

## Letter (16 January 1906) from the President of the Vatican Commission on Gregorian Chant:

During a visit to the Cardinal Secretary of State, his Eminence spoke to me of a letter that you had addressed to him, which gave him particular satisfaction. Profiting by the occasion, the Cardinal directed me to offer you some explanation on the subject of your doubts and difficulties, which are not only easy to understand but I know that other savants and artists have expressed similar surprise and even anxiety upon the same facts and questions.

The Congregation of Sacred Rites, the guardian of principles, cannot and will not approve any reproduction of the *Vaticana* which is not exact and faithful. Does the edition termed rhythmic, published by Desclée conform sufficiently to the typical edition? Yes, as far as the notes are concerned, putting on one side the special signs that are joined thereto. At first it was thought that this conformity of notes preserved what was essential and that the Concordat of the S. R. C. might be bestowed. But at the time that the Concordat was given, a reservation was imposed by the addition of the words *de Caetero* which was meant to exclude the rhythmic signs. However, in looking more slowly into the matter, it was recognized that in this new edition the occasion was lording it over the principal, and that **these rhythmic signs**, easily confused with the traditional notes, with which they are often incorporated, **would bring about a grave alteration of the melody**. Moreover, these supplementary signs have nothing traditional about them, nor have they any exact relation with the well known Romanian signs of the St. Gall Ms. of which they profess to be a reproduction. Even were these signs (of St. Gall) faithfully represented, in as much as they belonged to a particular school, they would have no right to impose their special ideas on the universal practice in a typical and official edition. The Pontifical Congregation from the outset has come to this resolution.

In this matter there are several things to be safeguarded; the responsibility of the Sacred Congregation; the right of the Catholic tradition, which cannot be of any special school, either ancient or modern; and the claims, no less established, of science which furnish us with views wider and higher. It cannot be a matter of surprise that the Concordat of the Sacred Congregation, bestowed at first through a real misunderstanding, was almost immediately withdrawn, in spite of the reservation of the words *de Caetero* regarding the rhythmic signs. This significant reservation might be enough to protect the Sacred Congregation, but it would not altogether prevent the abuse which might be made of the Concordat that had been bestowed. For this reason the editors of the edition have been informed and warned that they must regard this Concordat as not granted. Out of consideration, and in view of the circumstances of the case, the editors have not been obliged to withdraw the copies already on sale. But it has been well understood and laid down that the future issues must not contain the Concordat. On the other hand, the *motu proprio* leaves the field free for theoretical discussions. But it is clear that the people who are anxious to reproduce graphically their particular theories ought to practice on the normal and traditional notation so as not to alter it.

These few explanations written at command, although the phrases and style are my own, will enable you better to grasp the situation, which is awkward enough on certain sides. But it has been strongly misrepresented and disturbed in the recent controversies of Italian and German papers, where inspiration is not difficult to trace. I have paid little attention to controversies, and have no wish to enter into them; still, you can make any use you may think fit of these necessary explanations.

**I**TS EDITORS LEFT NO STONE turned in their quest for the best versions of these ancient Catholic hymns, combing through centuries of English translations from the sixteenth century to the present day. In the process, they have revealed much little-known material, and some that is published in a hymnal for the first time. [They] navigate this difficult terrain with assurance; indeed, the editors' explanation of the Urbanite reform and its impact on English translators is a model of clarity, and contains information this reviewer has not encountered elsewhere.

—Dr. Aaron James: 2019 review of the *Brébeuf Catholic Hymnal* in the *Journal of the Society for Catholic Liturgy* • <https://ocwatershed.org/hymn/>