LETTERS

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All correspondence, including email, must give a full postal address and contact telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to shorten letters.

Judgement on the Missal

Michael G. Ryan ("Time to say 'yes'", 3 September) thinks that the Missal will in time be judged deficient by people in the pew, and that there will then be such massive protest that the Vatican authorities will back down and allow a revision of the revision.

My experience in South Africa, where many of the changes were implemented prematurely, is that in no time people slip into passivity and indifference, and once again recite the prayers by rote. Changes in the translation have simply not produced a deeper level of participation or devotion. To suggest so is a myth. Sure, we are supposed to use the change as an opportunity for catechesis. But once we have catechised people that "for many" still means "for all", that "consubstantial" means "of one being", and so on, the celebration of Mass will once again become routine.

Time and again, what I hear from people is that it is not the words or translation used that draws them into a deeper participation in the Eucharist, but the love, devotion, understanding, faith and spirituality of the presider himself, and, of course, that of other ministers in the celebration.

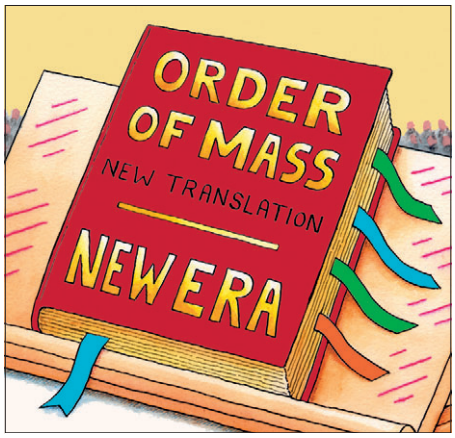
No amount of rationalising of the new translation, or of furthering the myth that it has improved (in South Africa) or will improve (in the rest of the English-speaking world) people's devotion to the Mass, can substitute for a liturgy well prepared and prayerfully executed, whatever words the celebrant may use.

(Fr) Larry Kaufmann CSsR
Johannesburg, South Africa

The post-Vatican II revisions of liturgies brought about some sharing of liturgical texts between some of the major English-speaking Christian denominations. The work of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy helped to draw us closer together in mutual understanding of our unity in Christ through baptism. We might remain unable to share in Holy Communion, but we were able to recite the Greeting, the Gloria, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the affirmation of Christ's salvific actions, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ has come again". If we happened to attend worship services in another denominational church, we often found ourselves "at home".

The new Mass, which many of us heard for the first time last Sunday, separates us again. The "Confiteor" emphasises grievous human sin, rather than the joy of redemption through Christ's Resurrection life into which we enter at baptism. The text of the Creed contains alterations which encourage us to think of ourselves as individuals rather than as the body of Christ.

The above affirmation in the words of consecration are now abolished in the Catholic Mass. The references to our souls being healed at Holy Communion rather than the whole of us entering into eternal life and being held in the abundance of Christ's Resurrection life in anticipation of our resurrection after death, and the Second Coming, suggests a measure of dualism between body and soul that seems to deny that we can begin to live in resurrection grace during our enfleshment in our bodies.



An obstacle to unity or an aid to understanding?

I am a Catholic who lived and worked as an Anglican deaconess, then as a priest for many years. I am sad to see long years of ecumenical work on the part of many people from all denominations treated in this way at this time when Christians could be drawing closer to one another in witness to our unity in Christ.

Una Kroll
Bury, Lancashire

I would urge people not to adopt the disingenuous and mischievous position of Michael G. Ryan, but rather to keep a sense of proportion. The changes now are as nothing compared with those of some 40 years ago. It took time for people to feel "at home" and the changes of several decades ago caused trauma and disorientation before they were integrated into the life of faith and prayer.

The changes now are of a much lower order. We are not moving from one rite to another or one language to another; indeed, we are presented with an opportunity to deepen our relationship with the Mass by slowing down and thinking about the words that we use. They will become familiar enough in time. Yes, some of the words and phrases are clunky, but then again some of the "old new" words lacked depth and imagination. No translation can ever be perfect.

