

## The Pronunciation of Church Latin.

Church Latin in most cases is pronounced like correctly spoken Roman Italian. However in the Italian we find syllables often run together, such as “*maggiore*”, “*gloria*” instead of “*glo-ri-a*”, etc. This cannot be in Latin, where every syllable must be clear and crisp. Too, some Italian words are accented on the last syllable, an impossibility in the Latin. We have spoken of the character of the Latin accent in preceding paragraphs.

The letters are divided into vowels and consonants :

### Vowels.

In Latin each vowel must be given the proper timbre and to preserve its proper color the slightest change in the position of the lips or tongue must be avoided during its articulation. There must never be that mixture of sounds peculiar to the English language; but the vowel sounds must be as far as possible, uniform. It is very important while singing extended melismatic melodies, to keep the same timbre of the vowel throughout.

*A* — has a broad open sound like the *a* in the word *father*, never like the English *a* in *can*.

*E* — has no exact English equivalent. It is between the *e* in the English word *met* and the *a* in *flame, same*.

*I* — is pronounced like *ee* in *feet*, or *ea* in *seat*. It must never be like the *i* in *milk* — *inimicus* is pronounced *eeneemeecoos*.

*O* — as in the English *for*, half open and uniform. *Glo-ri-a, ora*.

*U* — is pronounced like the *oo* in the English word *moon*. Never the English *u* in *use, sure, pure*, etc. Examples : *multus* = *mooltoos*; *secundum* = *saycoondoom*; the *oo* must not be too long.

*Y* — *always* treated as a vowel, never like a consonant. Pronounced like Latin *I* — *Marter*.

### Consecutive Vowels.

As a general rule when two vowels come together, each keeps its own proper sound and constitutes a separate syllable : *diei* = *di-e-i*, *fili* = *fi-li-i*, *eorum* = *e-o-rum*, etc. This rule

applies to *ou*, and *ai*: both vowels are heard separately and belong to two different syllables, Examples : *pro-ut*, *coutuntur* = *co-utuntur*, *ait* = *a-it*.

*Note* — *AE* and *OE* are pronounced as one sound, like *E* above : *caelum*, *saeculorum*.

In *AU*, *EU* and *AY*, the two vowels form one syllable, but both vowels must be distinctly heard. The principal emphasis and interest belong to the first vowel: In *AU* and *EU* the *U* takes a secondary place and almost forms a liaison with the following syllable. If several notes are sung on this combination, the vocalization is entirely on the *first* vowel, the second vowel being heard only on the last note at the moment of passing to the following syllable. Examples — *Láuda*, *Eúge*, *Ráymundus*.

Offert. Láu- - - da. Eu- ge.  
*Rend.* Lá- - u- da. E- u- ge.

*EI* is similarly treated when it occurs in an interjection : *hei* — *hei*, etc. In all other cases it follows the general rule of the *two* syllables. Examples : *me-i*, *De-i-tas*. *U* preceded by *Q* or *NG* and followed by another vowel keeps its normal pronunciation, but is uttered with the vowel which follows as *one* syllable; the following vowel keeps its proper timbre. Examples : *Sanguis, qui, quae, quod, quam, quoniam*. In these words the *U* plays the part of a liaison as in the case of *AU* and *EU*, except that it is at the beginning of the syllable and not at the end. The rule for *AU* and *EU* is to be applied, but in reverse order. *CUI* follows the general rule of *two* syllables, and must be clearly distinguished from *qui*; however in certain hymns because of the metre, this word has to be treated as *one* syllable : The Epiphany Hymn for Lauds will illustrate :

Maj̄or Beth̄lem cuī contigit

Also the Hymn for the Dedication of Churches :

cuī laus potestas gloria

The metrical rhythm makes these cases easy to determine.

## Consonants.

As the name indicates, consonants can only be pronounced in conjunction with the vowels, and form the motive power of these. They must be pronounced with a certain crispness and energy; otherwise the diction will not be clear, but weak and unintelligible.

*C* — when it comes before *E*, *AE*, *OE*, *I* and *Y* is pronounced like *ch* in *church*. Examples: *caelum* = chayloom, *Cecelia* = Chay-chee-lee-ah.

*C* — likewise when it precedes these hard vowels *A*, *O* and *U*, is pronounced like the English *K*. Examples: *caritas*, *corpus*, *cum*.

*CC* — before the same vowels, like *tch*. — *Ecce* = etchay.

*SC* — before the soft vowels is pronounced like *sh*. Examples: *Ascendit* = A-shen-deet, *Descendit* = de-shen-deet.

*SC* — before the hard vowels *a*, *o* and *u* is hard, as the English word scan, scourge, scum.

*CH* — is always hard, even before the vowels *e*, *i* and *y*. Examples: *Christus* = Krees-toos; Cherubim and other words of Greek origin.

*G* — is soft before *e*, *i*, *ae*, *oe* and *y*, as in the English word germ, generous, etc. Latin examples: *Genitori*, *Regina*.

*G* — is hard in all other cases, like in the English word go. Examples: *Gloria*, *Gratias*, etc.

*GN* — has the French sound heard in the word *Agneau*; the Spanish word *Montaña*, and the English word *onion*. Examples: *Agnus* = Anyius, *Magnificat* = Manyi-fi-cat.

