Paradise and the Liturgy

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1. Architecture

Soon after the Second Vatican Council it became customary in our churches for celebrant and people to face one another during the Eucharist, whereas previously it had been more usual for everybody to face in the same direction. Considerable sums of money were spent in facilitating this arrangement, which was widely thought to be among the chief requirements of the 'new liturgy'. For many, 'mass facing the people' has become, together with the use of the vernacular, the *sine qua non* of contemporary liturgy. Many priests will refuse to celebrate otherwise, many laity would not attend a mass celebrated otherwise. The reasons are surely ecclesiological: the reorientation of priest and people at the liturgy is seen as symbolic of the move from a pyramidal to a collegial model of church that the Second Vatican Council effected.

1.1 The late twentieth century

Before the Council, for celebrant and people to face each other was a clear sign of affiliation to the liturgical movement. The pattern was rare in this country, especially among Catholics. An early example was the chapel of Queen's College in Birmingham, built in 1938 but only opened for worship after the Second World War. At Queens the celebrant of the eucharist has always stood in the apse, facing the body of the church, and in doing so has faced west. I have been told that Queen's College chapel was the first built in England for the 'westward position', under the influence of the liturgical movement.

The change was represented as a return to primitive practice, but this justification was based on a misunderstanding. In Rome, it is true, the celebrant at the altar seems to have faced the people, but in doing so he was not facing west, because many of the older Roman churches have their altars at the west end. In such buildings, to face the people is to face East, which is the traditional posture for Christian prayer. It is possible that the people would face east as well, with their back to the celebrant. If this sounds odd, we need to remember that the altar may have been concealed by curtains, which prevented celebrant and people from seeing one another, as is still the case among the Greeks.

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1.2 The tradition of facing East

The Ordo Romanus I, which describes the papal liturgy of the early eighth century, assumes that the Pope will face the people. But when it was adapted for use outside Rome, where churches more normally had their altars at the east end, the text was changed so that the celebrant was directed to turn his back to the people when praying[1].

Christians face east to pray, according to the *Apostolic Constitutions*[2], because Eden was in the East (Gn 2:8), but for most of the early christian writers who touch on the matter, we face east because that is where the sun rises. Tertullian[3] says that christians were suspected of being sun-worshippers for this reason. For Origen[4] the eastward posture symbolises the soul looking towards the true light. This symbolism was reinforced by the requirement in some baptismal rites that the candidate face west to reject evil before being baptised. Often, when the altar was in the east, the baptistry would be in the west, as at Florence or Pisa, in the Westwerk of German cathedrals or so many of our English parish churches. Where the altar was in the west, the baptistry would sometimes be established near it, also at the west end of the church, as at the Lateran or the recently discovered baptistry at San Clemente in Rome.

I do not wish to paint an oversimplified picture. There is no single pattern of orientation among early churches, either in or outside Rome. The early Greek evening hymn *phos hilaron* ('O gladdening light') mentions that the worshippers are facing the sun as it sets in the west. The orientation of a church, and the position of its baptistry, was often determined by structures already in place when the church was built—a road, perhaps, a house or a pre-christian temple, an established water-supply. My point is that there is a well-established tradition that christian architecture encouraged the worshipping community to look outside itself and outside this world.

1.3 Orientation and eschatology

In many medieval churches in this country and in France, a person entering through the west door is confronted by a representation of the Last Judgement. At S Apollinare in Classe near Ravenna, the eastern apse over the altar is dominated by a mosaic of a jewelled cross, a sign of the Christ who is to come again. Some of the Roman basilicas have a mosaic of the *etimasia*, an empty throne with a cross and other instruments of the passion, ready for the last judgement. Sometimes, this is at the west end of the church. In the Lateran, and many other early churches in the West, the apse-mosaics contain representations of palm-trees, the signs of paradise.

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Developments in liturgical practice in the late twentieth century have all but put an end to this tradition, which has its roots in christian antiquity. We face each other during the eucharist. Baptism has in many places been brought into the centre of the assembly, baptistries being abandoned. We have chosen to look inwards rather than outwards. We have ceased to look for a world outside our own. I shall now go on to suggest that this change in the architectural pattern we use for worship is paralleled by new linguistic patterns that have arisen since the Council.

