

# Why We Sing

*Music, Word, and Liturgy in Early Christianity*

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF ANDERS EKENBERG'S  
75TH BIRTHDAY

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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?<sup>1</sup>



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