

The Missal's image of God

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Introductory

I only met Fr Godfrey Diekmann once. The occasion was my first ever visit to the Secretariat of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. I had been graciously invited as a guest to the Translations and Revisions subcommittee, which was revising the Eucharistic Prayers. When we reached the Preface of the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer, alternatives were sought to the words

lead all men to the joyful vision of your light

to avoid using the manifestly masculine noun 'men' to refer to the whole human race. I ventured to suggest that the original Latin was not concerned with men at all, or indeed with women, since the creation of the human race is narrated after the *Sanctus*. Rather, the Preface is concerned with the creation of the angels. My suggestion was not well received. But Fr Godfrey looked at me across the table and, in his quiet, kindly voice, said 'I believe you're right'. At that point we did not get our way, but now, I am happy to say, we have. The new English translation reads:

yet you, who alone are good, the source of life,
have made all that is,
so that you might fill your creatures with blessings
and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light.

The angels are not explicitly mentioned, but nor are they excluded, as they have been hitherto in English.

Hosts

Room is made for the angels on a much larger scale in the *Sanctus*, where ‘Lord God of Hosts’ replaces ‘Lord God of power and might’. Our current version was produced by the International Consultation on English Texts, an interdenominational group operative in the early 1970s whose texts were adopted by the Catholic bishops. ICET acknowledged that *Sabaoth* literally means ‘heavenly hosts of angels’, but added that ‘some people object to its military metaphor’. These ‘some people’ - whoever they may have been - were thus allowed to dislodge from the heart of the liturgy the iconography of the attendants who throng God’s throne which has been so abundant in East and West. So many examples come to mind. Let me simply take this opportunity offered to me by this occasion of paying tribute to the rich and original contribution to this tradition made at Collegeville by Frank Kacmarcik, OblSB, which has been an inspiration to me for many years. Welcome back, heavenly hosts.

I have begun with the angels, partly because they remind me of Father Godfrey and also because today I want to direct our attention upwards. The liturgical reform that followed the Second Vatican Council had as one of its major themes a rediscovery of the communal dimension of the liturgy, rooted in a rediscovery of the communal dimension of the Church. Developments since then have often seen an emphasis on the horizontal aspect of liturgy at the expense of its vertical aspect. Yet the Council said:

In the earthly liturgy we receive a foretaste of the heavenly one...
with all the hosts and powers of heaven we sing the hymn of glory
to the Lord.

This notion is expressed in the Roman Canon, though our current translation does not convey the meaning of the original:

Almighty God,
we pray that your angel may take this sacrifice
to your altar in heaven.

Then, as we receive from this altar
 the sacred body and blood of your Son,
 let us be filled with every grace and blessing.

In the original there are not two altars: rather, our participation at the earthly altar is a participation at the heavenly one, as the Council said. The new translation reads:

In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God,
 command that these gifts be borne
 by the hands of your holy Angel
 to your altar on high
 in the sight of your divine majesty,
 that all of us who through this participation at the altar receive
 the most holy Body and Blood of your Son
 may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing.

Welcome back, heavenly altar.

Look to heaven

A linguistic symptom of the horizontalisation of liturgy after the Council is the translation of the Latin word *Dominus* as ‘Father’ rather than ‘Lord’. In many places, *Dominus* is simply left untranslated. I assume that this was motivated in part by a feeling that ‘Lord’ belongs to a hierarchically-structured society. The translators of the Roman Canon stated explicitly that they wanted to give their translation a contemporary tone. The society of lords and ladies has all but passed away, even in Merrie England, but children still have mothers and fathers. However, the abundant use of ‘Father’ in the liturgical texts began to backfire as sensitivity to the use of gender-marked terms increased.