1. Space

2.1 The loss of heaven

At Mass on the twenty-third Sunday of the Year, the Prayer after Communion begins: 'Lord, your word and your sacrament give us food and life'. A more accurate translation might start: 'Grant to your faithful, Lord, whom you feed and invigorate with the nourishment of your word and of your heavenly sacrament...' The original text mentions heaven, whereas our current version does not.

The Sunday before, the Prayer after Communion begins 'Lord, you renew us at your table with the bread of life'. This is a new prayer, composed for the current Missal. A closer translation would read 'Lord, we have been fed with bread from the heavenly table'. Again, heaven has been left out.

On the twenty-fifth Sunday of the year, the Prayer after Communion is an ancient one, first found in the Old Gelasian Sacramentary. It came in the pre-conciliar Missal as the Post-communion for the 15th Sunday after Pentecost. Consequently, there are many translations of it available. The one by Adrian Fortescue[5] begins faithfully 'We beseech thee, O Lord, that the grace of thy heavenly gift may possess both our minds and bodies'. Our version runs 'Lord, may the eucharist you have given us influence our thoughts and actions....' Once more, no heaven.

The original texts of our liturgy contain hundreds, probably thousands of allusions to heaven. Though many have survived in English translation, there was a tendency among our translators to remove them. This is particularly noticeable in the Roman Canon, where we speak of Christ's 'ascension into glory' rather than his 'glorious ascension into the heavens', and we ask God to fill us with 'every grace and blessing' rather than 'every heavenly grace and blessing'. At one point the translators have inserted the word 'heaven' where there is, strictly speaking, no Latin equivalent—the reference is to 'your altar above'[6] rather than 'your altar in heaven', which is what

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we say, but then a whole line has been simply omitted[7] 'in the sight of your divine majesty': heaven is there, but its splendour is minimised. This will not change if the new version of the Sacramentary now awaiting confirmation from Rome comes into use, to judge by the texts so far published. The omissions of heaven from the Roman Canon that I have noted have survived intact in the published revision[8], and on Our Lady's birthday, to take one example, we shall implore 'this gift of grace', not 'the gift of heavenly grace'.

The revisers of our liturgy in the 1960s were on their guard against a dualism that can be associated with the idea of heaven, and accordingly altered some of the Latin texts. So on the Second Sunday of Advent we no longer pray that we may 'despise the things of earth'[9] but that we may 'judge wisely the things of earth'[10]. Similarly, the old Collect for Ascension Day with its prayer that 'we may live in mind in the heavens', was abandoned in favour of a newly-composed prayer. Translators have continued this anti-dualistic trend.

2.2 *Heaven becomes the kingdom*

Sometimes in our Missal we find 'heaven' translated as 'kingdom'. We have an example in the Collect for the twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year. Whereas Fortescue's version reads 'increase thy mercy upon us; that we who run after thy promises may be made partakers of the heavenly treasures'[11], we now say 'Help us to hurry toward the eternal life you promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom'. The revised sacramentary now awaiting Roman recognition promises to be more literal with 'the treasures of heaven'[12].

2.3 *The kingdom becomes a place*

I imagine the word 'kingdom' recommended itself to the translators by its frequency in the gospels and the centrality in the Gospel message of the concept it denotes. Scripture scholars in recent years, however, have preferred to use the word 'reign' as indicating the authority of God without any suggestion that it is restricted to a particular place. Our translators, by contrast, like to think of God's kingdom as a place. A familiar example comes in every Mass when we pray 'grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom, where you live for ever and ever'. There is no suggestion of place in the original, which could be translated 'deign to grant her (that is, the Church) peace, and gather her into unity in accordance with your will, who live and reign for ever and ever'. The present familiar version survives unchanged in the revision.

