

2013 Survey of U.S. Priests on the New Roman Missal

The Godfrey Diekmann, OSB Center for Patristics and Liturgical Studies, Collegeville, MN
May 21, 2013

Executive Summary

The “2013 Survey of U.S. Priests on the New Roman Missal” was conducted under the auspices of the Godfrey Diekmann, OSB Center for Patristics and Liturgical Studies (www.csbsju.edu/SOT/Programs/Diekmann-Center) at Saint John’s University School of Theology•Seminary in Collegeville, Minnesota. The objective of the survey was to determine as accurately as possible **the views of U.S. Catholic priests about the new translation of the English Missal** which was introduced on the First Sunday of Advent (November 26-27), 2011.

Full survey results, including all comments of respondents, are available at the Diekmann Center webpage at:
www.csbsju.edu/SOT/Programs/Diekmann-Center/New-Roman-Missal-Survey-of-US-Priests.

For ongoing coverage of this survey and other liturgical issues, see the *Pray Tell* blog at:
www.PrayTellBlog.com.

All 178 Roman Catholic Latin rite dioceses in the U.S. were invited to take part in this study; **32 dioceses participated**. The 32 participating dioceses are from all parts of the country and 12 of 14 Latin rite ecclesiastical regions of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. States represented by participating dioceses are: CA, CO, FL, GA, IA, IL, KS, LA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NE, NJ, NY, OH, TN, TX, WA, WI.

In the period February 21 – May 6, 2013, priests in participating dioceses were invited to participate in the online survey via an email to all priests on the diocesan distribution list. (Note that diocesan clergy distribution lists typically include diocesan priests as well as religious priests who are in pastoral ministry in a given diocese. For this reason, and in order to avoid religious order priests being polled more than once, religious orders were not contacted for distribution lists of religious priests.) A total of **1,536 priests responded, with a response rate of 42.5%**. (By comparison, the study “Same Call, Different Men: The Evolution of the Priesthood since Vatican II” carried out by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [CARA], had a response rate of 30% [*Same Call, Different Men*, Liturgical Press, 2012, page xii].)

This survey shows fairly **widespread skepticism about the new Missal** by U.S. Catholic priests, with strong differences in opinion between the majority of priests who do not like the Missal and the minority who do. Among the principal findings of this survey:

- By a 3 to 2 margin, priests do not like the new text – 59% do not like it, compared to 39% who do.
- By a similar margin, 57% to 36%, priests do not like the more formal style of language, with over one-third (35%) strongly disliking the new language.
- Only 35% of priests think that the new translation is an improvement on the old one, against 56% who do not think it is an improvement. Over one-third of priests (34%) strongly disagree that the new Missal is an improvement.
- Priests overwhelmingly think that some of the language is awkward and distracting – 80% agree with this statement, with nearly three out of five (59%) agreeing strongly with this negative appraisal.
- About three in five priests either agree (18 percent) or strongly agree (42 percent) that the new translation urgently needs to be revised. Only 29 percent disagree or strongly disagree that the new Missal needs revision.
- More than three in five priests (61%) do not think work should go forward translating the Liturgy of the Hours and other sacraments in the same style as the new Missal, with 43% strongly disagreeing with this work continuing. Only slightly more than three in ten priests (32%) would like to see translation work continue in the same style.
- Most priests (55%) are not confident that priests' translation views will be taken seriously, with less than one-quarter of priests (24%) confident their views will be taken seriously.
- Nearly half of all priests (49%) do not approve of the Holy See's leadership in bringing about the new Missal, with nearly three in ten priests (29%) strongly disapproving of the Holy See's role. Less than two out of five priests (39%) approve of the Holy See's leadership on the new Missal.

Priest respondents were given the opportunity to submit comments about the new Missal, and over half (52%) did so. Analysis of the 799 comments shows that **critique of the Missal outweighs affirmation by a four to one margin**. Based on analysts' appraisal of the priests' comments, it is estimated that slightly over 80% of the comments are critical of the Missal, while slightly less than 20% of the comments are affirming of the Missal.

This survey instrument is based in part upon a nonscientific survey completed by *The Tablet* on January 9, 2013 (<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/468/26>). Some questions (nos. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7) are substantially identical for the sake of comparison, one question (no. 3) is slightly revised, and some questions (nos. 6, 8, 9) are original to this survey. Unlike *The Tablet*'s survey, which allowed anyone in the general public to participate online, this survey was sent to only to priests, and to all the priests in each participating diocese. While this study measures only the views of priests who chose to respond to the personal invitation, the methodology of the study and the relatively high response rate increase the likelihood that this study gives a representative reading of priests' views. That the invitation to priests to participate in the survey was sent from a diocesan official in the case of 30 out of 32 dioceses may account for the high response rate.

For the most part, this survey by the Diekmann Center confirms the results of the online survey of *The Tablet*, while showing that the margin of rejection is somewhat smaller than in the earlier study. The survey of *The Tablet* showed that 69% of priests do not like the new Missal and 70% hold that it urgently needs to be revised. The Diekmann Center study found that 59% do not like the new Missal, and 61% think it urgently needs to be revised. Fuller comparison of the two studies is found in Appendix 1.

This study is offered by the Diekmann Center as a service to the U.S. Roman Catholic Church, to give the best possible information to Church leaders charged with making important decisions about the liturgical life of the Church. It is to be hoped that this study will enrich the discussion with its data, and also serve as stimulation for other studies to refine further our understanding of the reception of the new English Missal.

Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus.