Another motivation may have been discomfort with the fact that in the liturgy all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are spoken of and addressed as ‘Lord’. The translators may have feared that hearers of the texts would be confused. The translators of the new version have been similarly concerned, particularly where *Dominus* is used of both Father and Son in close proximity. But there is no way out of this, for the word used so constantly of Christ in the New Testament, *kyrios*, is used equally of God in the Septuagint. When we apply the Divine Name to Christ, we are acknowledging his divinity. The Latin liturgy follows this pattern, beginning many prayers with *Domine*, addressed to the Father, and ending with *Per Dominum*, referring to the Son.

The new version consistently translates *Deus* as ‘God’ and *Dominus* as ‘Lord’. So the Third Eucharistic Prayer, instead of beginning ‘Father, you are holy indeed’, begins:

You are indeed Holy, O Lord,

and continues:

and all you have created
rightly gives you praise,
for through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
by the power and working of the Holy Spirit,
you give life to all things and make them holy...

The reinstatement of this honorific title will give a stronger sense of the majesty of God and of the divinity of Christ, not by means of artificial rhetoric, but simply by using the language of Scripture.

Digneris

The Roman liturgy also shows respect for God by the way in which it makes requests of him. Think for a moment about how we make requests in ordinary life. Sometimes we use a

mere imperative: ‘Close the door!’ But this can often seem peremptory and unpersuasive, so we add elements to soften it: ‘Please close the door’, for instance. Or we turn an imperative into a question: ‘Would you close the door?’ or ‘Would you mind closing the door?’ This device, though extremely common in modern English, is inappropriate for the Roman Liturgy, which, unlike the Psalter, does not ask questions of God. The liturgy often softens its requests by using the word *digneris*, for instance early in the First Eucharistic Prayer, when the Priest currently says over the Gifts:

Bless and approve our offering;
 make it acceptable to you,
 an offering in spirit and in truth

Early in the recent translation process, attempting to do full justice to the Latin, including *digneris*, the Commission proposed that these lines be translated:

We pray, O God,
 deign to make this offering in every way
 blessed, consecrated, approved, spiritual, and acceptable...

‘Deign’ was a natural choice to translate *digneris*, being etymologically descended from *dignor*, but it aroused a storm of protest. People pointed out that in modern English we only use ‘deign’ ironically, as in ‘Would you deign to close the door?’ The unacceptability of ‘deign’ posed a problem for the translators, *digneris* being so common in the Missal. The search for an alternative led them to experiment with ‘please’, for instance:

We pray, O God,
 please make this offering in every way
 blessed...

This too was rejected, because it was found to be too colloquial. The episode illustrates how restricted is the register of acceptable liturgical language. Those who claim that liturgy should follow the patterns of ordinary speech overlook the existence of a silent consensus that liturgical language should have a degree of formality. This became clear in the 1980s when ICEL began the process of preparing a new English Missal. A survey was conducted, and most respondents said they would prefer a more elevated and complex style than that of the current texts. ICEL's translators, in responding to these requests, have had to tread a narrow path in search of an acceptable style. Liturgical translation is an exercise in catholicity, an attempt to forge a version around which the Church can unite.

The search for a translation of *digneris* continued. Often 'be pleased to' was chosen, as in

Be pleased to confirm in faith and charity
your pilgrim Church on earth

in the Third Eucharistic Prayer, which replaces the bald imperative of the current text

:

Strengthen in faith and love.

Occasionally, 'graciously' has been used, as in the Epiclesis of the Third Eucharistic Prayer. The two short sentences of the current version:

And so, Father, we bring you these gifts.

We ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit.

will be replaced by a single sentence:

Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you:

by the same Spirit graciously make holy

these gifts we have brought to you for consecration

To some these expressions will seem artificial and unnecessary. Others attach great importance to the translation of every word in the Latin. Happily, over the course of time, liturgical texts become hallowed by use despite their deficiencies, as is clear from the love that many feel for our current texts. For that reason, I am not unduly anxious about the initial reception of the new texts: let us wait to see how they are being used after a year or two.

