Chapter 3

Psalm Tones

> All our Scripture, both the Old and New, is divinely inspired and useful for doctrine, as it is written … The Book of Psalms, like a paradise containing in itself all fruits gives forth songs, and with them also shows its own songs in psalmody … To me it seems that the psalms for him who sings them are as a mirror in which he may contemplate himself and the movements of his soul and, under this influence, recite them.
>
> —Saint Athanasius, *Epist. ad Marcell. cit.*, n. 2., as quoted by Pope Saint Pius X, *Divino Afflatu*, 1 November 1911

3.1 When Psalm Tones are Used

There are many different tones that a portion of text can be set to, the majority of which are reserved for a priest during Mass or a religious during the Divine Office. As the name implies, "Psalm Tones" are those typically applied to verses of psalms that are recited in occassions like:

- The Verse of the *Asperges Me* or *Vidi Aquam*

- Verses following the Introit, Offertory or Communion

- Verses of hymns like in *Adoremus in Æternum*

- Verses of the *Pueri Hebræorum* on Palm Sunday

- Communal recitation of Vespers or Compline (or any other Hour)

Additionally, Decree No. 3697 issued by the Sacred Congregation of Rites on 7 December 1888 allows the simplification of difficult parts of the Mass (i.e., the Propers):

Dubium V. Utrum tolerari posit usus Missam cantandi modo quasi psalmodico, seu semi-tonato?
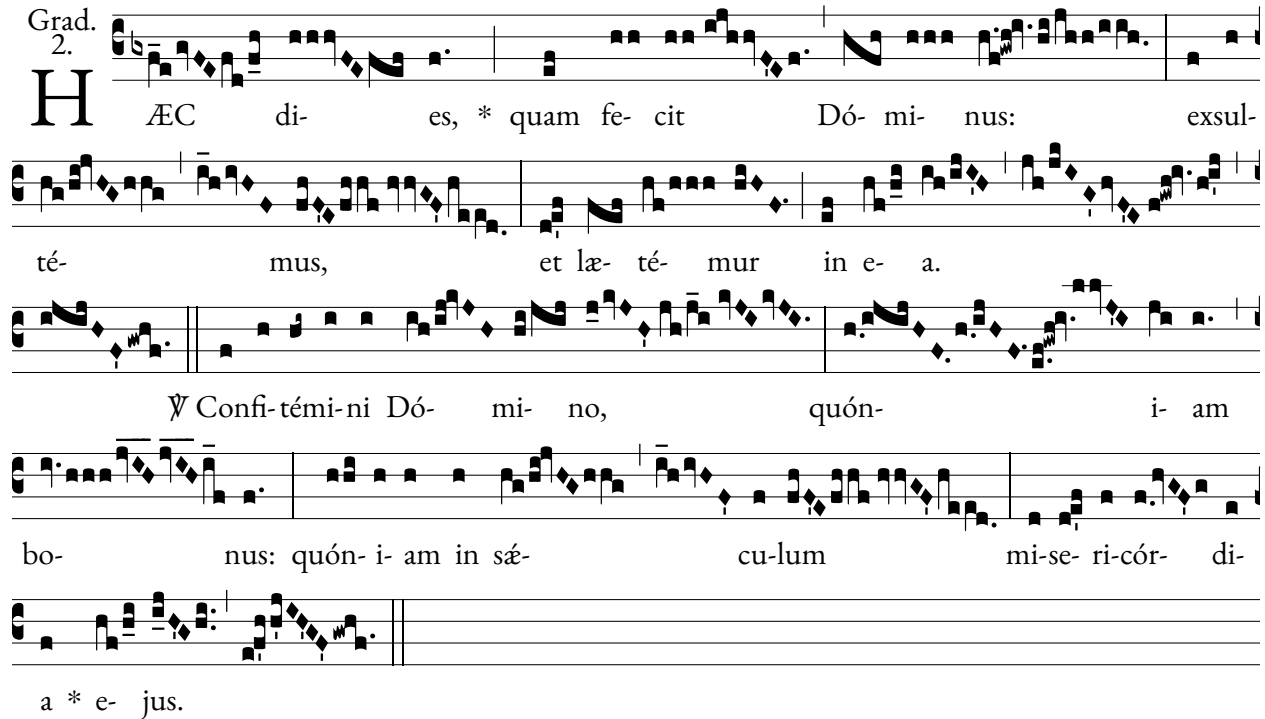
Resp. ad V. "Retineri posse".