Edward Bell
London NW1

Having dutifully purchased a copy of the new translation of the people's part at Mass, I was a little surprised to read in the introduction: "For about 20 years now, the bishops have overseen the work of preparing a new translation ..." This is at best seriously misleading, given that roughly a decade was spent preparing a translation which Rome then scrapped (even though it had been approved by the bishops) before work started on the translation we now have. Surely, the authorities of our Church could at least try to be honest with us.

Robert Nowell
New Barnet, Hertfordshire

At Mass on Sunday we used, for the first time, the new Missal. I must confess that I was strongly against it; being a post-Vatican II convert, I did not want the service and liturgy that I cherish changed in any way. However, as the Mass progressed I found that I was paying more attention than usual; the fear of saying something wrong made me pay attention to the liturgy and what it really meant. I came away with a deeper sense of the wonder that is the Mass and the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

Perhaps the revolutionary idea would be to change the liturgy every 10 years or so in order that we never say things by rote but always have to search out the full meaning and mystery of what we are about.

Barry Mellish
Bromley, Kent

I have used all Eucharistic Prayers since June without involving the people and their response. Only one person asked what is different. So, I am not sure what impact the new translation of the Roman Missal will have on the people of God. I am very certain that it will not last as long as the one introduced in 1975.

I wonder if the translators actually spoke the new version out loud. It sounds awkward and in some cases does not make sense. The Roman Canon in particular is unwieldy. For example, the first sentence in the prayer has 43 words. This sentence alone is difficult to say out loud, it is repetitive. The composition of the whole prayer is so complex that I predict that it will be quietly ignored and left to gather dust in the Missal. All I wish for is that we do not have to wait until 2051 for an improvement.

(Fr) Tom Grufferty
Havant, Hampshire

I am happy to relate that discussion in the chaplaincy's local pub touched upon the new translation of the Missal after last Sunday's evening Mass. There were two threads to the discussion: an MA student who thought the language far superior to what she had grown up with – all agreed; the second, a medical student and convert from evangelicalism who asked how anyone thought "dynamic equivalence" in the old translation was a good idea. That sorted, the students focused on sharing experiences of World Youth Day in Madrid and how to raise money for Rio.

(The Rev.) Gareth Jones JCD
University Chaplaincy, Cardiff

Housing and the family

You are right to draw attention in your leader to the housing crisis that faces our nation ("Families need houses", 3 September). So far there have been warm words from the Housing Minister, Grant Shapps, but as the saying goes, "words butter no parsnips", and neither do they build houses. I have some suggestions for radical action. First: reform of the private rented sector to improve quality, regulate rents and increase security of tenure. (Why not have rental agreements for two or five years, or even longer, as will be the norm in the social housing sector?) Secondly: a land value tax to provide a financial incentive for development. (Could the revenue raised be linked to the provision of much needed affordable housing?) Thirdly: the Churches to come out powerfully in support of the building of family homes wherever they are needed. If, as a Church, we want to support marriage and family life, we need to be advocates for affordable and stable family housing – ideally homes that do not require both parents to work outside the home in order to pay the bills.

Alison Gelder
Director, Housing Justice

Labour's benefit challenge

Frank Field ("Labour's big challenge", 3 September) is right to point to the Labour Government spending money in a boom without making much difference to how the poorest people live. But the one place neither the 1979 Government nor the 1997 Government spent money was on the unemployment benefits of adults aged 18 to 60.

Professor Jonathan Bradshaw has pointed out that when unemployment benefit started in 1912 it was seven shillings a week – about 22 per cent of average male earnings in manufacturing. By 2008, as a result of the policy of tying benefits to the price index while real earnings increased, the renamed jobseeker's allowance (JSA) had fallen to an all-time low of 10.5 per cent of average earnings. JSA is now £53.45 a week for those aged 18 to 25 and then £67.50 a week up to age 60, half the Government's poverty threshold and 42 per cent of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation minimum income standard – in fact, without a real increase for nearly 30 years. Mr Field says that Labour must ensure that earnings are greater than benefits, but that is not the problem. The problem is that the JSA is so low.