Here are some more examples. On Christmas Eve we pray to

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Christ 'that those who trust in thy goodness may be relieved by the consolations of thy advent' (Fortescue), but ICEL1 has 'raise us to the joy of your kingdom, *where* you live and reign....' The next day, at Midnight Mass, we pray to the Father 'Bring us to eternal joy in the kingdom of heaven, *where* he lives and reigns...', and again at the Mass of the Day 'May he welcome us into your kingdom *where* you live and reign....' Finally, at the end of the Third Eucharistic Prayer we sometimes hear the words 'Welcome into your kingdom our departed brothers and sisters and all who have left this world in your friendship. *There* we hope to share in your glory...', where 'there' translates the Latin conjunction *ubi*, which can be either temporal or spatial. Its context in Eucharistic Prayer 3 suggests strongly that the authors of this new text intended it spatially, and so were making the kingdom into a place although, as I have suggested, this is alien to the traditions of the Roman Rite. The Italian and German translators did well, I think, to avoid understanding it spatially: their versions, unlike our own, avoid making the kingdom into a place.

2.4 Other spatialisations

The innovative cosmology of our liturgical texts also appears elsewhere. Take the Friday before Pentecost, in whose Post-Communion we pray 'May our sharing in this mystery bring us to eternal life, *where* Jesus is Lord for ever and ever'. Compare the Collect for September 15, the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows: 'May your Church be united with Christ in his suffering and death and so come to share in his rising to new life, *where* he lives and reigns....' Again, on October 7th we hear ourselves saying 'lead us to share his (i.e. Christ's) happiness and the glory of eternal life, *where* he is Lord for ever and ever'[13].

Sometimes the concept of heaven has been retained in translation, but heaven has been turned into a place. For instance, on the Tuesday before Pentecost, we pray 'bring us to the glory of heaven, *where* Jesus is Lord...', and on the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time the Prayer after Communion ends 'may we come to share his glory in heaven, *where* he lives and reigns for ever and ever'.

Some of these spatialisations have been removed in the revision of the Sacramentary, but others have been introduced. The Collect for the Epiphany ends 'mercifully grant that we who know thee now by faith, may be brought to contemplate the beauty of thy majesty' (Fortescue). This is one of the texts where the current version adds a mention of heaven. It runs: 'Lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith'. The new version introduces a notion of place with

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'lead us into that presence *where* we shall see your glory face to face'. Finally, in this section on space, let me return to Ascension Day and consider its newly-composed Collect, which is based on a sermon of Leo the Great. It is very hard to translate, but the version in the Collins-Dwyer edition of *The Divine Office* renders the sense well. It is, I think, by Dom Placid Murray of Glenstal. Here is its second half: 'You have raised us up with him: where he, the head, has preceded us in glory, there we, the body, are called in hope'. Our current version is ingenious: 'May we follow him into the new creation, for his ascension is our glory and our hope'. The image of the new creation as a place where Christ is inside and we are outside is unfortunate. The revision is also more spatially specific than Leo: 'our human nature is raised above the heavens[14], and where Christ the Head has gone before in glory, we, his Body, are called in hope'.

The net effect of these changes is to redraw the map of the cosmos, setting a border between our world and the kingdom of heaven. The original texts, by contrast, allow us to think of our world and the kingdom, or heaven, as interpenetrating.

3 Time

Having discussed questions of space, I now turn to considerations of time, beginning with some familiar expressions. The second of the Lenten Prefaces ends 'Now, with all the saints and angels, we praise you for ever'. This does not make good sense. If we praise God for ever, then we are not starting now. So what is the point of saying 'now', as though we were beginning a new activity?[15] Similarly, several of the Easter prefaces end 'The joy of the resurrection renews the whole world, while the choirs of heaven sing for ever to your glory'. 'While' is normally used to link two processes that overlap in time, for example 'I'll clean the house while you cook the dinner'. But if the heavenly choirs sing 'for ever', then *everything* happens while they are singing, not just the renewal of the world by the joy of the resurrection, and so there is no point in using 'while'. Thirdly, the second preface of the Eucharist, which we use on Corpus Christi, ends 'Earth unites with heaven to sing the new song of creation as we adore and praise you for ever'. This puzzles me. If earth uniting with heaven and our adoring God are two unbroken activities, then why join them with an unidiomatic 'as', which normally functions like 'while' as in 'She arrived as I was leaving'? The three temporal expressions that are causing difficulties in these three passages—'now', 'while' and 'as'—have no equivalent in the Latin texts.