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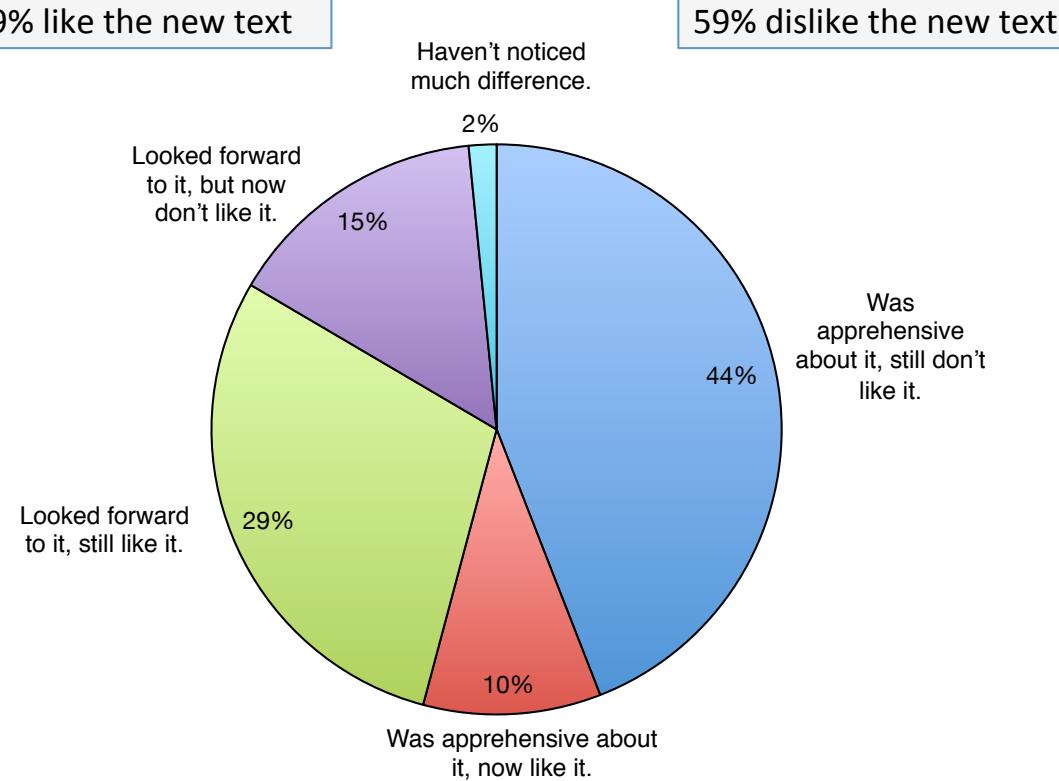
The Survey Questions

1. Attitude towards the new text

Nearly 3 in 5 priests (59%) dislike the new text; nearly 2 in 5 (39%) like the new text. For those whose opinion changed compared to their expectations before implementation, more have come to dislike the text than like it: 10% were apprehensive but now like it, whereas 15% were looking forward to it but now dislike it.

“Which of the following best sums up your attitude towards the new text?”

Total responses: 1529



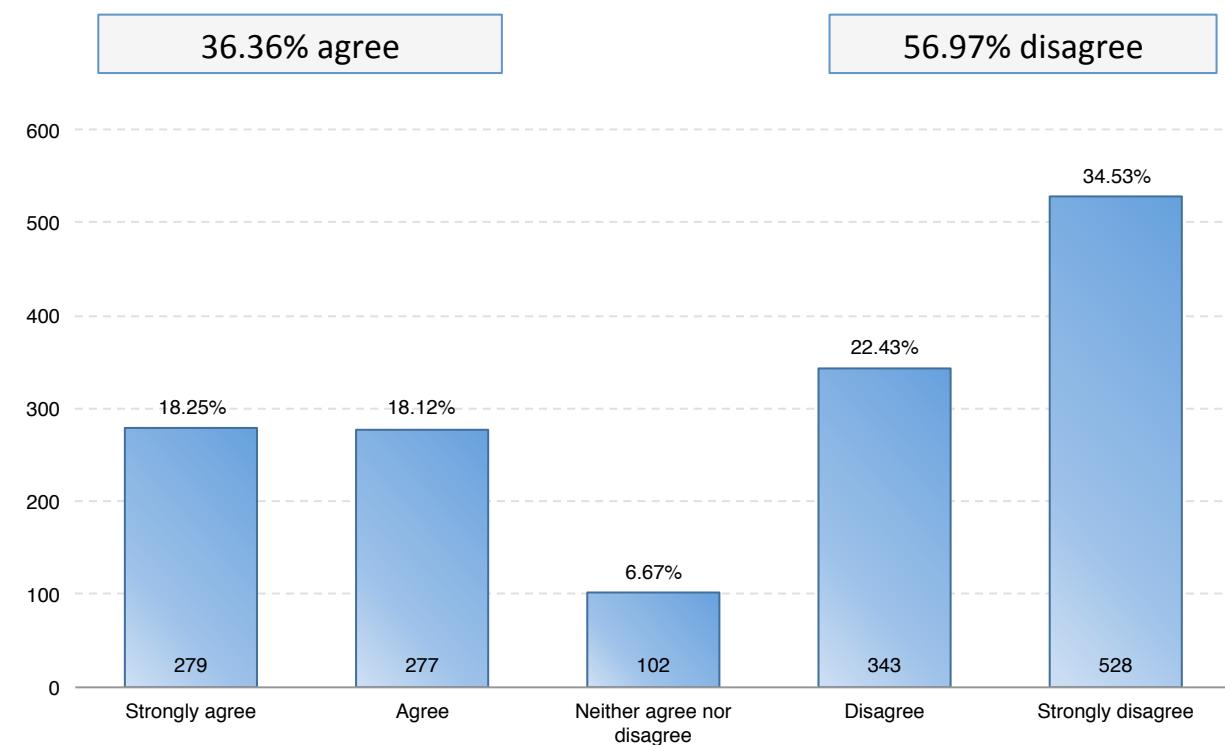
Survey Responses	Responses	Percentage
Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it and I still don't like it.	674	44.08%
Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it but I've changed my mind and I like it.	154	10.07%
Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it and I still like it.	448	29.30%
Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it but I've changed my mind and I don't like it.	229	14.98%
I haven't noticed much difference between this text and the previous one.	24	1.57%
Total	1529	100%

2. Style of language

Priests dislike the more formal style of language of the new Missal by approximately a 3-2 margin. More than 1/3 of priests (34.5%) strongly disagree with the more formal style of language of the new Missal, with a further 22% who disagree that they like the more formal style. More than 1/3 of priests like the more formal style, either agreeing (18%) or agreeing strongly (18%) that they like it.

