Contents

Figures  IX
Abbreviations  XI
Contributors  XII

1  Introduction: Early Christian Liturgy and Its Reception  1
    Sven-Erik Brodd and James A. Kelhoffer

PART 1
Lyrics: Liturgy and Language in the New Testament

2  Liturgical Influences on the Text of the New Testament  49
    Tommy Wasserman

3  Zwei urchristliche Taufformeln  80
    David Hellholm

4  “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets”: Proclamation and
   Narrative Progression in Three Speeches by Peter in Acts (Acts 2:14–40;
   3:12–26; 4:8–12)  109
    Daniel Gustafsson

5  Celebrating the Exodus: A Key to the Prophetic Message of the
   Apocalypse  126
    Håkan Ulfgard

6  “For an Intelligible Reading”: A Colometrical Version of First John  152
    Birger Olsson

PART 2
Leitmotifs: Liturgical Themes in Other Early Christian Literature

7  Passing the Audition: Mode and Harmony in Ignatius of Antioch’s
   Chorus (Eph. 4.2; Rom. 2.2)  175
    James A. Kelhoffer

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Passing the Audition: Mode and Harmony in Ignatius of Antioch’s Chorus (*Eph. 4.2; Rom. 2.2*)

James A. Kelhoffer

Is it not for this reason ... that education in music is all-powerful, because rhythm and harmony most of all plunge down into the inner soul and most vigorously take hold of it, bringing [with them] refinement?

Ignatius of Antioch twice exhorts believers to form a chorus, taking their cue from the bishop, the conductor who indicates the correct notes and intervals to be utilised. This study examines ancient Greek principles of musical harmony and dissonance and the imperative that a particular “mode” (i.e., scale) be adopted to the exclusion of others. Debates among ancient philosophers and musicians about which mode(s) and intervals ought to be employed form an illuminating backdrop for the controversies in which Ignatius engages. The bishop envisions the resounding of a chorus as he dutifully makes his way in silence towards his martyrdom in Rome.

1 Introduction

In his *Letters to the Ephesians* and *the Romans*, Ignatius of Antioch urges believers to form a chorus of unanimity. Through a detailed linguistic analysis of two key passages (sections 2.1–9), this paper explores the import of his metaphor and its role in the two letters. I will offer a provisional translation of Ignatius, *Eph. 4.2* and *Rom. 2.2* before discussing ancient competing views about harmonic and dissonant intervals and, in the light of the discussion of ancient

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1 Plato, *Resp. 3.12* (401D), discussed in section 2.3 of this study.