

SUPPLEMENTAL BOOKLET

FOR

PRONUNTIATUS
LATINUS

The Pronunciation
of Ecclesiastical and Classical Latin

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Ross Michael McGowan

P.O. Box 1891, Post Falls, ID 83877

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INTRODUCTION

There are two systems of pronunciation for the Latin language which are in common use today, and accepted by Latinists. The work of W. Sidney Allen of Cambridge University, culminating in his book *Vox Latina: The Pronunciation of Classical Latin*, first published in 1965, established with a fair degree of certainty the true pronunciation as done by the educated in Rome's Golden Age, and has since been generally adopted by Classicists. It is often called the Restored Pronunciation.

This pronunciation is contrasted with Ecclesiastical Latin pronunciation – the pronunciation of the Catholic Church. Ecclesiastical pronunciation does not pretend to be authentic in the historical sense of accurately agreeing with what Romans of the Golden age did. Rather, it is the system which has evolved through the practice of the Catholic Church over the ages, especially so far as she has used it in her liturgy. It is authentic in the sense that it is approved by an authoritative tradition so far as it sounds well for the purpose of worship. The chief differences that have arisen are those which favor a more pure and beautiful sound when Latin is sung, and for this reason it is strongly recommended by the Church for use in Her liturgy. Liturgical Latin uses only pure vowel sounds; every vowel has only one sound. It is thus easier to learn. You may hear slight differences in various places or on recordings of Latin Church music (especially by non-Catholic choirs). These are a result of the imposition of personal or national preferences, or an attempt at authenticity, for secular performance purposes, with respect to the way things were done in a particular time and place in history. The method I give was approved and recommended by Pope St. Pius X, Benedict XV and Pius XI, and never since altered.¹ It should be used in actual Catholic liturgy.

Correct pronunciation of Latin is still a disputed matter, and probably always shall be. But, outside of secular 'period' performance, if one pretends to 'authenticity', there are only the two options I give. If one aims for historical literary authenticity, one has to trust experts such as Allen. Such authenticity is based upon an incredibly complex investigation by professional philologists. It demands intimate knowledge of many languages and comparison of vast quantities of ancient manuscripts, to name only a couple of necessary tools. Liturgical authenticity is the only other important kind, in which case the Catholic Church is the source, since she is the originator of Latin liturgy.

¹ See *Papal Legislation on Sacred Music*, Mgr. Robert Hayburn, 1979, pp. 318, 319, 327. The author's source for pronunciation rules is *The Correct Pronunciation of Latin According to the Roman Usage*, Rev. Michael de Angelis, 1937.

LATIN PRONUNCIATION RULES

It is recommended that the student not get 'bogged down' in these rules, which are very detailed. They should be learned as much as possible through listening and practice, and thus absorbed naturally. But they serve as a useful reference if doubts arise. The rules on syllabication and quantity are generally of use only to teachers, musicians, those studying Latin poetry, or others who need to do technical work or composition in the language.

Ecclesiastical Pronunciation:

The alphabet is the same as the English alphabet, except that there is no *w*.

VOWELS

There is no distinction between long and short vowels in Ecclesiastical Latin. Each vowel has only one sound. Be careful not to treat them as diphthongs. All vowels are always pronounced as follows:

- A Pronounced *ah*, as in the word *father*, not as in *cap* or *cape* (*kéheep*).
- E Pronounced *eh*, as in *met*, not as in *prey* (*préhee*) or *procede*.
- I Pronounced *ee*, as in *seat* or *sleet*, not as in *sin*.
- O Pronounced *oh*, as in *clover*, not as in *go* (*góhoo*) or *gone* (*gahn*).
- U Pronounced *oo*, as in *lute*, not as in *cute* (*keéoot*) or *crunch*.
- Y Pronounced the same as the I.

As a general rule, when two or more vowels come together they are treated as separate syllables: *di-é-i*, *fi-li-i*, *e-ó-rum*, *Á-a-ron*. But there are some exceptions, these being diphthongs and digraphs.

Note: In the pronunciation keys given, the *h* is not meant to be aspirated. It only shows that the vowel sound is pure and ends open. It also distinguishes the vowel sounds in a diphthong (e.g. *góhoo*), though in such case does not end open.

DIPHTHONGS

The word *diphthong* comes from the Greek, *diphthongos*, meaning 'two sounds'. A diphthong is two vowel sounds; one gliding into the next within the time of one syllable. For example, the English word *out* has only one syllable, and apparently one vowel sound, but in reality the *ou* contains two sounds (ah and oo) occurring in rapid succession and thus blending together. It matters not how many or few vowels are *written* in the syllable; if it has two sounds it is a diphthong. The *i* in the word *bite* is a diphthong composed of the sounds *ah* and *ee*. In Latin diphthongs, the emphasis belongs to the first sound, which must be pure.

- AU Pronounced as in *out* (*áhoot*), not as in *gaudy* (*gahdy*).

- AY Pronounced as in *aye* (*áhee*), or *aisle*, not as in *slay* (*sléhee*).

The following diphthongs are seldom used:

- EU No English equivalent. Pronounce the pure vowel sounds in quick succession, emphasizing the first. Except for *ceu* and *seu*, this is a diphthong only in a syllable, with no preceding consonant, which begins a word. *In all other cases it breaks into two syllables.*
e.g.: *Éuge* (*Éhoo-jeh*, not *Éh-oo-jeh*, or much less *Eh-óo-jeh*), and *Dé-us* (*Déh-oos*, not *Déhoos*)

- EI Pronounced as in *reign*. Used only in the interjection *héi!*

Note: When sung, diphthongs are sometimes broken up into distinct syllables.

VOWEL DIGRAPHS

The word *digraph* comes from the Greek *digraphein*, meaning 'to write double'. A digraph is two vowels *written* in a syllable, but pronounced with only *one* vowel sound. The English word *ought* is an example; the two vowels *o* and *u* are pronounced as the single vowel *ah*.

- AE Pronounced exactly as the pure vowel E. *cælum* (*chéh-loom*)
- OE Pronounced exactly as the pure vowel E. *prælium* (*préh-lee-oom*)

Note: A digraph may or may not be written in contracted form (as *Æ* or *E*), but is pronounced the same regardless. In the very few cases when the written vowels must be pronounced separately, a dieresis will sometimes be placed over the second: *Michaël* (*Mée-kah-ehl*), *Noë* (*Nóh-eh*)

CONSONANTS

These are pronounced as in English, but note the following points or exceptions:

- C When coming before any E or I sound, is pronounced like the *ch* in *church*.
e.g.: *Cecilia* (*Ceh-chée-lee-ah*), *Cyrillus* (*Chee-réel-loos*)
- CC Coming before an E or I sound, is pronounced *t-ch*.
e.g.: *écce* (*ét-cheh*), *buccéllas* (*boot-chél-lahs*)
- SC Coming before an E or I sound, is pronounced *sh*, as in *shell*.
e.g.: *scit* (*sheet*), *ascéndo* (*ah-shéhn-doh*)

Outside these cases, C is pronounced hard, as when coming before A, H, O, and U.
e.g.: *cápis* (*káh-pees*), *máchina* (*máh-kee-nah*), *scála* (*skáh-lah*), *cor* (*kohr*), *accúso* (*ahk-kóo-soh*), *crédit* (*kréh-deet*)