Question 5. Can the practice of singing the Mass in a psalmodic, or semi-toned, manner be tolerated?

Answer to 5. "It can be retained".

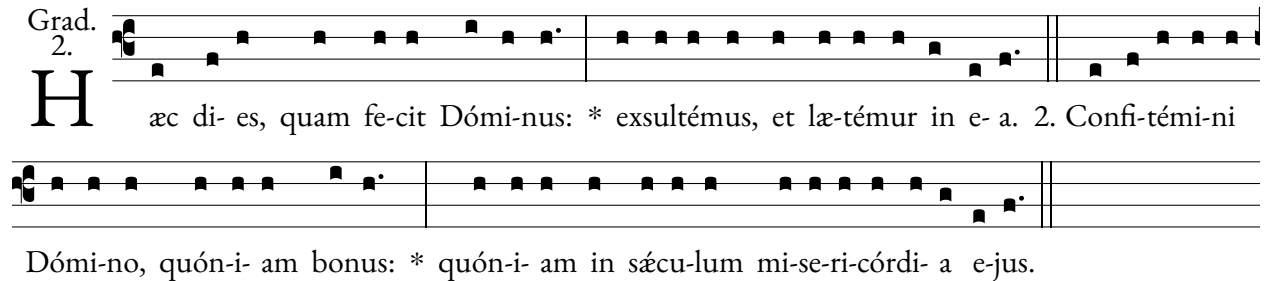An example of this kind of simplification is shown below for the Gradual of Easter Sunday.

Grad. 2.

HÆC di- es, * quam fe- cit Dó- mi- nus: exsul-

té- mus, et læ- té- mur in e- a.

℣ Confi- témi- ni Dó- mi- no, quón- i- am

bo- nus: quón- i- am in sǽ- cu- lum mi- se- ri- cór- di-

a * e- jus.

Grad. 2.

Hæc di- es, quam fe- cit Dómi- nus: * exsultémus, et læ- témur in e- a. 2. Confi- témi- ni

Dómi- no, quón- i- am bonus: * quón- i- am in sǽcu- lum mi- se- ri- córdi- a e- jus.

3.2   The Form of a Psalm Tone

4.g

B e- á-tus vir, qui non áb-i- it in consí- li- o impi- ó-rum, † et in vi- a pecca-tó-*rum non*

ste-   tit, * et in cáthedra pesti-lénti- æ non **se-** dit:

A psalm tone can be divided into the following parts (adapted from *A Plain and Easy Introduction to Gregorian Chant* by Dr. Susan Treacy):

1. **Annotation** refers to the number and letter directly preceeding the chant; the number (Roman or Arabic) is the Tone / Mode and the letter designates the Final Cadence.

2. **Intonation** is the first couple of notes that clue you in on which mode (i.e., numbered tone) is being used, that raise up to the Recitation Tone.

3. **Recitation Tone** is the pitch that the majority of the verse will be on, and is also the Dominant (or Tenor) of the corresponding mode.

4. **Flex** is used when a text is long and the recitation needs to pause briefly (signified by †); the pitch drops before returning to the Recitation Tone.

5. **Mediant Cadence** signifies the end of the first half of the verse with a short melody, resuming the Recitation Tone afterwards.

6. **Preparatory Syllables** sometimes come before the Final Cadence.

7. **Final Cadence** is how the psalm tone ends for a given verse; some modes have multiple Final Cadence options.