“I like the more formal style of language.”

Total responses: 1529

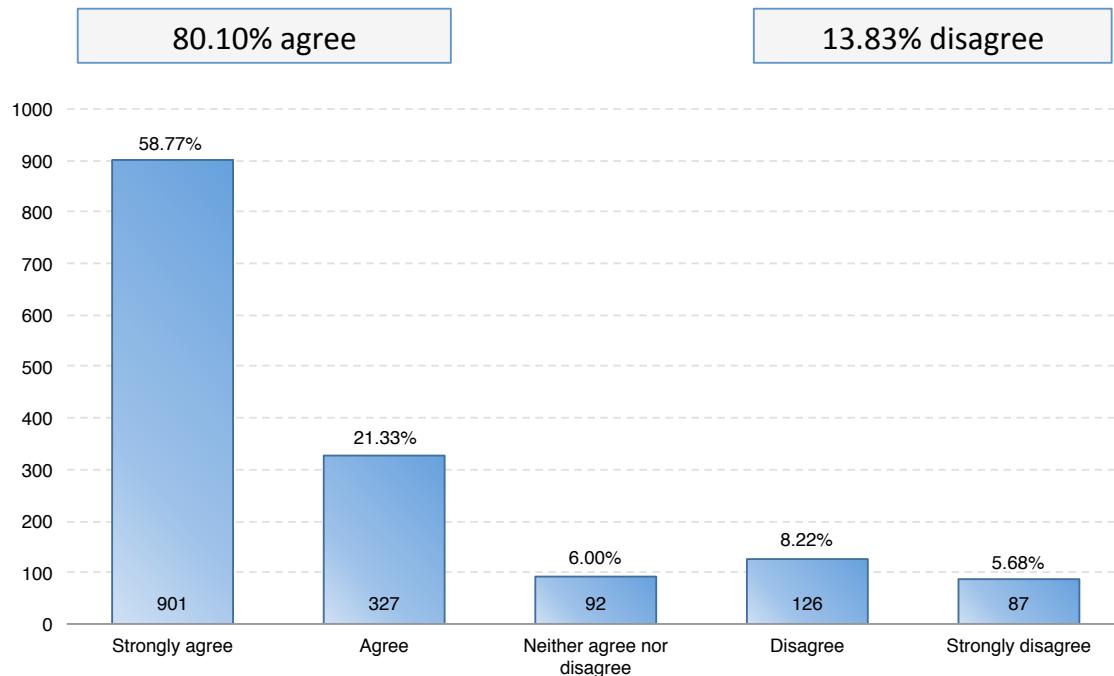


3. Awkward and distracting language

In the strongest agreement of any question of the survey, priests overwhelmingly find some of the language of the new Missal awkward and distracting. More than 4 in 5 priests agree with this negative assessment, with nearly 3 in 5 (59%) agreeing strongly with it. Only 14% of priests disagree or disagree strongly that some of the language is awkward and distracting.

“Some of the language is awkward and distracting.”

