

# A Tale of Two Prefaces: I and II Advent

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## PREFACE I of ADVENT

Vere dignum et iustum est, æquum et salutare,  
nos tibi semper et ubique gratias agere:  
Domine, sancte Pater, omnipotens æterne Deus:  
per Christum Dominum nostrum.

Qui, primo adventu  
in humilitate carnis assumptæ,  
dispositionis antiquæ munus implevit,  
nobisque salutis perpetuæ tramitem reseravit:  
ut, cum secundo venerit in suæ gloria maiestatis,  
manifesto demum munere capiamus,  
quod vigilantes nunc audemus exspectare promissum.

Et ideo cum Angelis et Archangelis,  
cum Thronis et Dominationibus,  
cumque omni militia cælestis exercitus,  
hymnum gloriæ tuæ canimus,  
sine fine dicentes:

### 2008

### 2010 Received Text

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,  
always and everywhere to give you thanks,  
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,  
through Christ our Lord.

Who at his First Coming  
took on the lowliness of human flesh,  
fulfilled the plan you formed long ago,  
and opened for us the way of eternal salvation,  
so that, at his Second Coming in glory and majesty,  
when your work is at last made manifest,  
we who now watch for that day  
may receive what we dare to hope for,  
your promised salvation.

And therefore, with Angels and Archangels,  
with Thrones and Dominions,  
and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven,  
we sing the hymn of your glory  
and acclaim without end:

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,  
always and everywhere to give you thanks,  
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,  
through Christ our Lord.

For he assumed at his first coming  
the lowliness of human flesh,  
and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago,  
and opened for us the way to eternal salvation,  
that, when he comes again in glory and majesty  
and all is at last made manifest,  
we who watch for that day  
may inherit the great promise  
in which now we dare to hope.

And so, with Angels and Archangels,  
with Thrones and Dominions,  
and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven,  
as we sing the hymn of your glory  
without end we acclaim:

In both Advent Prefaces, as in the Collects, Prayers over the Gifts and Prayers after Communion Pray Tell has already featured, we find in the 2010 revisions the by now legendary combination of mistranslations, grammatical infelicities, stylistic tone-deafness, and an alternating concern for and abandonment of a literal approach to the primary text, with a consequent loss of the parallels *Liturgiam authenticam* sees as important to maintain.

- 1) Fulfilling the mandate of *Liturgiam authenticam*, 2008 renders the *Qui* which begins the body of the Preface literally, thus communicating clearly and quite beautifully the connection between the Preface introduction and the lovely text which follows.
- 2) 2008 maintains, from the outset, the parallelism of contrast between the *primo* and *secundo* of the Latin: “at his first coming / at his Second Coming,” easily proclaimed and easily heard as promise / fulfillment. This is doubly lost in 2010 by moving the literal “he assumed” from the second line of the Latin to the first line of English and shunting “at his first coming” to the end of that line. Then, in the fifth line, remarkably, by *not* translating *secundo* literally, but leaving it, as in the 1974 ICEL, “when he comes again.”
- 3) Besides losing the parallel, the literal translation of *assumptæ* in 2010 is unfortunate because, in English usage, “assume” more commonly has the sense of pretending or impersonating, e.g., “he assumed a false identity,” “he assumed the air of a great personage.” 2008’s “he took on” is precisely what the Preface is trying to say.
- 4) In a remarkable departure from the norms of *Liturgiam authenticam*, and repeating an error frequently criticized in the 1974 ICEL, 2010 adds a causality that is not found in the Latin. 2008 translates precisely and straightforwardly the Latin’s three declarative sentences describing what Christ did at his first coming: took on our lowliness, fulfilled God’s providential design, opened for us the way of (not as in 2010 “to”) salvation. 2010 has limited, as it were, Christ’s fulfilling of God’s design to the taking on of our human flesh, when, of course, that was just the beginning of his mission!
- 5) In fact, the “so” does not show up until the introduction of the second part of the Preface body, the Second Coming of Christ, which disappears in 2010, again doubly, by not translating the Latin *secundo* and dropping the “so” from the translation of *ut*.
- 6) 2010’s “all is made manifest” is not at all in the Latin; rather it is the *munus*, the great work of salvation that will be made manifest, as in 2008.
- 7) Though both translations expand *vigilantes* by adding “for the day,” which is not in the Latin, because *nunc* occurs between *vigilantes* and *audemus*, 2008 translates it as modifying *vigilantes*, 2010 as modifying *audemus*. There are authorities to support either choice; but as with “First Coming” and “Second Coming,” the Preface is trying to set up the contrast between the “now” of our Advent watching and the “then” of every Advent’s fulfillment. Situating “now” where it does, 2008 makes that contrast clearer than 2010 does; the “then” is clearly understood as implied in the “may receive.” In any case, 2010’s placement of “now” is awkward: the adverb wants to be more proximate to the verb; and the line is made clunky by mistranslating *promissum* as an ablative, when the Latin has it in the accusative as the object of *expectare*: we “hope for” (or “look forward to,” or “await”) the promise. Taking *nunc* as modifying *audemus*, and to avoid leaving the preposition that is part of the verb form at the end of the line, 2010 would have to read: “we who watch for that day may (then) inherit the great promise for which now we dare to hope.” In every way, 2008 is the better translation, not least in consideration of our next point.
- 8) Again, both translations expand *promissum*, but 2008 by specifying what is promised, “of salvation,” but 2010 only by adding the adjective “great.” Because 2008 maintains the Latin

construction, as *Liturgiam authenticam* urges, the body of the Preface concludes gloriously, as does the Latin, with the climactic *promissum* with its specification “of salvation.” Compare this conceptually strong and rhythmically pleasing ending of the 2008 version, “what we dare to hope for, / your promised salvation” with 2010’s torturous tongue twister, beginning with the addition of “inherit,” which is not in the Latin, relegating non-specific “great promise” to the penultimate line, and clunking to a close with the mistranslated and staccato: “in which now we dare to hope.” “Come by the house and whistle me out.”

