should be understood to indicate a form used to reproduce shapes with corresponding contours.

"Archaistic" was invented for the author's "*archaizzante*" and indicates that type of modal evolution which resembles the archaic, and is thus "archaic-like". Similarly, "authentistic" was chosen for the Italian "*autentizzante*"; that which resembles the "authentic", or "authentic-like".

"Boundary tone" translates the author's "*termine*", and thus, upper boundary tone – *termine acuto*, lower boundary tone – *termine grave*.

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