Total responses: 1533

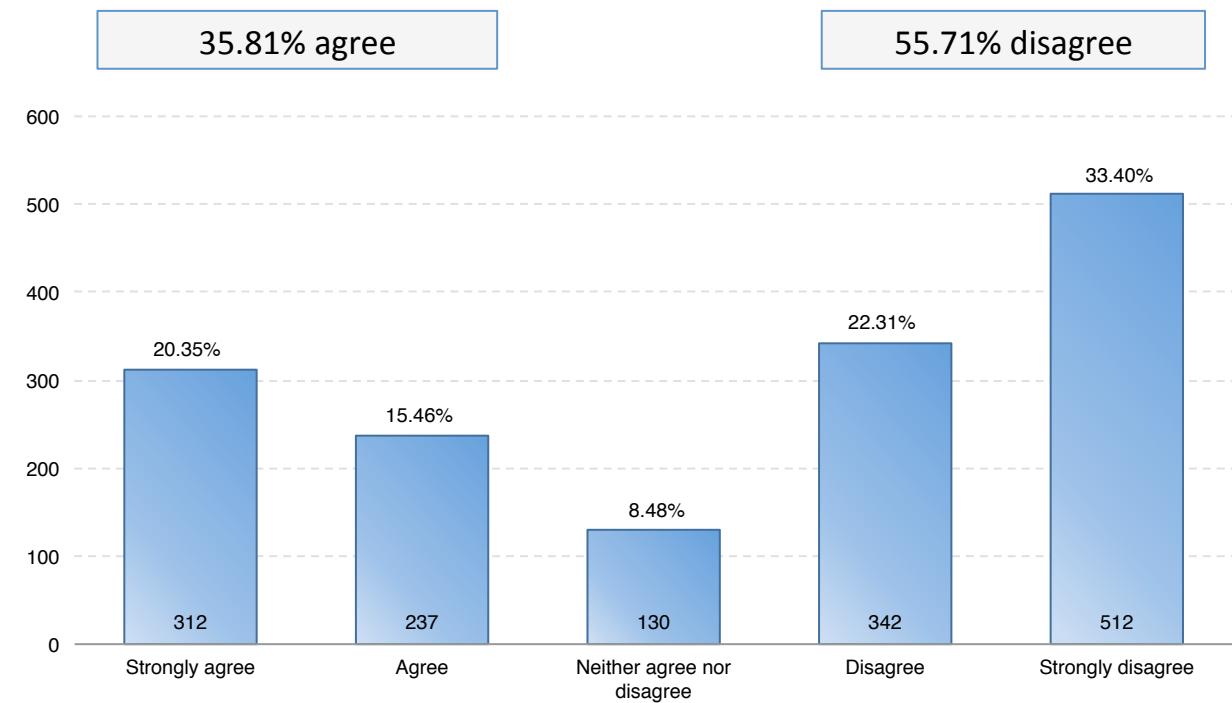


4. Is the new Missal an improvement?

Priests state by approximately a 3-2 margin (56% to 36%) that the new translation is not an improvement on the previous one, the Sacramentary in use from 1974 until 2011. More than 1/3 of priests strongly disagree that the new Missal is an improvement. One in 5 priests (20%) strongly agrees that it is an improvement.

“I think the new translation is an improvement on the old one.”

Total responses: 1533

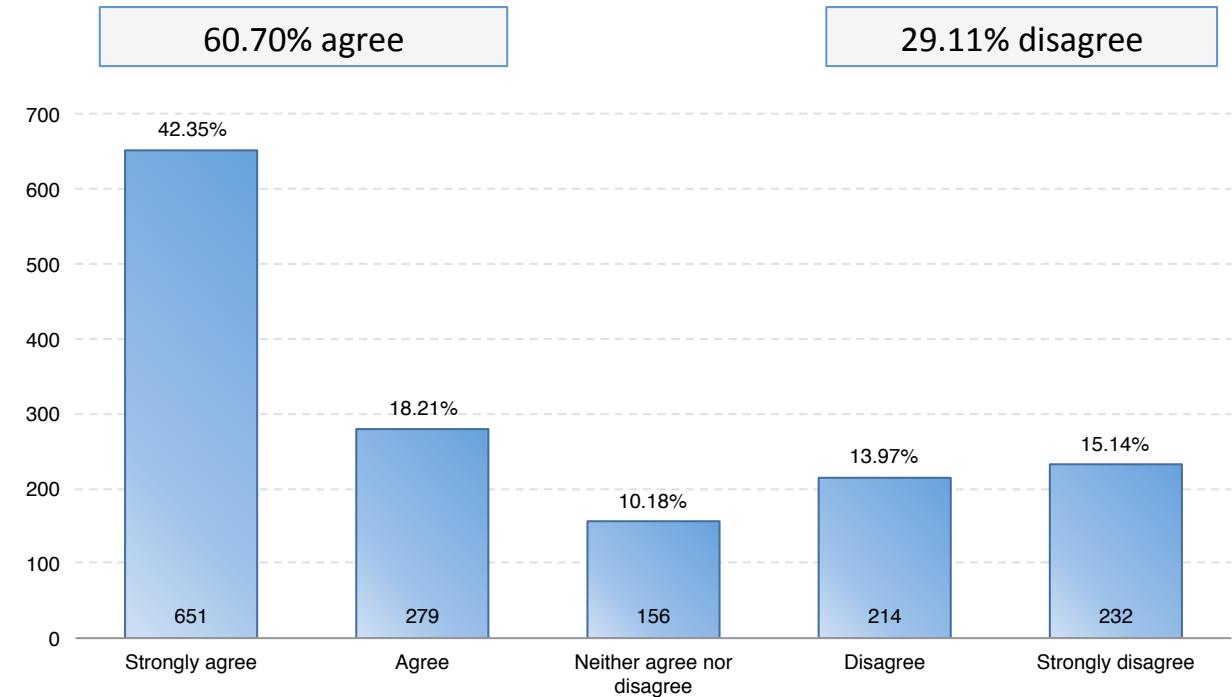


5. Does the new Missal need revision?

Most priests hold that the new translation urgently needs to be revised, with more than 6 in 10 holding this view, against 3 in 10 who disagree. More than 4 in 10 (42%) strongly agree that the new translation urgently needs to be revised.

“I think the new translation urgently needs to be revised.”

