

Gregorian Or Else....

Letter from Pope Leo IV (r. 847–855) to a certain Honoratus, abbot of a monastery not far from Rome, possibly Farfa.

Honorato abbati. Res una valde incredibilis auribus nostris insonuit, que si veritati coniungitur, magis ius nostre gravitati detrahit, quam perornat, magis tenebrat quam splendet;

id est cum dulcedinem Gregoriani carminis, cum sua, quam in ecclesia traditione canendi legendique ordinavit et tradidit, intantum perosam habeatis, ut in omnibus in huiusmodi ratione non tantum ab hac proxima sede, sed et ab omni pene occidentali aeclesia, et prorsus ab omnibus, qui Latinis vocibus laudem aeterno regi conferunt et sonos canoros persolvunt, dissentiat.

Que cuncte aeclesie cum tanta aviditate et amore arduo predictam tradicionem Gregorii susceperunt ut, cum ex integro recepissent, tantum eis idem est placabilis, ut adhuc magis de ipsa apud nos non desinant querere, existimantes amplius de illis apud nos remansisse.

Qui plane sanctissimus papa Gregorius adeo Dei cultor et inclitus predicator et sapiens pastor fuit et copiosos ad humanam salutem edidit, et sonum iam dictum, quem in ecclesia vel ubique canimus, musicis artibus opera plurima ad excitandos vel commovendos intentius humanos fecerit animos, ita, ut non tantum ecclesiasticos, sed etiam rudes et duros animos artificiose modulationis sonitu ad aeclesias convocaret.

To Abbot Honoratus. A most unbelievable thing has sounded into our ears, something which, if it be true, diminishes our rightful dignity rather than adorns it; darkens it more than makes it resplendent.

This is that you hold the sweetness of Gregorian song, and the things he has arranged and passed on in the ecclesiastical tradition of singing and reading, in such disdain that on this point you are in everyway in disagreement, not just with this [Holy] See which is nearby for you, but from practically the whole Western church, and from all who bring praise and render harmonious sounds in Latin voices to the eternal king.

All these churches have taken up the aforesaid tradition of Gregory with such eagerness and love, and it is so pleasing to them, that even though they received it in full, they do not leave off asking more of it from us, believing that more of them have remained among us.

This most holy Pope Gregory was truly a man of God, a renowned preacher and wise shepherd, and he did very many things for human salvation. It is he who made that sound which we sing in church and everywhere, with musical art, and with much labor, to arouse and move human minds more intently, in such a way that by the sound of artful melody, he would draw to the churches not only the spiritually-minded but even rough and harsh minds.

Item. Deposco, ne ab hac, summo religionis capite, ecclesia, a qua nullus exorbitare vult, vel a tantis prefatis ecclesiis dissentire paciamini, si ex toto pacem et concordiam universalis ecclesie habere diligitis. Nam si, quod non credimus, in tantum doctrinam nostram et tradicionem nostri sancti presulis exorrescitis, ut non per cuncta in cantilenis et lectionibus ritum nostrum sequamini, scitote, quod vos a nostra communione repellemus: quoniam convenit vos ea sequi salubriter, que Romana ecclesia, mater omnium et magistra vestra, non spernit, sed appetit atque insolubiliter tenet.

Idcirco sub excommunicationis interpositione precipimus, ut nequaquam aliter, quam et sanctus papa Gregorius tradidit et nos tenemus, in modulatione et lectione in ecclesiis peragatis, totisque viribus perpetim excolatis et decantetis.

Nam si, quod minime credimus, in alteram vos tradicionem preter hanc, quam vobis presentibus vel futuris peragendam duximus, reducere vel declinare quocumque modo conatus quis fuerit, non solum a sacro corpore et sanguine domini nostri Iesu Christi [alienum] eum fore precipimus, verum in perpetuo anathemate mansurum ob sue presumptionis audaciam nostra immo et omnium antecessorum nostrorum auctoritate sancimus.

I demand, therefore, that you do not allow yourself to remain in disagreement either with this Church, which is the highest head of religion, and from which no one wishes to stray, or with all those Churches of which we have spoken, if you love to live in complete peace and concord with the Universal Church. For if—which we do not believe—your aversion for our instruction and for the tradition of our holy Pontiff is such that you are not willing to conform in every point to our rite, both in chants and lessons, know that we will repel you from our communion; for it is fitting and healthful for you to follow the usages for which the Roman Church, mother of all and mistress of you, shows such great love and invincible attachment.

For this reason we order you, under pain of excommunication, to conform both in singing and reading exclusively to the order instituted in the churches by the Holy Pope Gregory and followed by us, and in future to practise and sing it without fail [and] with the utmost zeal.

For if—which we cannot believe—anyone shall attempt by any means whatever to turn you from the right path, by leading you to a tradition other than that which we have just prescribed to you for the present and the future, we not only order that he be deprived of partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, but in virtue of our proper authority and that of all our predecessors, we decree that in punishment of his audacity and presumption he remain under a perpetual anathema.