Dignatus

I hope you will not think that ICEL's search for new ways of addressing God have produced a liturgy of grovel. The Missal addresses God with an awareness not only of his might but of his love. Let us look again at the Latin word *dignor*. In the liturgy we not only ask God to deign to do things, but we recall that he has already deigned. Currently, we speak of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

These words very probably came from the pen of Pope Saint Leo the Great. The Latin is *dignatus est*, literally 'deigned', and I have to admit that ICEL did offer as a translation of this clause

who deigned to share in our humanity.

Eventually it was felt that the current translation was adequate, and it has not been changed. Moreover, it has been inserted into the Collect for Christmas Day which had omitted it. When the new Missal comes, instead of saying

Your Son shared our weakness

we shall say that Christ

humbled himself to share in our humanity

which is much closer to the language and thought of Saint Leo.

But ‘humbled himself’ will not do on every occasion as a translation of *dignatus est*. For instance, ICEL’s new version of the Collect for Saturday in the Fifth Week of Easter begins:

Almighty eternal God,
 who have been pleased to confer on us heavenly life
 through our rebirth in Baptism...¹

It would not have made sense to speak here of God ‘humbling himself’ to give us heavenly life, since Baptism is more a manifestation of his power than of his humility. Occasionally other ways of translating *dignatus* have been used, such as one in a blessing from the Rite of Marriage, which speaks of

...the Lord Jesus,
 who graced the marriage at Cana by his presence.

[Let me mention at this point that, although the Order of Mass has reached its final form and been approved by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, that is not true of the rest of the Missal. ICEL has finished its work, which awaits final confirmation by some Conferences of Bishops and by the Congregation. So when I speak of a new text that does not form part of the Order of Mass, I am talking about a provisional text that may be changed before it comes into use. My purpose in discussing these texts is to show you some of the issues the translators have had to face, and the kind of book that the Roman Missal is. Hitherto, I have been making contrasts with the texts currently in use. From now on, I shall be doing this less, as I have been asked to speak on the riches of the new texts, rather than the defects of the current ones. But you will find that this script of this talk gives the current versions of the texts I discuss, so that those who wish can make such comparisons.]

The Missal’s use of *dignor* shows how, as we seek God’s favours, reminding ourselves and him of the favours he has already shown. Similarly, we speak of God as *benignus*, *pious*, *placatus* and *propitiatus*. Each of these divine epithets offers a challenge to the translator. I shall

speak about each of them briefly, hoping thus to build up a picture of God as he is envisioned in the euchology of the Roman tradition.

Benignus

The Latin *benignus* has given us the English ‘benign’ and ‘benignity’. Its most obvious translation is ‘kind’. In the liturgy it is most often used adverbially, so the Collect for Wednesday of the Third Week in Lent begins:

Pour your grace kindly into our hearts, we pray, O Lord . . .²

Note that we say ‘Pour your grace kindly’, not ‘Kindly pour your grace’. Adverbs like ‘kindly’, when placed at the beginning of their sentence, express the speaker’s assessment of the action concerned: so if we said ‘Kindly pour your grace’ we would mean that, if God pours his grace into our hearts, we shall regard him as kind. There can be a peremptory or ironical note in the request, as in ‘kindly close the door’. We do not want that note in prayer, so we are careful not to put ‘kindly’ at the beginning of sentences. But this restriction on word-order has led the translators to choose often a different mode of expression: ‘in your kindness’. An example is the Prayer over the Offerings for the week that is just past:

Look with favor on our supplications, Lord,
and in your kindness accept these offerings of your servants,³

God is not kind at some times and unkind at others: the liturgy’s use of *benignus* appeals to God’s unfailing kindness.

Pius and pietas

Frequently, liturgical prayer appeals to God’s *pietas*. This word has a rich history. In classical literature, Aeneas is known as *pius* because he rescued his father from the burning city of Troy: one who faithfully observes the obligations of family life, or of other human ties, is

pius, has *pietas*. We call the statue of the Blessed Virgin holding her dead son the *Pietà* because she is demonstrating that virtue. The popular medieval image of the ‘pelican in her piety’ is so called because the mother bird is wounding herself to feed her children. *Pietas* when shown to the vulnerable involves pity, so the Latin word *pietas* has given both ‘piety’ and ‘pity’ to the English language. It is clear that no one word will suffice to translate *pietas* on every occurrence. The new translation proposes: compassion, mercy, faithfulness, love, faithful love, loving mercy, loving-kindness, pity, loyalty, care and constancy.