Total responses: 1532

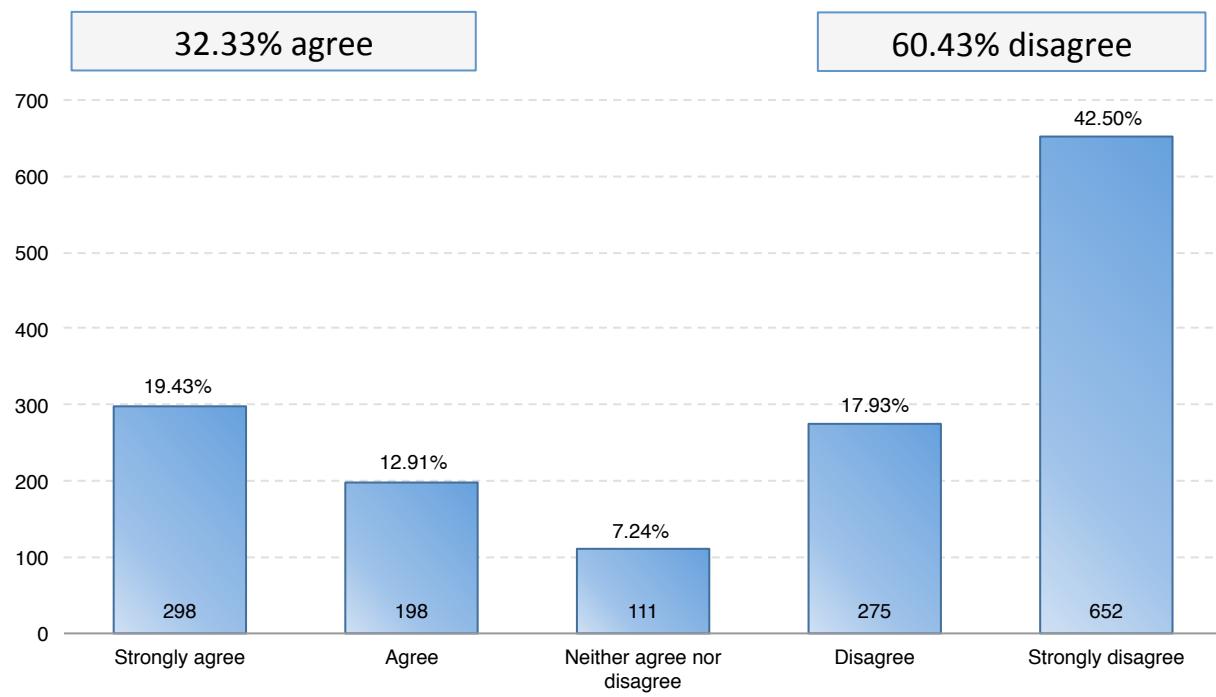


6. Continuing with the same style of translation for other rites

More priests disagree with work continuing on translating other liturgical texts in the same style as the Missal than agree with it, by approximately a 2-1 margin (60% and 32% respectively). More than 2 in 5 priests (42.5%) strongly disagree with further liturgical texts being translated in the same style.

“I think work should go forward in translating the Liturgy of the Hours and all the other rites (Marriage, Confirmation, etc.) in the same style as the new Missal.”

Total responses: 1534

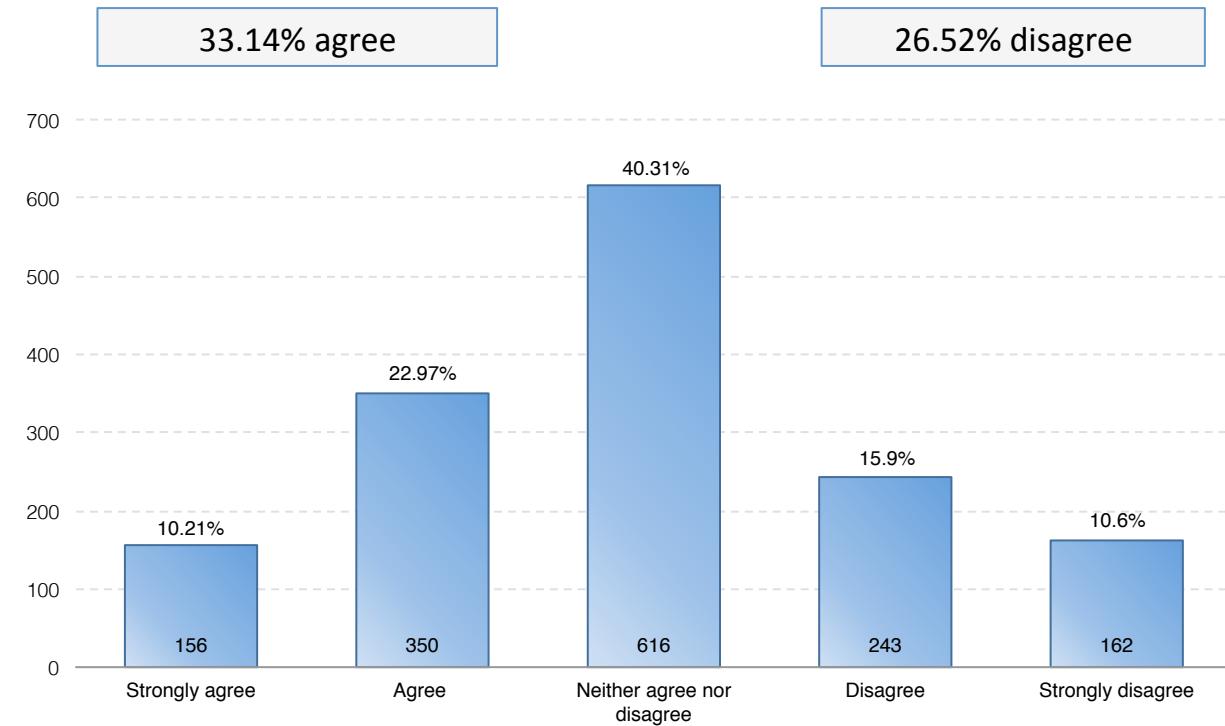


7. Missal chant settings

More priests like the English chant settings than do not, with the largest group of respondents (40%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing that they like the chant. About 1/3 of priests (33%) like the Missal chant; slightly more than 1/4 (27%) dislike it.

“I like the Missal’s English chant settings.”

