

## **Interview one: Why a new translation?**

The new English translation of the new Roman Missal will soon be the way that most English-speaking Catholics around the world celebrate the Eucharist. Already, though, voices of dissent are criticizing and hoping to stop the new translation. One website claims over 20,000 signatures to its petition “What If We Just Said Wait?” in regard to the implementation of the new translation.

Recently, I spoke with Monsignor James P. Moroney, one of the foremost authorities on the new English translation of the revised Roman Missal. Here is the first part of our interview focusing on the need for a new translation, how the translation was prepared, and who is responsible for the Missal we will soon be using.

**Monsignor Moroney, can you tell readers a bit about your background, experience and (even) expertise when it comes to the Roman Missal?** While I am, at heart, a parish priest, I hold pontifical degrees in liturgy and have spent most of my priestly life working in this field, whether as Chairman of the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, Executive Director of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, a consultant to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, or the Executive Secretary of the Vox Clara Committee. In each of these capacities I have been involved in one or another aspects of the Roman Missal.

**Briefly, what is the Roman Missal?** The Roman Missal is that liturgical book which contains the rites, prayers, and chants which we use for the celebration of the Mass.

**You’ve authored a DVD program called “A New Translation for a New Roman Missal.” Can you explain the difference between the new Roman Missal and the new English translation?** In 2001, the Holy See issued the third edition of the Latin *Missale Romanum* for the whole Roman Catholic Church. Vernacular editions, in each of the languages Catholics use throughout the world, were subsequently developed by the bishops from throughout the world, including the *Misal Romano* (the Spanish translation) and the Roman Missal (the English version).

**Some people say (and I agree) that English is the “new Latin,” that is, it has become the common international means of communication. Does this have any bearing on why there is just one new English translation of the Roman Missal rather than many national English versions: i.e., one for Americans, another for South Africans, another for Indians and Pakistanis, even one for British-English speakers?** In the age of instant communication English has certainly become more standardized because what I post, tweet, or blog in Massachusetts is quickly read and responded to by folks in India, Scotland, and South Africa. As a result, the differences between English spoken in various parts of the world is not so great as to require different translations of liturgical texts. This relative universality is not true for all languages, however, most notably Spanish, as there are seven different translations of the Roman Missal for the Spanish-speaking world.

**In his instruction *Liturgiam authenticam*, what criticism did Pope John Paul II level against some liturgical translations published after Vatican II? Was he thinking especially of the English translation?** Through the instruction *Liturgiam authenticam*, the Holy Father made clear his concern that “translations of liturgical texts in various localities stand in need of improvement through correction or through a new draft” (LA, no. 6). This was particularly true for English because of the enormous influence which our language has on the world. At the same time it should be made clear that the problems were due to an evolving realization that certain theories of translation which were popular forty years ago have been improved and developed.

**What kind of new translations did John Paul II call for? What is wrong with the English translation we’ve been using for the last forty years?** *Liturgiam authenticam* called for a translation which was more precise and thus gave the listener a more authentic sense of the original Latin text. Such a translation was to be “without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses” (LA, no. 20).

**How come it has taken fifteen years to get this new English translation (and why do we still not have it)?** Because the celebration of the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the entire Christian life, there are few more important tasks than the preparation of translations which are, at the same time, beautiful, precise, and proclaimable. Such a task involved the work of hundreds of bishops, theologians, liturgists, Biblical scholars, pastors, poets, musicians and specialists in both liturgical Latin and English literature. The fruits of such an enormous undertaking will soon be evident to the Church in the English-speaking world.

**Can you briefly define the “players” in the new translation: ICEL, Vox Clara, and the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments?** The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council assigned the task of the translation of liturgical texts to the Conferences of Bishops, with the confirmation of the Holy See. The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) is a mixed commission of the eleven major English-speaking conferences of bishops which is charged with the development of translations. Once these have been emended by the bishops of each conference, they are submitted for the confirmation of the Holy See. The Vox Clara committee simply advises the Holy See in regard to its confirmation of the texts which have been approved by the Bishops. The Congregation for Divine Worship, among other duties, approves translations of liturgical books, acting in the Pope’s name.

**The next interview will focus on the content of the new English translation.**

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**About Monsignor Moroney:** *Rev. Msgr. James P. Moroney is one of the foremost authorities on the new English translation of the revised Roman Missal. Msgr. Moroney was Executive Director of the USCCB Secretariat for the Liturgy from 1996 to 2007. Pope John Paul II appointed him as a consultor to the Congregation for Divine Worship*

*and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and Pope Benedict XVI reappointed him as a consultor to the Congregation, wherein he also serves as Executive Secretary to the Vox Clara committee which advises the Holy See in regard to its confirmation of the texts which have been approved by the Bishops. Msgr. Moroney is a frequent lecturer on liturgical matters, having addressed more than 17,000 priests and deacons in recent years at the invitation of close to one hundred bishops.*