Pius is the Latin word being translated when the new version refers to the ‘motherly intercession’ of the Blessed Virgin⁴, the ‘motherly tears’ of Saint Monica⁵, the ‘fatherly devotion’ of Saint Joseph⁶ and the ‘fatherly care’ of God himself⁷.

The Missal attributes *pietas* not only to God the Father, but to Jesus in relation to us. Before receiving Holy Communion, the Priest may pray to Christ that receiving his Body and Blood will

through your loving mercy
be for me protection in mind and body,⁸

The current version has no equivalent for *pietas* here.

Propitiatio and placatio

The Missal also speaks of ‘propitiation’ in regard to God. This word forced the translators to think very hard. Do we ask God to be propitiated at Mass? Or to be propitiated *by* the celebration of Mass? This would seem to imply an image of an angry God that many regard as undesirable. But if that is what is found in the Missal, that is what must be translated. Should we, for instance, on Christmas Eve, beg God to be propitiated and to grant us his peace? Fortunately, whereas in English ‘propitiation’ is something we might do, or try to do, to a god, in Latin it is a quality that belongs permanently to God himself. God has been propitiated, and we

appeal to what one prayer calls his ‘perpetual propitiation’. Let me assure you that the translators did not choose that clumsy phrase, but rather ‘unceasing mercy’⁹.

Something similar can be said about the idea of placating God. The Missal often applies *placatus* to God, and the Prayer over the Offerings for Christmas Day assures us that because of the Incarnation, God is perfectly placated.¹⁰ For these concepts, the translators have used the words ‘reconciliation’ and ‘atonement’. For instance, last week in the Collect we were praying that we might know God’s ‘forgiveness in our lives’. The new version renders the Latin more precisely with:

that we may know what your atonement has accomplished.

Propitiatio here refers not only to God’s forgiveness, but to its source in the atoning death of Christ.

Both the prayers that I have cited here are from the Veronese Sacramentary, our earliest substantial source of evidence for the Roman eucharological tradition. Their concepts of propitiation and placation are harmonious with the explanation given by the Catechism of the Church’s doctrine that the sacraments act *ex opere operato*: that they act by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all.

Managing

Now I wish to shift focus, from looking at God in himself to looking at his relationship with us. In the liturgy, we constantly ask God to do something, so that something else can happen. For instance, when a Priest proclaims the Gospel, he says beforehand:

Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God,
that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.

The second part of this prayer, the purpose clause, which remains unchanged from the current version, illustrates how the diction of the liturgy is different from that of everyday life. A more normal form of expression would be:

so that I can proclaim your holy Gospel worthily.

But the use of plain ‘that’ for ‘so that’ and the unusual position of ‘worthily’ have been accepted for forty years. I want to draw your attention particularly to the use of ‘may’ rather than ‘can’. The two words are often interchangeable in Modern English, although ‘may’ is perceived as more formal than ‘can’: this fact has won ‘may’ its place in the liturgy. Had we used ‘can’ here or elsewhere, I think it would have been rejected, like ‘please’ or ‘deign’.

There are far more purpose-clauses in the new translation than in the current one, which tended to avoid subordination. For instance, today’s Post-Communion is three sentences:

Lord,
 help us with your kindness.
 Make us strong through the Eucharist.
 May we put into action
 the saving mystery we celebrate.

In the new translation it is one:

With unfailing help, O Lord, gently uphold
 those you refresh with your Sacraments,
 that we may obtain the effect of redemption
 both in the mysteries and in our manner of life.