Total responses: 1527

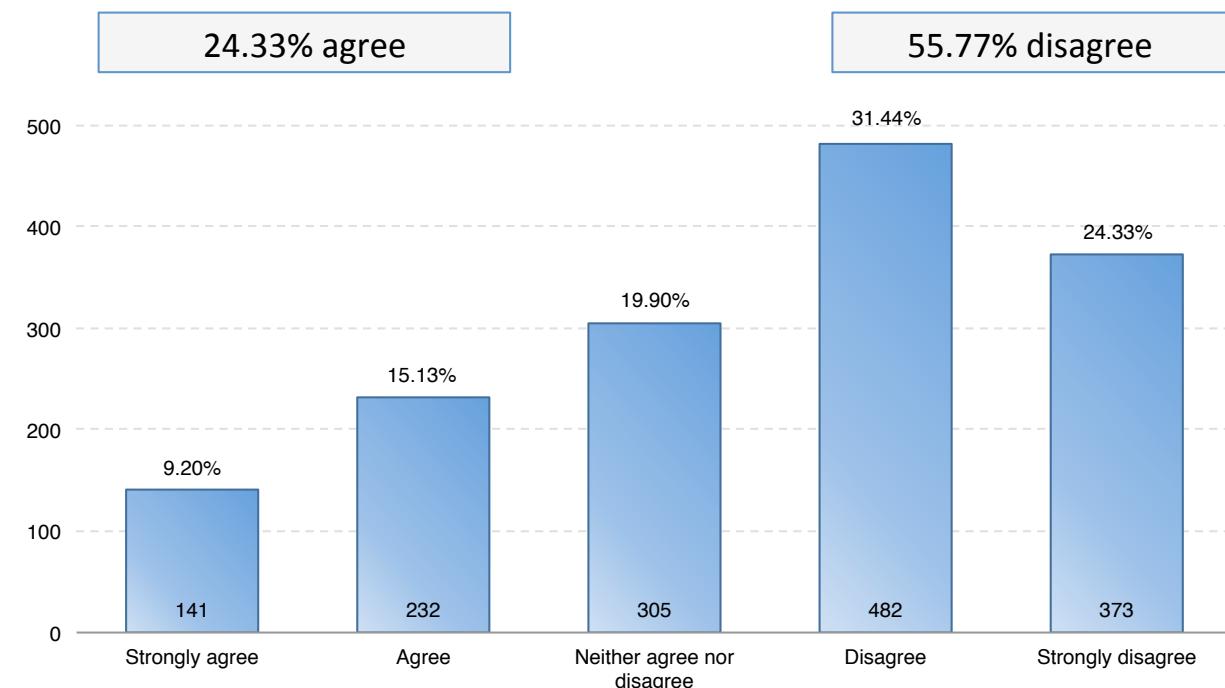


8. Priests' input on future translations

Priests are not very confident that their views about translation will be taken seriously. Less than 1/4 of priests (24%) are confident of this, while more than half (56%) are not.

“I am confident that the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation.”

Total responses: 1533

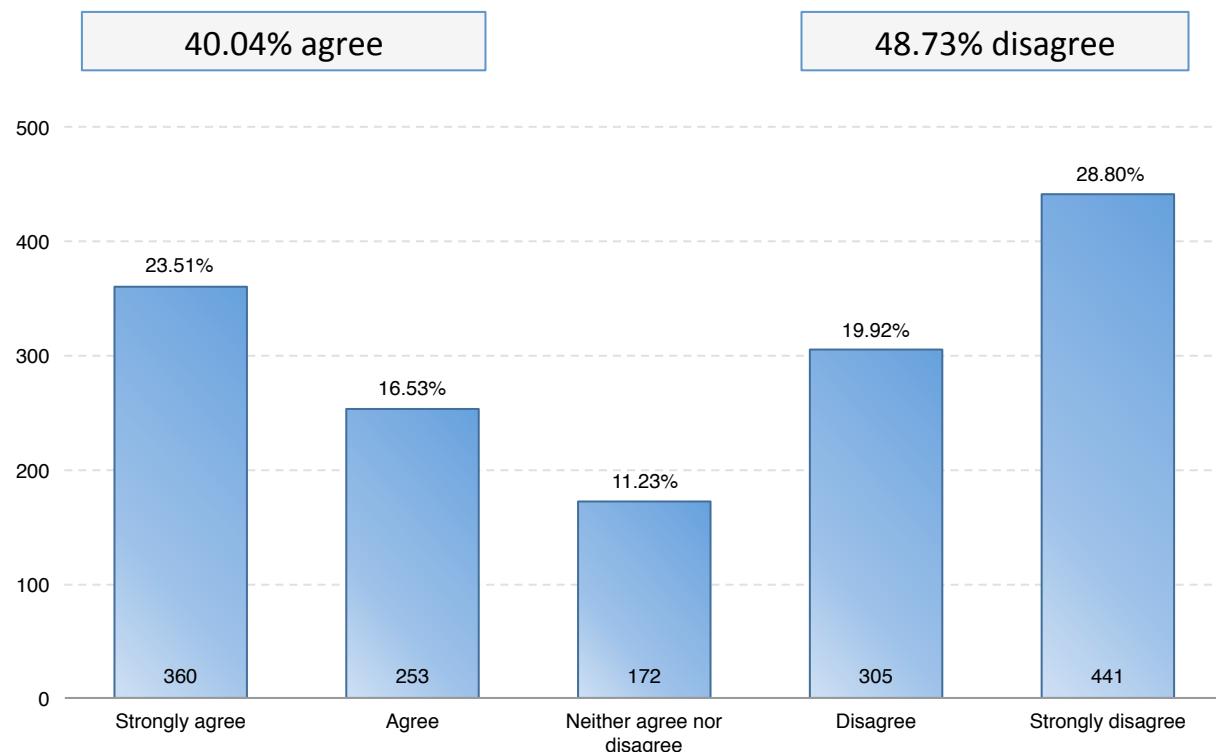


9. Leadership of the Holy See

More priests disapprove than approve of the Holy See's leadership in bringing about the new Missal. Nearly half (49%) do not approve of the Holy See's leadership, 29% strongly so. About 2 in 5 (40%) do approve of the Holy See's leadership, nearly 1/4 (24%) strongly so.

"I approve of the leadership of the Holy See in bringing about the new Missal."