8. **Epenthetic Notes** are the little white notes in the cadence sections denoting the pitch inbetween accents.
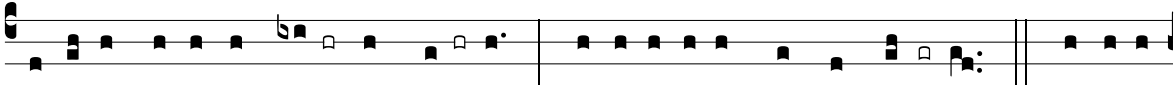
Sometimes the Cadences have the syllables with inflection denoted in **bold** and *italic*. This is not always the case, and is usuallly reserved for when only the first verse of a psalm is given in chant notation, while the subsequent verses are simply-formatted text.

There are eight Psalm Tones which correspond to the eight Modes. Some Psalm Tones have multiple Final Cadences possible, which are differentiated by their last note with a letter ("c" for Do, "d" for Re, etc.). If the last note happens to be the Final (or Tonic) of the Mode, then this letter is capitalized (as in Psalm Tone VIIIG).
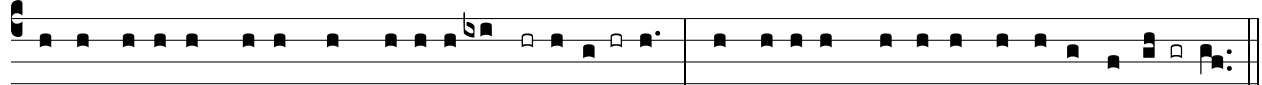
3.3 Psalm Tone If

There are 10 different Final Cadences for the First Tone.

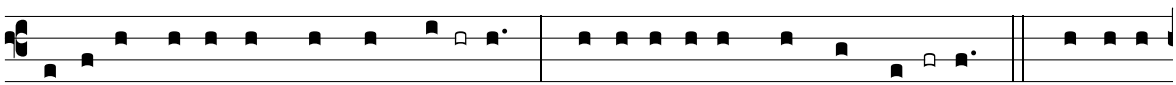1.f Laudá-te Dómi-num, **om**-nes **Gen**- tes: * laudá-te e- um, *omnes* **pó**pu- li: 2. Quón-i- am

confirmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-**cór**di- a e- jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net *in æ-***tér**-num.
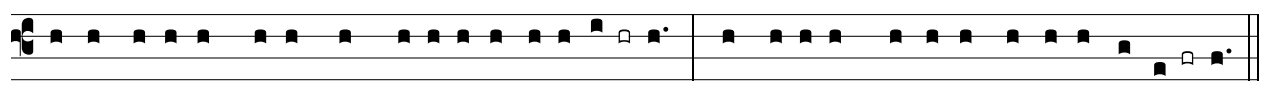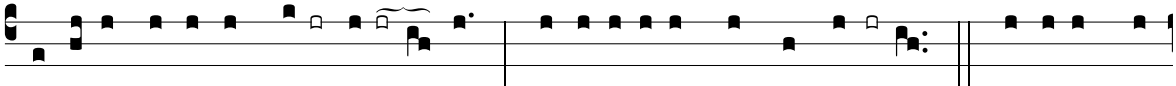
3.4 Psalm Tone II

There are 2 different Mediant Cadences and 1 Final Cadence for the Second Tone.

2. Laudá-te Dómi-num, omnes **Gen**- tes: * laudá-te e- um, om*nes* **pó**pu-li: 2. Quón-i- am

confirmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-córdi- a **e-** jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net in æ-**tér**-num.

3.5 Psalm Tone IIIa

There are 5 different Final Cadences for the Third Tone.

3.a Laudá-te Dómi-num, **om**-nes **Gen**tes: * laudá-te e- um, om*nes* **pó**pu- li: 2. Quón-i- am con-
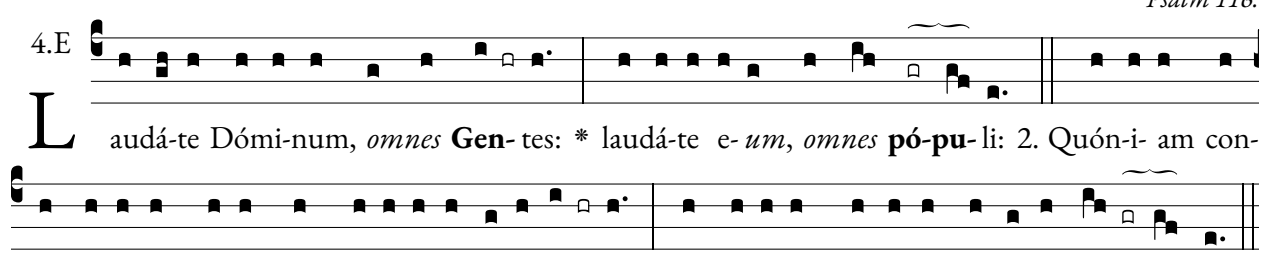
firmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-**cór**di- a e- jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net in æ-**tér**-num.