Often the liturgy is not content with praying that we may do something: it asks that we may *be able to* do something. The Latin word most commonly used for this in the Missal is *valeo*. The prayer before the Gospel is a case in point: literally, it prays that ‘I may be able to

proclaim your holy Gospel worthily'. It is hard to see that 'be able to' adds anything here: if God cleanses my heart and my lips so that I can proclaim the Gospel, I am unlikely to decide not to proclaim it after all. But in many cases it does add something. Let me return to the Lenten Collect I discussed earlier:

Pour your grace kindly into our hearts, we pray, O Lord...

It continues with a purpose-clause:

that we may be constantly drawn back from human excesses

and continues with another one:

and be able, through your generosity,
to cling to your heavenly commandments.¹¹

There is a sense here of the great effort needed to cling to God's commandments, and of our need for his strength so that we can do so. In Lent, this emphasis on human weakness and divine strength is particularly appropriate. Elsewhere, *valeamus* is translated with 'have strength to' and 'succeed in'. In fact, it has a natural English translation, which is 'manage', as in 'I managed to close the door', but it is of the wrong register for the Liturgy. I do not think that we can pray to God at Mass:

that we may manage to cling to your heavenly commandments.

God and possibility

For God, everything is possible. So it is surprising to find in the Missal a prayer that, literally translated, would contain these words:

O God... increase your grace within us,
so that you may make those who run towards your promises
sharers in the good things of heaven.

(This is the Collect for next Sunday, the 26th *Per Annum*). There are many such prayers, of ancient provenance, that seem to ask God to do one thing in order that he may be able to do another. We are faced here, I think, with a peculiarity of liturgical syntax. Latin text-books teach us to distinguish clauses of purpose from clauses of result. But in God there is no distinction between purpose and result: what he wills, he does. And this affects his syntax. Next week's Collect means something more like:

O God...increase your grace within us,
with the result that you will make those who run towards your
promises
sharers in the good things of heaven.

In fact, the new translation will be:

O God . . . increase your grace within us,
and so make those who run towards your promises
sharers in the good things of heaven.¹²

It is interesting to note that Thomas Cranmer, or whoever was responsible for the texts in the sixteenth-century Anglican Book of Common Prayer, took a similar view when faced with texts like this. He translated the latter part of this prayer:

Geve unto us abundantly thy grace, that we, running to thy
promises, may be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure;

Cranmer makes us, rather than God, the subject of 'may'.

The key point I am making is that, because of God's omnipotence, we do not use the word 'may' with God as its subject. Often, 'will' takes its place:

We offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of atonement,
that in your mercy

you will both absolve our offenses
and guide our wavering hearts.¹³

If you ever have responsibility for composing the Prayer of the Faithful, you may wish to take note of this.

Merit

Probably the most serious objection to the texts currently in use is that they overestimate human capabilities and underplay our need for God's help, that is, that they have a Pelagian tendency. The Collect for the Thirty-First Sunday of the Year, first found in the Veronese Sacramentary, reminds us that it is through God's unfailing kindness that we are able to serve him. In the new translation it begins:

Almighty and merciful God,
whose gift it is
that your faithful offer you fitting and praiseworthy service...¹⁴

Another prayer reminds us that
we have no merits to plead our cause.¹⁵

This truth requires of translators great care in handling the concept of merit. Though in classical Latin, the verb *mereor* clearly means 'to deserve', it can rarely be translated in that way in Christian texts. Some have argued that the first-person plural subjunctive *mereamur*, 'that we may merit', so common in the Orations, is only there to facilitate metrical patterns required by Roman style. However, in *Liturgiam authenticam* 55 it was observed that some words that seem to have found their way into the text for metrical reasons in fact have a theological significance, and this is certainly true of *mereor*. How should we translate it? Let me take an example.