The Preface in the Mass always raises a question about time: how

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does the Mass that I attend at eight o'clock or eleven relate to the worship offered by beings whose lives are not regulated by clocks as mine is? This question has made our translators uneasy, and led them to try to be more specific about time than their Latin originals.

3.1 Maundy Thursday

Particular questions are raised by the Mass of Maundy Thursday. We celebrate it as a kind of anniversary of the Last Supper. Yet every Mass is a commemoration, not only of the Last Supper, but of the Lord's death and resurrection, and far more than a commemoration.

The Collect of that Mass, newly composed for the post-conciliar liturgy, begins in our current version: 'God our Father, we are gathered here to share in the supper which your only Son left to his Church to reveal his love' and it ends 'We pray that in this eucharist we may find the fullness of love and life'. The prayer refers quite specifically to this congregation gathered in this place to celebrate this Mass. But the Latin can be taken equally as a prayer for all who, whenever and wherever, celebrate the Eucharist. The Anglicans have taken it over in their new book, *Common Worship*. Their version, like the original, looks beyond the immediate assembly: 'God our Father, you have invited us to share in the supper which your Son gave to his Church to proclaim his death until he comes: may he nourish us by his presence and unite us in his love'.

The most interesting of the prayers for the evening Mass of Maundy Thursday is the Prayer over the Gifts, first found in the Old Gelasian Sacramentary. Here is Fortescue's translation: 'Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that we may be present at these mysteries worthily, for as often as the memory of this sacrifice is celebrated, the work of our redemption is wrought'. Thomas Aquinas quoted it in illustration of the doctrine that through the eucharist we share in the fruits of the Lord's passion[16], and at Vatican II it was used again[17]. It is hard to translate. Our current version runs 'Each time we offer this memorial sacrifice, the work of our redemption is accomplished', but 'accomplished', though favoured by a large number of translators, seems to me too final. There is a good deal to be said for the version in the Dominican missal published in 1948: 'the work of our redemption is renewed'.

Having considered some difficulties connected with relating the present to the extra-temporal, and the present to the past, I turn to the relationship in our liturgy between present and future. After Communion at the Mass of the Last Supper we pray 'Almighty God, we receive new life from the supper your Son gave us in this world.

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May we find full contentment in the meal we hope to share in your eternal kingdom'. These spatial images of world and kingdom replace temporal ones in the original which prays, literally 'that as we are renewed by the temporal supper of your Son, we may be satisfied by his eternal supper'. Faced with the difficulties of this text, the translators chose to turn time into space, again making God's kingdom a place that is not within this world.

3.2 Post-communions and eschatology

Many Post-communion prayers point towards eschatological fulfilment. We may take as a first example the one for the second Sunday after Christmas, which Fortescue translates 'By the operation of this mystery, O Lord, may our vices be cleansed away and our just desires fulfilled'. Our just desires include our desire for eternal life, heaven, the kingdom of God, eschatological fulfilment. But the current version narrows the scope of our petition and turns the ancient text into a prayer for moral rectitude: 'by this eucharist free us from sin and keep us faithful to your word'.

On the first Monday in Lent the Church prays that 'we may receive support for mind and body; so that, having health in both, we may enjoy the fulness of the heavenly remedy'. Our version omits heaven and reduces the prayer to a request for God's help here and now: 'may we rejoice in your healing power and experience your saving love in mind and body'.

On the thirtieth Sunday of the Year we pray after Communion for eschatological fulfilment, of which the Eucharist is a sign: 'that we may receive in truth what we now outwardly (*specie*) celebrate' (Fortescue) This has been de-eschatologized and become one of the most embarrassingly flat of all our prayers: 'may our celebration have an effect in our lives'.

3.3 Collects and eschatology

In the Collect for the Vigil of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist we currently pray 'By following the teaching of John the Baptist may we come to your Son our Lord Jesus Christ'. Our version retains the eschatological note in this prayer, which the revision has de-eschatologized with: 'Grant...that your people...by heeding the summons of John the Baptist may follow faithfully Christ our Lord'. On the Immaculate Conception we say 'Help us by her (i.e. Mary's) prayers to live in your presence without sin' whereas the original means 'we beseech thee...grant to us also to come with clean hearts to thee'.