Total responses: 1531

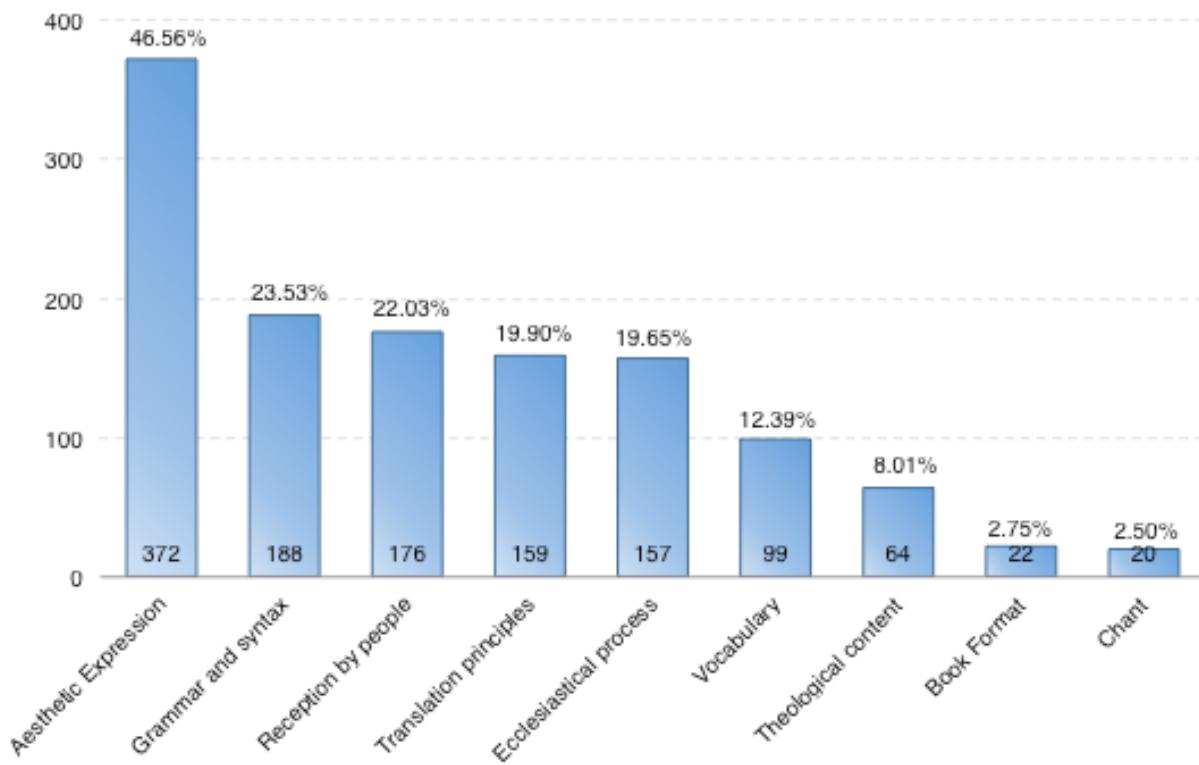


The Comments

Total comments: 799

All of the comments are published in their entirety at the Diekmann Center webpage:
www.csbsju.edu/SOT/Programs/Diekmann-Center/New-Roman-Missal-Survey-for-US-Priests.

Themes Reflected in Comments

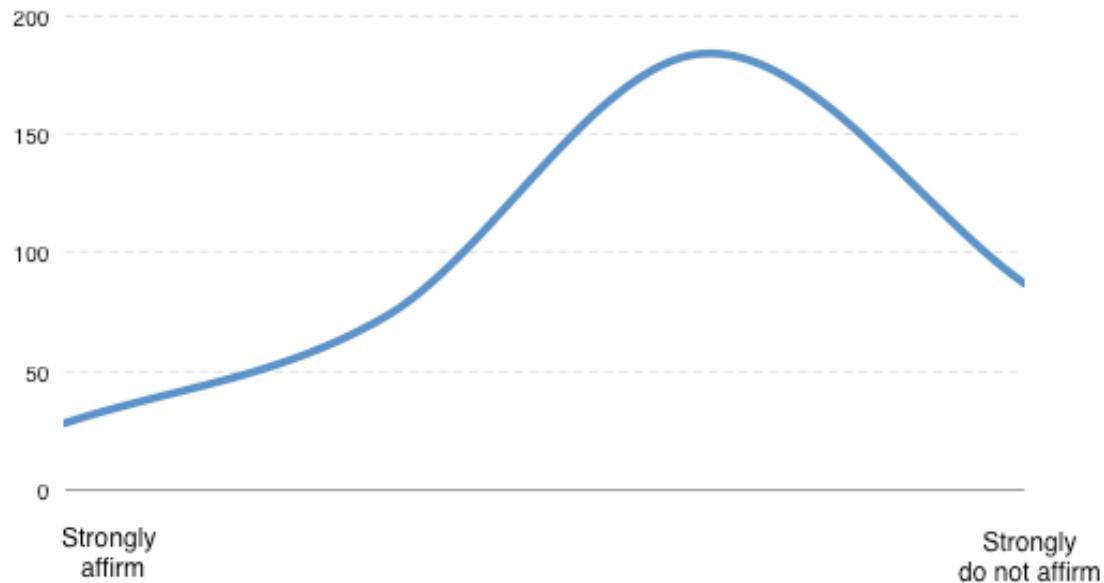


* Some comments are included in one or more categories; percentages in the graph are based on the no. of comments in a particular category / total comments. So “46.56%” indicates that of all 799 comments, 46.56% of them treat the issue of “aesthetic expression.”

1. Aesthetic Expression

Treating issues of proclaimability, poetic quality, beauty.