In the Post-Communion prayer of the Midnight Mass of Christmas we shall pray:

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God,
 that we who find joy in celebrating
 the Nativity of our Redeemer
 may through an honorable way of life
 become worthy of union with him.¹⁶

The translators avoided ‘be worthy’ because they wanted to avoid the impression that an honourable way of life would guarantee us an entry-ticket into heaven. ‘Deserve’ would be open to the same objection. ‘Earn’ would be even worse. ‘Become worthy’ implies a process of growth in grace that is not necessarily complete at the end of an earthly life.

In other cases, ‘be worthy’ seemed acceptable, for instance the Collect for Advent Sunday:

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
 that your faithful may resolve
 to run forth with righteous deeds,
 to meet your Christ who is coming,
 so that, gathered at his right hand,
 they may be worthy to possess the heavenly Kingdom.¹⁷

Here, the worthiness of the faithful does not seem to be directly linked to their activities: it is clear that any worthiness of theirs is the gift of God. That is the crucial point.

In some places ‘be found worthy’ has been used, indicating that it is for God to judge whether we are worthy or not. For instance, the Collect for Tuesday in Holy Week:

Almighty everlasting God,
 grant us so to celebrate

the Sacraments of the Lord's Passion,
that we may be found worthy to receive pardon.¹⁸

In others, 'merit' has been used as a verb:

grant, we pray, that through him
whom outwardly we acknowledge to be like us,
we may merit to be inwardly changed.¹⁹

In some texts, there is no one word that explicitly translates *mereamur*, for instance, the Prayer over the Offerings on Christmas Eve:

Receive with kindness, Lord,
the gifts offered to you,
that we may be cleansed of sin by receiving them
and be ready with pure hearts
to greet the glorious coming of your Son.²⁰

Nothing would be gained, I think, by 'and be worthy to be ready' or 'and merit to be ready', but the context as a whole indicates that what we pray for is a gift of God.

There is in fact a natural translation of *mereor* that I wish we had been able to use, but had to reject because it was felt to be too colloquial. I am thinking of the usage 'get to', as in 'I got to have a beer with the President'. Similarly, we could pray that 'we may get to possess the heavenly kingdom' if only the market would buy it.

The Saints

A large part of the Missal is given over to the commemoration of the Saints, and reference is constantly made to their intercession. This often takes the form of the Latin ablative

absolute construction, which can sound unnatural in English. For instance, we would not want to say, on the Memorial of a Saint,

We humbly ask you, almighty God,
that, Saint John interceding,
you will multiply your gifts among us.

But what should we say? There has been a certain amount of pressure to adopt the phrase ‘through the intercession of Saint John’ in instances like this. But the Commission has resisted, because ‘through’ is the normal English translation of the Latin preposition *per*, which is very common in the Missal. *Per* comes at the end of nearly every oration in *Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum* or similar forms. But *per* is not used in connection with the intercession of the Saints, except in one recently-written prayer, whose author we may suppose to have been unfamiliar with the tradition. This restriction seems to point to the unique mediation of Christ. Consequently, the translation often asks God to grant something *at* the intercession of a saint, that is, in response to it.

This is not to deny that God does things by means of the saints’ intercession. Indeed, more than one prayer in the Veronese Sacramentary speaks of God guarding his people with it, as if were a sword. But we do not, in the Roman Rite, ask God to do things through their intercession, and this pattern ensures that we make all our prayers through Christ, through whom the Father gives us all good things. This point seemed particularly important because the role of the Saints has been such a hot topic ecumenically in the West.

Looking forward

I said at the beginning that Vatican II reminded us to look around us as well as upwards during the Liturgy. It also taught us to look forwards. The Council’s reaffirmation of the eschatological dimension of Christianity was well followed up in the liturgical reform. In Christian iconography up to the time of the Council of Trent, the Last Judgment was a familiar

theme. For the most part, God was represented as an impassive figure, unconcerned by the fate of those who rise to his right and fall to his left. This is not the picture we find in the Missal. God himself is involved in our journey, leading us towards salvation. This theme is particularly prominent in the Post-Communion prayers. Here is one example, taken from the Veronese Sacramentary. Like many of the prayers with this theme, it was not in the Missal before the Council:

Filled with the saving gift
we beg your mercy, Lord,
that by this same Sacrament
with which you nourish us in the present age
you will make us partakers of life unending.