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Towards the end of our Missal, among the prayers for various needs and occasions, there is one 'for those unjustly deprived of liberty', though in the Latin it is simply for those in captivity, whether justly or not. We pray 'restore them to the freedom you wish for all men as your sons', but the original prays, not for a return to a lost liberty, but that they will 'gain that liberty with which you have willed that all people, your children, should be endowed', that is, an eschatological liberty.

3.4 Already and not yet

The Collect for the Epiphany ends 'mercifully grant that we who know thee now by faith may be brought to contemplate the beauty of thy majesty'. Our current version minimises the contrast between faith and vision with 'Lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith'. The revisers went in exactly the opposite direction. The process is documented in ICEL's Progress Report of 1988[18]. The first revision had 'Lead us who already know you by faith to the final vision of your glory in heaven', but then they saw a parallel between this Collect and 1 Cor 13:12 'now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face' and 2 Cor 5:7 'We walk by faith, not by sight'. They were persuaded that 'here' was a better translation of *iam* (replacing time by space again), but eventually they settled on 'now', though still spatialising by using 'where': 'We know you now by faith; lead us into that presence where we shall behold your glory face to face'. But the truth is that the Collect is unlike the Pauline texts. They contrast faith and sight, whereas the Collect sees them as continuous, faith leading with God's help to sight.

Similarly, the Postcommunion for the third Sunday of Lent begins (in my translation) 'Lord, as we receive a foretaste of the mysteries of heaven, and are satisfied while still on earth with bread from above, we humbly pray you that what is being accomplished in us in mystery may be fulfilled in reality.', but our current version can make nothing of these eschatological thoughts, and reads simply 'Lord, in sharing this sacrament may we receive your forgiveness and be brought together in unity and peace'.

The Collect for the seventeenth Sunday of the Year had already been altered by the revisers of the Latin text before it came into the hands of the English translators. It has been adopted in its old form in the new Anglican prayer-book *Common Worship*, so I will quote from that. It prays that 'we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not our hold on things eternal'. The Latin revisers, presumably judging the original to be too dualistic, produced a text that asks that

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'we may so use the goods that pass away that we may already cling to those that will endure'. Already, it is implied, we can have a share in eternal life. But our missal will have none of that: 'Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world' it prays baldly. The revision prays 'that we may use wisely the gifts of this passing world and fix our hearts even now on those which last for ever'. In each case, the prayer is that we may long for lasting goods, not, as in the original, that we may already in some measure possess them.

The Collect for the twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year in the original Latin similarly sees eternal life as beginning already here and now. Cranmer translates 'that we, running to thy promises, may be made partakers of thy heavenly treasures'. Our version separates the two with 'Help us to hurry toward the eternal life you promise and come to share in the joys of your kingdom', as does the revision with 'that we may strive for the things you have promised and come to share the treasures of heaven'.

3.4.1 'This is the Lamb of God'

What I have been saying can be summed up in a reflection on the well-known words spoken by the celebrant at Mass as Communion begins: 'This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world'. The Latin says 'Behold' (*ecce*) the Lamb of God'. The English focuses our minds exclusively on *this* host that the priest is holding. The Latin is more allusive, inviting us to hear the words of the Baptist beside the Sea of Galilee, and perhaps to picture in our minds his pointing finger as Jesus passes. Our celebrant continues 'Happy are those who are called to his supper', words based on those of the angel in Apoc 19:9 'Blessed are they who have been called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb'. The Latin, and the Greek that lies behind it, have a perfect tense: 'blessed are they who ***have been*** called', so that they are words that can only be spoken of us in the future, when we shall learn whether or not we are to be admitted to heaven. Our current version loses resonance with Apoc 19:9 by omitting the allusion to the Lamb, and sounds like a mere reference to the good fortune of those able to receive Holy Communion. Some celebrants underline the narrow focus by saying 'Happy are we....' The original invites us to consider the there and then of Galilee in the past and heaven in the future, and to link them with the host in the celebrant's hand. Our version focuses thoughts narrowly on the here and now.

