

Tridentine Community News

April 18, 2010

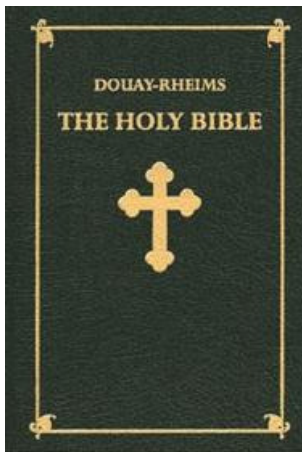
Beyond the New English Ordinary Form Missal: Other Issues With Approved Translations – Part 1

Much attention is being given in the Catholic media to the forthcoming new English translation of the Ordinary Form of Holy Mass. This column has addressed the topic as well. Overall, the new translation is a vast improvement from the previous relatively inaccurate translation that was rushed into print shortly after the promulgation of the Novus Ordo in 1970.

The International Commission on English in the Liturgy, which is working with the Vatican to prepare the new Missal, is also responsible for the English translations of the Ordinary Form Roman Ritual (Book of Blessings), Pontifical, Ceremonial of Bishops, and Liturgy of the Hours. The texts it prepares are only authorized for use after the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship reviews them, suggests or requires changes, and finally approves them. ICEL then tightly enforces copyrights on the resulting texts, requiring royalties to be paid by any publisher seeking to use them.

Interestingly, the Church does not have a comparable process in place for vernacular translations of other liturgies, prayers, and rituals. The first and most pertinent example to consider is the Extraordinary Form of the Mass. The Tridentine Mass cannot be celebrated in the vernacular, but hand missals and worship aids providing English translations are essential in helping worshippers follow the Mass. However, there is no formal regulation over those translations. Each hand missal is slightly different from the next. Let us examine just where today's translations come from.

The Readings



The readings are the most straightforward part. Virtually all hand missals and English readings books for use in the pulpit use texts from Bishop Richard Challoner's 1752 revision of the 1609 Douay-Rheims Bible. Catholics commonly think of the Douay-Rheims as the "thee & thou" Bible. Sentences employing these hierarchical pronouns sound noticeably different from the modern English found in Ordinary Form Mass readings. They reflect an understanding that the members of the Holy Trinity exist

at a higher plane than mankind and thus should be addressed in a most formal manner. The Douay was the de facto standard Bible used by English speaking Catholics from 1609 to 1965. Countless prayer books from that era contain supplicative, reverent prayers obviously inspired by the Douay's hierarchical language.

The transitional 1965 Missal incorporated readings from the 1961 Confraternity Bible, an effort to blend the substance of the Douay-Rheims with more modern English phrasings and non-hierarchical pronouns.

Readings in Ordinary Form Masses are taken from the 1970 (and constantly under revision since) New American Bible in the U.S., and the 1989 (with 2008 revisions) New Revised Standard Version Bible in Canada. To the average person in the pew, the Confraternity Bible does not sound all that different from the NAB or NRSV, and thus it is mostly an historical curiosity today.

The 2007 Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* allows for any authorized translation to be used for the readings. Nowadays in the English-speaking world, what constitutes an authorized translation? The simplest and safest answer is, if we are to stick with rubrics from 1962 as the Motu Proprio dictates, we should stick with the Douay Rheims. It was unquestionably the dominant English Catholic Bible in 1962, and its hierarchical language is consistent with the spirit of demarcation between the sacred and secular evident in so many aspects of the Tridentine Mass. The Confraternity, NAB, and NRSV versions each come from a later era and contain more casual wording inconsistent with the Extraordinary Form ethos.

The Antiphons, Graduals, and Orations

Most, but not all, of the Antiphons (Introit, Offertory, Communion) and Graduals are taken from the Bible. The English versions of those of biblical origin are thus also generally taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

The non-Biblical Antiphons and Graduals, and the Orations (Collect, Secret, and Postcommunion) present a challenge: Without an authoritative English translation, there is no single source one can go to for a translation. As a result, hand missals differ in their translations of the same texts. For example, for the Second Sunday After Easter, in the Marian Missal (this author's preferred hand missal), the Collect reads:

O God, Who by the humility of Thy Son didst lift up a fallen world, grant unending happiness to Thy faithful: that those whom Thou hast snatched from the perils of endless death, Thou mayest cause to rejoice in everlasting joys. Through the same Lord.

The same Collect in the St. Andrew Missal reads:

O God, who by the humility of Thy Son hast raised up a fallen world, grant to Thy faithful people abiding joy; that those whom Thou hast delivered from the perils of eternal death, Thou mayest cause to enjoy endless happiness. Through the same Lord.

Two hand missals that both use the same Douay-Rheims English text for biblical passages thus use similar, yet different, Douay-ish English for the non-biblical texts. Thees and thous, "we beseech thee", "graciously hear our prayers", and so forth, help form continuity with the Douay texts. We don't imagine that an ICEL-like committee will form to standardize these texts. After all, *these translations are not liturgical*. They will never be used in the Mass. They are merely aids for the worshipper to understand the Latin that is used liturgically. Plus, there is no particular need to fix translations that are quite accurate to begin with.