3.6   Psalm Tone IVE

There are 2 different positions, 4 different Mediant Cadences and 5 different Final Cadences for the Fourth Tone.

Psalm 116.

Laudá-te Dómi-num, *omnes* **Gen**-tes: * laudá-te e-*um*, *omnes* **pó-pu**-li: 2. Quón-i- am con-

firmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-cór*di- a* **e-** jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-*net in æ-* **tér**num.

3.7   Psalm Tone V

There are 2 different Mediant Cadences and 1 Final Cadence for the Fifth Tone.

Psalm 116.

Laudá-te Dómi-num, omnes **Gen**- tes: * laudá-te e- um, **om**-nes **pó**pu-li: 2. Quón-i- am

confirmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-córdi- a **e-** jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net **in** **æ-tér**-num.

3.8   Psalm Tone VI

There are 2 different positions, 3 different Mediant Cadences and 1 Final Cadence for the Sixth Tone.

Psalm 116.

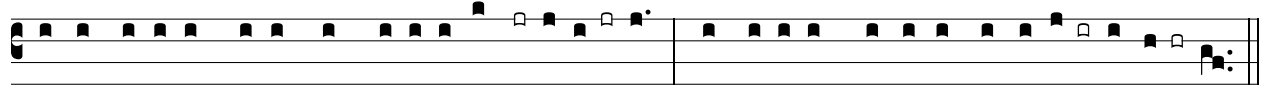Laudá-te Dómi-num, **om**-nes **Gen**- tes: * laudá-te e- um, *omnes* **pó**pu-li: 2. Quón-i- am

confirmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-**cór**di- a **e-** jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net *in* **æ-tér**-num.

3.9   Psalm Tone VIIa

There are 5 different Final Cadences for the Seventh Tone.

Psalm 116.

L audá-te Dómi-num, **om**-nes **Gen**- tes: * laudá-te e- um, **om**-nes **pó**pu- li: 2. Quón-i- am
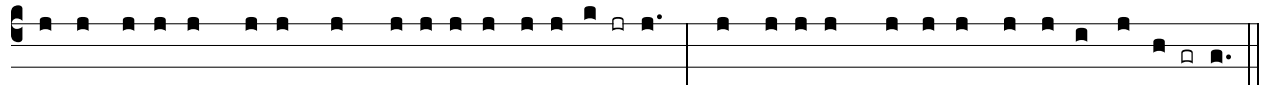
confirmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-**cór**di- a **e-** jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net **in**   æ-**tér**-num.

3.10   Psalm Tone VIIIG

There are 2 different Mediant Cadences and 3 different Final Cadences for the Eighth Tone.

Psalm 116.

L audá-te Dómi-num, omnes **Gen**- tes: * laudá-te   e- um, *omnes* **pó**pu-li: 2. Quón-i- am

confirmá-ta est super nos mi-se-ri-córdi- a **e-** jus: * et vé-ri-tas Dómi-ni ma-net *in* æ-**tér**-num.

3.11   Homework

The *Liber Usualis* (Nº 801 in Latin-English, 1961) starting on page 112 has a section titled "The Ordinary Chants of the Office" with descriptions on each variation of the Psalm Tones. See if you can set a verse or two to a specific tone following their instructions.

The website and app *Chant Tools*, which defaults to the "Propers Tool", is a great resource for toggling between Full and Psalm Tone versions of Propers. There is another tab on the top titled "Psalm Tone Tool" that applies any tone to any psalm (and even non-psalm text, too). Play around with various Final Cadences of a tone and find one that's particularly easy or pleasant to you.