Donald Hirsch, of the Centre for Research in Social Policy, has calculated that the price of a healthy diet for a week for a single adult, currently £46.31 a week, will overtake the level of JSA during the next 10 years if there is not a change in policy. Workfare, only receiving benefit if in work or training, as recommended by Mr Field, will not take away the temptation to carry a parcel of illegal drugs from A to B at £50 a time, or shoplift, if the benefit, often encumbered by high interest debt, is too low to sustain health and well-being.

(The Revd) Paul Nicolson
Chairman, Zacchaeus 2000 Trust

For more of your correspondence, go to the new **Letters Extra** section of *The Tablet*'s expanded website: **www.thetablet.co.uk**

Crisis in the Austrian Church

Your leader ("Austria's moment of truth", 3 September) serves up a hotchpotch of opinions. I cannot see why the Madrid assembly of young Catholics should inspire hope for the Austrian Priests' Initiative. Although you accept the basis of the movement and its truth, you draw solace from the able leadership of Cardinal Schönborn to "defuse the crisis" and avert a "catastrophic schism" in the Church.

While I sympathise with the dilemma facing the cardinal, he cannot have it both ways. Either the Priests' Initiative is true to the mission of the Church and the Gospel, and must be promoted even at the cost of church unity, or it is anti-evangelical and worthy of condemnation. Church unity should not be made a higher objective than the proclamation of the Kingdom of justice and truth.

Frank Campbell
Southampton

Your admirable leader warns against the possibility of "a catastrophic schism" in the Chuch in Austria. Schism, yes; but catastrophic, not necessarily. The Vatican has responded to the small Lefebvrist schism with dialogue and concessions. "Lifting of excommunications? – certainly. Restoration of the Tridentine Mass? – of course. And if you have any other issues to discuss, come and talk with the prefect of the CDF." By contrast, the loyal Catholics who by the million have begged to be given priests, married or celibate, are brushed aside. If the threat of schism becomes a real possibility, still more so if it actually takes place, this and other issues will suddenly become the subject of meaningful discussion.

(Dr) Michael Hoskin
Cambridge

Spanish matters

Writing about the attractions of Salamanca for the study of Spanish ("¡Viva Salamanca!", 3 September), Hugh O'Shaughnessy describes Fray Luis de León as "another Dominican". In fact, he was an Augustinian friar. His imposing statue stands outside the lecture hall where he was arrested by agents of the Inquisition mentioned in the article. The Inquisition was administered by … the Dominicans.

(Fr) Paul Graham OSA
London N1

The living Spirit

Silence is the mother of the spirit. It births in us the cloister of the heart. It brings us beyond the noise of chaos and clutter and confusion of a spinning world to the cool, calm centre of the spiritual self.

Silence enables us to rest in that centre, to allow God to work in us there, to clear from our hearts whatever thoughts or pain, desires or demands, clamour within us for puerile attention and so take us away from our best selves. In silences, we learn to listen to others who are also seeking God in a Monastery of the Heart, to hear their pain and their wisdom, their experiences and the truths in them, that bring our own wisdom to light, to question, to development.

Sr Joan Chittister
The Monastery of the Heart
(SPCK, 2011)

Therefore the Apostles first taught by their conduct, and then by their words; nay rather they had no need of words, when their deeds spoke so loud. Nor is it wrong to speak of Christ's Passion as action, for in suffering He performed that great and wonderful act, by which He destroyed death, and effected all else that He did for us.

St John Chrysostom
(349-407)

Had there been no cross, Christ could not have been crucified. Had there been no cross, life itself could not have been nailed to the tree. And if life had not been nailed to it, there would be no streams of immortality pouring from Christ's side, blood and water for the world's cleansing. The legal bond of our sin would not be cancelled, we should not have attained our freedom, we should not have enjoyed the fruit of the tree of life and the gates of paradise would not stand open.

St Andrew of Crete
(Born *c.* 650)

13 September is the Memorial of St John Chrysostom; 14 September is the Feast of The Exaltation of the Cross