

NOTE ON THE ENGLISH ROMAN MISSAL (2011)

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The current situation

1. The 2011 Roman Missal has not been received by the majority of people and priests. There are good reasons for this — linguistic, pastoral, theological and ecumenical.
2. The language of the Missal is consistently and pointlessly unnatural and arcane. The syntax is convoluted, clunky and alien to English usage. There are several pastoral consequences, of which I list three here: exclusion, catechesis and poor theology.
3. Only people of a certain background and a relatively high level of education can make any sense of it. In your ordinary congregation, many are excluded: the young, people whose first language is not English, people whose education stopped after primary school or early in secondary school. Also excluded, as far as the responses go, are people who attend church only for baptisms, weddings and funerals. It has pushed some people finally to stop attending Mass at all.
4. The 2011 translation will never, ever become a vehicle of catechesis. The attempt at “elevated” English is almost never truly expressive and poetic, merely pretentious. As a result, phrases and images will not “lodge” in our imagination to nourish our faith and prayer over time. The old “*lex orandi lex credendi*” will simply not happen, at a spiritual level, with this text.
5. The frequency of merit and meriting in this translation has been noticed by us all. Speaking in a restrained way, this borders on the heretical. The text regularly contradicts our fully signed up agreement with the World Lutheran Federation on justification by faith and grace (1999).
6. There is no point in attempting to repair the 2011 Missal. It is all of a piece — linguistically and theologically — and, as such, should simply be set aside.
7. By way of exception, the Sanctoral cycle in the Irish 2011 Missal is fine — most likely because these prayers were written straight into English by English speakers.

Proposal

8. The 1969/1975 Missal was not perfect. A revision was indeed needed and there is no reason to be particularly attached to that translation. However, the 2011 revision is exactly what was *not needed* for the reasons indicated briefly above.
9. Take a fresh look at the 1998 ICEL translation (it may be downloaded here: www.tarsus.ie/page-15/). This Missal is very complete and rich. It is also in proper English — no small mercy in the context.
10. The 1998 ICEL translation is much, much better than the current 2011 Roman Missal. A glance at the enclosed preface to Eucharistic Prayer II will illustrate what is meant. The three prayers of the Mass (Opening, Offertory and Communion) are all far better than the 2011 text (see enclosed example). The 1998 revision also offers as alternative Opening Prayers the ICEL Collects. These brilliantly capture the teaching and spirit of the Scriptures for each Sunday, according to the three cycles.
11. For the responses, Gloria, Creed etc. the 1998 ICEL text uses the ecumenically shared common texts, an important signal to other Churches. We should revert immediately to that fraternal practice (1975 / 1998). These responses could be the same for all English language Missals.

Ad experimentum

12. At Episcopal Conference level, seek agreement to use the 1998 ICEL text for a three-year experimental period.
13. Print the experimental copy of the Missal *inexpensively* for the period proposed (with copyright permission etc.).
14. Oversee the experiment by means of focus groups, interviews and surveys, under the guidance of the National Centre for Liturgy.
15. Given the completeness of the 1998 ICEL text, it should be possible to proceed without too much delay.

Urgency

16. The Sunday liturgy is vital not only for the faith of the community but also for celebration and evangelisation. The current 2011 Missal impedes all three: faith, celebration *and* evangelisation.
17. Finance is always a significant consideration. But getting the liturgy “right” so that it can “work” again for us all is surely a pastoral priority of the highest order. It is almost too late to undo the damage already done.