Notice the word order. The ordinary order would be:

that you will make us partakers of unending life
by this same Sacrament
with which you nourish us in the present age.

But the Latin of this and similar prayers tends to end on a high note, not with the adverbial phrase, but with the clause on which it depends. The Commission has decided to follow the Latin word-order, ending on an eschatological high. In the current Missal, the Prayers after Communion often seem to fall rather flat, and it is hoped that the new word-order will remedy this. It is not always wrong to translate the Latin word for word, despite what many critics of *Liturgiam authenticam* have said: sometimes this approach reveals aspects of the original that would otherwise remain hidden.

Conclusion

In the years during which this new translation has been in preparation, much public comment on it has, to my mind, been disappointingly superficial, creating controversy over small points without getting to the heart of the matter. The situation was similar forty years ago, when the post-conciliar Missal first came into use. Pope Paul VI, hearing talk of the ‘old mass’ and the ‘new mass’, urged us to talk simply about ‘the mass’, because what the Missal offers us belongs to the heritage of the Church, distilled across the ages. Some of what it contains is over sixteen centuries old.

The value of these ancient prayers was well expressed by a monk of Mont-César in Belgium, Dom Placide Bruylants, a great liturgical scholar, who was chair of the Committee that revised the Prefaces and Orations of the Mass until his early death in 1966. The ancient prayers of the Mass, he said, ‘express in a classic manner what is most fundamental in our attitude towards God’. They teach us to enter by prayer into the mystery of God, and more especially into the mystery of God’s redemptive love.

The work of ICEL has been less like painting a new picture, and more like cleaning an old one. Re-translating the Missal is like cleaning the Sistine Chapel: the work enables us to see riches that have previously been hidden. My hope for the English translation of the Missal that will soon come into use is that it will enable its users to discover the treasury of the Roman tradition of prayer, and thus to be led into the mystery of God’s redeeming love.

Notes

¹ 1973: Loving Father, / through our rebirth in Baptism / you give us your life . . .

² 1973: Merciful Father, / fill our hearts with your love . . .

³ 1973: Lord, hear the prayers of your people / and receive our gifts.

⁴ 1973: prayers

⁵ 1973: tears

⁶ 1973: care

⁷ 1973: loving help

⁸ 1973: Let it not bring me condemnation, / but health in mind and body.

⁹ 1973: 'unfailing love'

Cranmer's version has 'perpetual mercy'.

¹⁰ 1973: Almighty God, / the saving work of Christ / made our peace with you.

¹¹ 1973: . . . and keep us faithful to the Gospel of Christ. / Give us the grace to rise above our human weakness.

¹² 1973: Father, / you show your almighty power / in your mercy and forgiveness. / Continue to fill us with your gifts of love. / Help us to hurry toward the eternal life you promise / and come to share in the joys of your kingdom.

¹³ 1973: Merciful Lord, / we offer this gift of reconciliation / so that you will forgive our sins / and guide our wayward hearts.

¹⁴ 1973: God of power and mercy, / only with your help / can we offer you fitting service and praise.

¹⁵ 1973: Lord, / we are nothing without you.

¹⁶ 1973: God our Father, / we rejoice in the birth of our Saviour. / May we share his life completely / by living as he taught.

¹⁷ 1973: All-powerful God, / increase our strength of will for doing good / that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming / and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven . . .

¹⁸ 1973: Father / may we receive your forgiveness and mercy / as we celebrate the passion and death of the Lord.

¹⁹ 1973: Father, / your Son became like us / when he revealed himself in our nature: / help us to become more like him . . .

²⁰ 1973: Father, / accept the gifts we offer. / By our sharing in this Eucharist free us from sin / and help us to look forward in faith / to the glorious coming of your Son.