Now is as good a time as any to point out an error that occurs in countless Preface conclusions throughout the 2010 revision. Let us simply leave as a question why *Et ideo*, clearly and elegantly “And therefore,” has been rendered almost pedantically “And so.” Far worse than that are the last two lines, a mistranslation of the Latin and a grammatical error in English. The “with” (*cum* in Latin) modifies “we sing” (*canimus*) and not “we acclaim” (*dicentes*), a confusion compounded by the omission of the comma that would be necessary at the end of the phrase it introduces. The Latin and English want this: “And so (therefore), with Angels and Archangels... we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim.” Translating *sine fine dicentes* this way is actually more literal than 2008 but avoids the two errors of 2010. It also parallels the number of syllables in Latin, thus replicating the Latin’s pleasing rhythm, which in turn results in the text almost certainly “singing better” than the erroneous 2010 text. Like the *Per ipsum*, this Preface conclusion, repeated over and over again in various configurations throughout the Missal, has to be rendered accurately and elegantly. 2010 fails on both counts.

## PREFACE II of ADVENT

per Christum Dominum nostrum.

Quem prædixerunt cunctorum præconia prophetarum,  
 Virgo Mater ineffabili dilectione sustinuit,  
 Ioannes cecinit affuturum et adesse monstravit.  
 Qui suæ nativitatis mysterium  
 tribuit nos prævenire gaudentes,  
 ut et in oratione pervigiles  
 et in suis inveniat laudibus exsultantes.

### 2008

### 2010 Received Text

<p>Whom all the Prophets’ oracles foretold,          whom the Virgin Mother awaited          with love beyond all telling,          of whose coming John the Baptist sang          and whose presence he proclaimed,          who has granted us to anticipate with joy          the mystery of his birth,          so that he may find us watchful in prayer          and joyful in his praises.</p>	<p>For all the oracles of the prophets foretold him,          the Virgin Mother longed for him          with love beyond all telling,          John the Baptist sang of his coming          and proclaimed his presence when he came.          He it is who grants our anticipating with joy          the mystery of his birth,          so that he may find us watchful in prayer          and exultant in his praise.</p>
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- 1) Again, 2008 maintains the connection between *Christum* and the body of the Preface by translating the *Quem* literally, “Whom.” *Quem* is not the *Quia* (“For”) of other Prefaces, and it is hard to see how the criticism leveled against the the 1974 ICEL, i.e., breaking off the body of the Preface from the introduction, does not apply to 2010’s constantly resorting to “For” in order to establish some connection. In this Preface, this makes for an additional unpleasing aural repetition: “For . . . fore.”
- 2) 2008 sets forth each line to end with a verb that even “sounds like” Advent: “foretold / awaited / sang / proclaimed,” with pleasing parallels that imitate the Latin *cecinit / monstravit, affuturum / adesse*: “sang / proclaimed,” “whose coming / whose presence.” These parallels get lost in 2010 by reversing the pleasing inversions of 2008, “of whose coming John the Baptist sang / and whose presence he proclaimed” into the flat declarations, “John the Baptist sang of his coming / and proclaimed his presence,” to which has been added (from the 1974 ICEL) “when he came.”
- 3) (*Quem*) *Virgo Mater sustinuit* is a line that has been causing translators problems since the 1974 ICEL, since *sustinere* has such a richly diverse heritage – see any reputable Latin dictionary. The 1974 ICEL, and more recently the fine Latinists of the Oratory, have opted for “bear,” thus “the Virgin Mother bore him in her womb” (1974 ICEL) and “whom the Virgin Mother carried” (Birmingham Oratory), while the 2008 translators have gone with “awaited.” The 2010 revisers, inexplicably, have come up with “longed for,” a striking departure from the norm set forth in *Liturgiam authenticam* (54): “To be avoided in translations is any psychologizing tendency, especially a tendency to replace words treating of the theological virtues by others expressing merely human emotions.” Though not a theological virtue, the “Expectation (or Expectancy) of the Blessed Virgin Mary” was considered to be one of her “virtues” and was especially venerated by medieval Christians (Feast of the Expectatio Partus, December 18).
- 4) In the second part of 2010, the revisers’ tenuous grasp of English style fairly explodes, and the corner into which they began painting themselves by abandoning the first Latin word of the Preface body begins to seal them in. 2008 keeps our ears on Christ through a succession of pronouns that, line by line, clearly refer to him alone: “Whom / whom / whose / whose / who.” 2010 has opted for “he / his / him.” Therefore, to get into the second part of the Preface, 2010 must add “he it is,” but then, switching from the perfect to the present tense, “has granted” to “grants”, 2010 inexplicably abandons the Latin infinitive *prævenire*, turning it into a gerund (“anticipating”) and thus overloading the sentence with two objects, one of “grant” and another of “anticipating.” The gerund, of course, requires the possessive “our,” and, finally, the revisers separate, as they have been wont to do, the verb (in this case in the gerundive form) from its object by an adverbial phrase “with joy.” The result is a grammatical and syntactical labyrinth. If the revisers were determined to abandon the Latin, they needed to do something like this: “He has granted us to anticipate with joy / He has granted that we anticipate with joy” But why not just translate the Latin?
- 5) 2010’s loss of the plural *laudibus* (2008: “praises”): mistranslation or copyist’s error?