*H* — is pronounced like *K* in *mihi* (meekee), and *nihil* (neekeel) and their compounds. These two words were formerly written *michi*, and *nichil*. In all other cases *H* is silent. Examples: *ora* = hora, *habitat* = abitat.

*J* — is often written *I*, and is pronounced like the English *Y*. It must be uttered as part of the following vowel, and the two sounds form only *one* syllable. Examples: *Jam* or *IAm*; *Allelu-ja* or *Allelu-ia* (never as in the Greek *Allelou-i-a*). *Jesus* or *Iesus*; *Jo-annem* or *Io-annem*. The vowel following *J* plays the most important part in the syllable, and on it the neums are sung when they occur in such a place.

*R* — should always be trilled slightly as in Italian. When it precedes another consonant, as in *carnis* and *martyr*, care must be taken *not* to pass over it as in cultivated English. It is important, too *not* to shorten or modify the vowel in the syllable preceding the *R*, as is done in French, Italian and other languages.

*S* — is usually hard and dental as in the English words *yes*, *sea*, *source*, and so on; however, it is slightly softened when it comes between two vowels : *misericordia*, *miserere*.

*TI* — before a vowel and preceded by any other letter except *S*, *T* or *X* is pronounced *tsi*. Examples : *Gratia* = Grat-see-a, *Laetitia* = Lay-tee-tsee-a, *Patientia* — Pat-si-en-tsi-a. But *Modestia*.

*T* — as in English, except in the last instance and before *H* where it is silent : *Thomas* = Tomas, *Thesaurus* = Tesaurus etc.

*X* — in most cases has the same sound as in English. But *XC* before *e*, *ae*, *ce*, *i* and *y* must be carefully noticed. It is equal to *K* plus *SC*. We have noted above that the soft combination *SC* when followed by the soft vowels *e*, *ae*, *oe*, *i* and *y*, is pronounced *sh*; putting these together we have *K-sh*. A notable and often mispronounced example is *Excelsis* properly Ek-shel-sees. Also *Excessus* = Ek-shess-oos.

*X* — is slightly softened when it comes between two vowels : *Exercitus* = Eg-zer-chee-toos.

*XC* — when followed by the hard vowels *a*, *o*, and *u*, has the normal sound : *Excussorum* = Eks-coos-so-room.

*Y* — see vowels.

*Z* — pronounced *dz*. Example : *Zizania* = dzi-dza-ni-a.

The rest of the Consonants : *B*, *D*, *F*, *K*, *L*, *M*, *N*, *P*, *Q*, *V*, are pronounced as in English.

*Double Consonants* : both must be clearly articulated. Examples : *Bello* = Bel-lo; *Altissimus* = Al-tis-si-mus; *Piissime* = Pi-is-si-me.

In the pronunciation and singing of a word, never take a breath before a fresh syllable of a word.

In singing, the vowels should appropriate the value of the notes assigned to them, as far as possible; the consonants must only occupy as much time as is necessary for their clear articulation. No matter how many notes are assigned to a syllable, every one must be sung on the vowel, and the vowel must not undergo any alteration because of the consonants in the course of a long passage.

In long words like om-ni-po-ten-tem, mi-se-ri-cor-dia, and all dactyls, care must be taken to pronounce every syllable and not to slide over any of them.

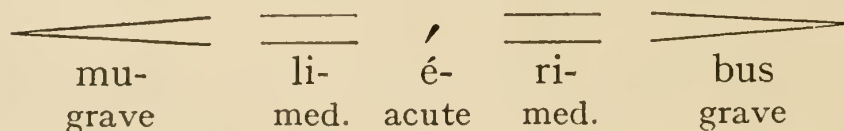
There must never be a "coup de glotte" on attacking, such as *miserehatur*, *Filihus*, etc.

The Greek word, (Κύριε) ἐλεῖσον (eléison) has *four* syllables, not three.

### The nature of the Latin Tonic Accent <sup>(1)</sup>.

With syllables are formed words. But the syllables by themselves are only the material and unformed elements of words. That which constitutes properly the word and gives it its form, its being, its life, is the *accent*.

The accent molds and unites all the syllables of a word, and helps the ear distinguish in discourse one word from the other. Let us review the profound and substantial difference existing between the Classical Latin accent and that of the later centuries : In the Classical Epoch the Latin accent was essentially musical and melodic. The Latins like the Greeks uttered and declaimed the different syllables of the same word with different sounds and intonations. That syllable (there was only one) which occupied the highest place in the word carried the Tonic Accent, called the Acute ὀξεῖα. The others (syllables) which preceded or followed it, and grouped around it, and subordinated to it, carried the Grave Accent. in Greek βαρεῖα. The sign of the Acute Accent was a small oblique line ascending from left to right (/); that of the Grave Accent, on the other hand ascending from right to left (\). Those syllables which were found between the Acute and Grave Accents, were uttered in half voice : thus they had an Accent which was called the Medio (τὸ μεσον)



From this alternation of Acute and Grave syllables was born a simple and natural melody. Thus Cicero would say, "*Est autem in dicendo quidam Cantus obscurior*". — (Orat. XVIII).

The Latin Language, in contrast to the Greek never elevated the final syllable but only the penult and the antepenult. For this reason it was called "baritonale" Language, or a Language with a *descending cadence*.

<sup>(1)</sup> D. Paolo M. Ferretti, "Principii Teorici e Pratrici di Canto Gregoriano". Roma, Desclée e Ci. 1937.