

The following excerpted from Collins, *A Primer of Ecclesiastical Latin* (1985):

1. Pronunciation of Ecclesiastical Latin

The alphabet used to record ecclesiastical Latin is the same as that used for English, except for the absence of k and w.

Aa, Bb, Cc, Dd, Ee, Ff, Gg, Hh, Ii, Jj, Ll, Mm,
Nn, Oo, Pp, Qq, Rr, Ss, Tt, Uu, Vv, Xx, Yy, Zz.

a. Vowels The vowels are a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y. While English has several different ways to pronounce each vowel, Latin has only two, called long and short. In a strict sense, these terms—long and short—refer to quantity, i.e., the time taken to say them.

ā, as in *father*: grātia, pāpa, ā

a, as in *carouse*: aqua, ad, ab

ē, as in *they*: cēna, ecclēsia, ē

e, as in *get*: terra, ex, sine, bene

ī, as in *machine*: doctrīna, famīlia, vīta

i, as in *fit*: missa, in, sine, ibi

ō, as in *no*: glōria, nōn, hōra, prō

o, as in *soft*: doctrīna, apostolus, dominus

ū, as in *tuba*: nātūra, futūrus, Jūdaea

u, as in *put*: culpa, cum, super

N.B.: For y, see note 4.

Notes: 1. Long vowels are indicated with a superscribed bar, called a macron (or, simply, a long mark). In this text long vowels will always be thus indicated.
2. Note that short e, i, o, and u differ from their long

Notes continued:

forms in quality of sound as well as in quantity. But when ecclesiastical Latin is sung, the short vowels, when in open positions, tend to take on the same quality as the long vowels; since the English speaker's ear is not good at detecting the quantity of a vowel, this in practice goes a long way toward blurring the distinction between long and short vowels. Close short vowels, however, tend in song to retain their own quality. Compare short *e* in *terra* and in *Deō* when sung: *terra*, but 'day-oh.'

3. There are no silent vowels in Latin: e.g., **confines** is two syllables in English, but three in Latin (**cōn/fī/nēs**).
4. The letter *y* occurs only as a vowel (never as a consonant), in words borrowed from Greek. It came to be pronounced like the short form of *i*: **mystērium**, **hymnus**.
5. A vowel followed by another vowel, or separated from it by *h*, is usually short: **scīre**, but **sciat**; **nihil**.

b. Diphthongs A diphthong is a sequence of two vowels pronounced together in one syllable. Here are the more frequently encountered diphthongs:

ae, like *ē*: **aeternus**, **saeculum**
au like *ou-* in *out*: **aurum**, **laudō**
oe, like *ē*: **oecumenicus**, **coepī**
ui like *-wi-* in *dwindle*: **huic**, **cui**

c. Consonants The consonants are pronounced as follows:

b, as in English (but more like *p* before *s* or *t*).
c, like *k* in all positions, except before *e*, *i*, *ae*, or *oe*; then, like *ch* in *church*: **cēna**, **circā**, **caelum**, **coenobium**.
d, **f**, as in English.
g, like *g* in *gut* in all positions (but see note 1), except before *e*, *i*, or *y*; then, like *j* in *jut*: **angelus**, **rēgīna**, **Aegyptius**.
h, as in *hat* (not as in *honor* or *hour*): **honōrēs**, **hōra**.

Pronunciation of Ecclesiastical Latin 3

j, this is in reality **i** used as a consonant, pronounced like **y** in *yet*: **jam**, **Jēsūs**, **jūstus**.

l, m, n, p, as in English.

q, always followed by a (semiconsonantal) **u** + another vowel, pronounced in all positions *kw*, as in *quick*: **quod**, **antīquus**.

r, like English **r**, but lightly trilled.

s, unvoiced, as in *set* and *loose*: **ecclēsia**, **missa**.

t, v, x, as in English.

z, like *dz* in *adze*: **baptizō**.

- Notes:*
1. The combination **gn** is like *ny* in *canyon*: **agnus**, **rēgnum**.
 2. **Sc** followed by **e** or **i** is like *sh*: **scelus**, **scīvī**.
 3. **U** has the character of a consonant in **qu**, **gu**, and (often) **su**. **Gu** + a vowel is like *gw*: **sanguis**; **su** + a vowel, like *sw*: **suāvis**.
 4. **X** and **z** count as two consonants (**x** = *ks*; **z** = *dz*).
 5. **Ti** followed by a vowel is pronounced *tsi* (except when preceded by **s**, **t**, or **x**): **laetitia**, **pretiōsus**, **vitium** (but **hostia**).
 6. **Ph** is like *f*; **ch** and **th** are pronounced as in *character* and *thyme*.
 7. Doubled consonants are doubly pronounced: **ancil/la**, **mis/sa**, **pec/cātum**, **sab/batum**, **com/mit/tō**.
 8. There are no silent consonants in Latin.

d. Syllabication A Latin word has as many syllables as it has vowels or diphthongs. Division into syllables is made after open vowels—i.e., those not followed by a consonant—(**pi/us**, **De/us**) or those followed by a single consonant (**vī/ta**, **hō/ra**). Division is made after the first consonant when two or more consonants follow a vowel—consequently called an enclosed vowel—(**mis/sa**, **minis/ter**, **sān/ctus**). But in compounds the parts are separated (**dē/scrībō**).

Note: The sequence of a mute consonant (**b, c, d, g, p, t**) or **f** and a liquid consonant (**l, r**) is taken with the succeeding vowel: **la/crima**, **pa/tris**.

4 UNIT I

e. Syllabic Quantity; Accent The length of a syllable is instrumental in establishing the accent of a word of three or more syllables. A syllable is long (by nature) if it contains a long vowel or a diphthong, or long (by position) if a short vowel is followed by two or more consonants or by a double consonant, x or z; a short vowel made long by position is still pronounced short: **missa**, not **mīssa**.

Accent in Latin is determined by the quantity of the next to last syllable (called the penult); if the penult is long, it bears the accent: **doc/trī/na**, **an/cīl/la**. If the penult is short, then the third syllable from the end (called the antepenult) gets the accent: **ec/clē/si/a**, **án/ge/lus**, **im/pé/ri/um**. Words of two syllables are accented on the penult: **cē/na**, **sí/ne**.

- Notes:*
1. In prose, the combination of a mute (**b, c, d, g, p, t**) or **f** and a liquid (**l, r**) does not make for length by position: **ce/le/brō**, **te/ne/brae**.
 2. Traditional Latin missals and breviaries do not use macrons as guides to pronunciation; instead, accent marks (') are used in words of three or more syllables: **cōfessiōne**, **vírgine**.
 3. The sequences **-nf-**, **-ns-**, **-nx-**, **-nct-**, and (often) **-gn-** cause a preceding vowel to lengthen: **īnferus**, **cōnsecrō**, **conjūnx**, **sānctus**, **dīgnus** (but **māgnus**).