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4 Contemporary eschatology

Contemporary eschatology is not preoccupied with the *novissima*, the Four Last Things, but rather with the consummation of all things in Christ. This theological development is the fruit of a return to Scripture, and the biblical theme is found also in the early liturgical texts: in Christ, the kingdom of God is already present, though not yet in its complete and final form.

Do we still think of heaven as a place? Here are two quotations, the first from a representative of the neo-scholastic tradition that dominated catholic theology in the century preceding the Second Vatican Council:

> Heaven means the place, and especially the condition, of supreme beatitude. Had God created no bodies, but only pure spirits, heaven would not need to be a place; it would signify merely the state of the angels who rejoice in the possession of God. But in fact heaven is also a place.... Though we cannot say with certitude where this place is to be found, or what its relation is to the entire universe, revelation does not allow us to doubt of its existence.[19]

My second quotation is from a theologian active during the Council and afterwards:

> Heaven, therefore, must first and foremost be determined christologically. It is not an extra-historical place into which one goes.... One is in heaven when, and to the degree that one is in Christ. It is by being with Christ that we find the true location of our existence as human beings in God.[20]

As I have tried to show, our missal reinstates the notion of place in connection with our eschatological fulfilment, a notion that is much less common in the original texts.

5 Nature and Grace

The borderline that our texts draw between this world and the kingdom of heaven, and the separation they set up between the now and the hereafter, reflect the separation between the natural and the supernatural that characterised neo-scholastic thought. The so-called 'new theology' pioneered by Henri de Lubac asserted that this separation was foreign to the thought of the first christian millennium. Already, Odo Casel with his Mystery-theology had revived an understanding of the liturgy as the sacred action in which the paschal mystery is made present to transform the worshippers. That was the deepest meaning of the 'active participation' that the Council recommended and the liturgical reform sought to assure, though it is often represented as being no more than 'joining in'.

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English-speaking countries were not ready for the Second Vatican Council. Neither the New Theology nor the Liturgical Movement had made much headway among us. We were still sunk, for the most part, in neo-scholasticism. Our English liturgy is a monument to that period, made up as it largely is of texts from the patristic period translated with a neo-scholastic mentality. The proposed revision of the Missal includes some improvements, but gives no evidence of a change of heart.

The liturgy we have now lacks a sense that the kingdom of God is among us, that we share already in the liturgy of heaven. Its horizons are the horizons of this world. Like our liturgical architecture, our liturgical texts are the expression of a community turned in on itself.

1 Two MSS of the mid-eighth century copied in Frankish territory contain this change: see Cyrille Vogel, 'Versus ad orientem' *La Maison-Dieu* 70 (1962) pp. 78-79.
2 2,57.
3 *Apologeticus* 16.
4 *On Prayer* 32.
5 Several of the translations of liturgical texts in this article are from Adrian Fortescue, *The Roman Missal* (London, 1912).
6 *sublime altare tuum*
7 *in conspectu divinae maiestatis tuae*
8 *International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Third Progress Report on the Revision of the Roman Missal* (Washington, D.C., 1992) pp 68-75.
9 *terrena despicere*
10 *terrena sapienter perpendere*
11 *caelestium bonorum facias esse consortes*
12 *Many of the texts of the proposed revision discussed in this article are published in Sunday Celebration of the Word and Hours*, by the National Liturgical Office of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Ottawa, 1995) p.28.
13 *eius socii passionum effecti, consolationis etiam ac gloriae mereamur esse participes*
14 *nostra provectio*
15 This remains virtually unchanged in the proposed revision: see International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Third Progress Report on the Revision of the Roman Missal* (Washington, D.C., 1992) p.48.
16 *STh* 3a,83,1c
17 *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2
18 International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Progress Report on the Revision of the Roman Missal* (Washington, D.C., 1988) p.57.
19 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Life Everlasting* (E.T. Herder, St Louis 1952) p. 205.
20 Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (E.T. Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 1988 (1977)) p. 234.

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