Total comments: 372 (46.56%)



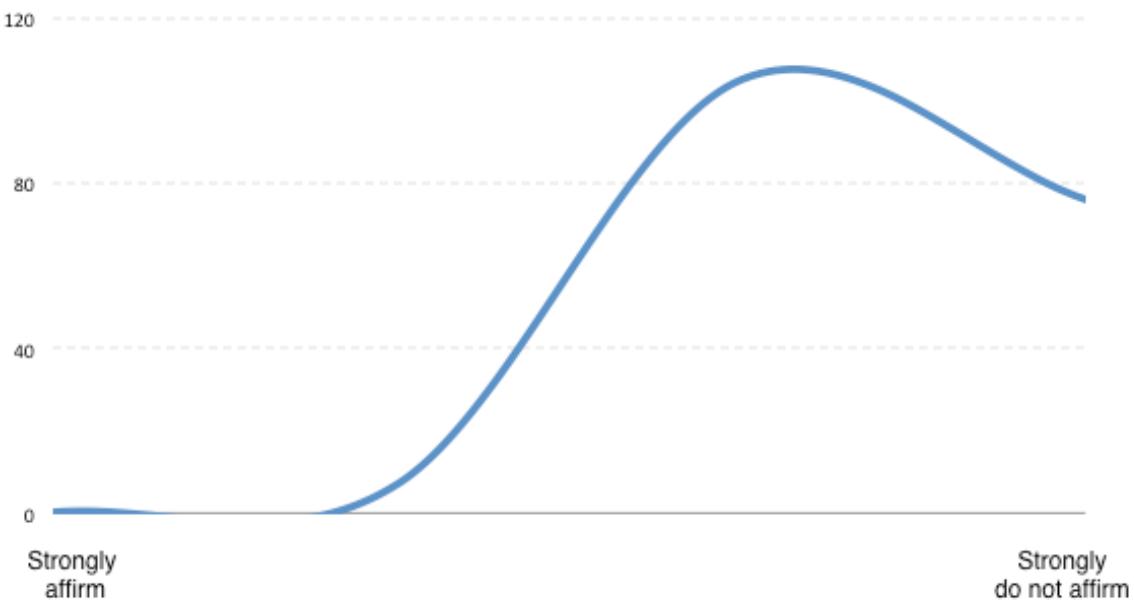
More than 2/3 of the 372 respondents who commented on aesthetic expression in the new Missal do not affirm it. Respondents describe prayers as “stilted,” “awkward,” “difficult to proclaim,” “contrived, not sacred,” “clunky,” “lacking a lyrical beauty,” “cumbersome,” “distracting,” “awful,” having “no poetic feel,” etc.

Those who affirm the Missal’s aesthetic expression express approval for the Missal’s “elevated style,” “stronger sense of reverence,” “difference from common-day language,” “more prayerful phrases,” “richness of text,” etc.

2. Grammar and Syntax

Treating issues of sentence structure, quality of English grammar.

Total comments: 188 (23.53%)



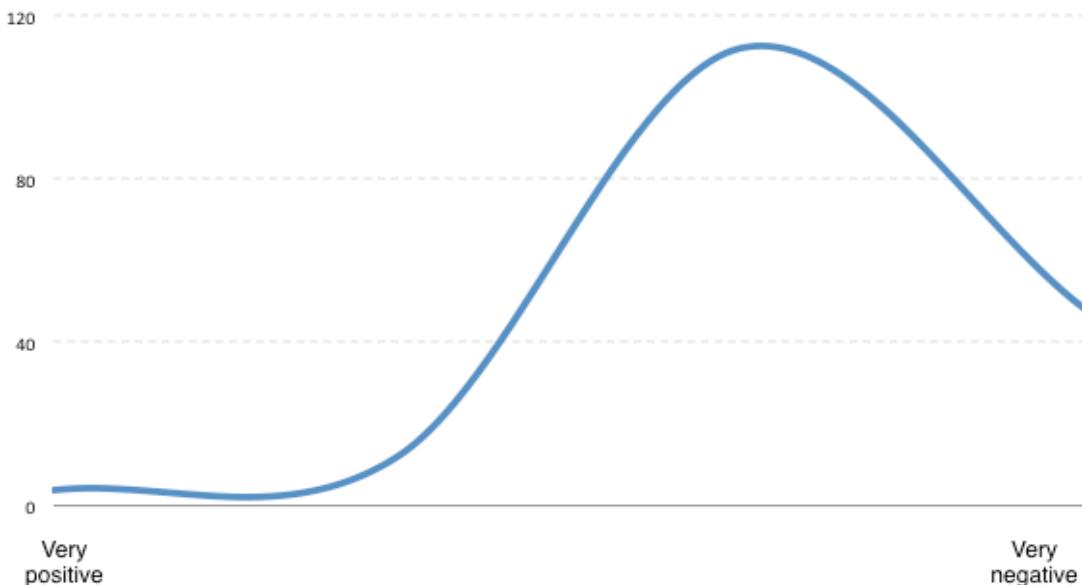
The vast majority of those who commented on the Missal's grammar and syntax do not affirm it. Many commenters express concerns that the Missal's English is not idiomatic, breaks rules of English grammar, and employs Latin rather than English syntax, so much so that the Missal is simply "not English." Commenters wrote unfavorably about the "many dependent clauses," "run-on sentences," "many commas," and "awful phraseology" that left one "tongue-tied."²⁴ 24 comments singled out the Missal's collects, calling them "horrendous," "overwritten," and impossible to diagram. One noted that the difficult phrases are challenging to render into sign language when he celebrates Mass for the deaf.

No one affirmed the grammar and syntax in the Missal strongly, but a handful admit that the language could use "minor tweaks" and prefer the new translation overall.

3. Reception by people

Treating issues of pastoral effect, participation, engagement, comprehensibility.

Total comments: 176 (22.03%)



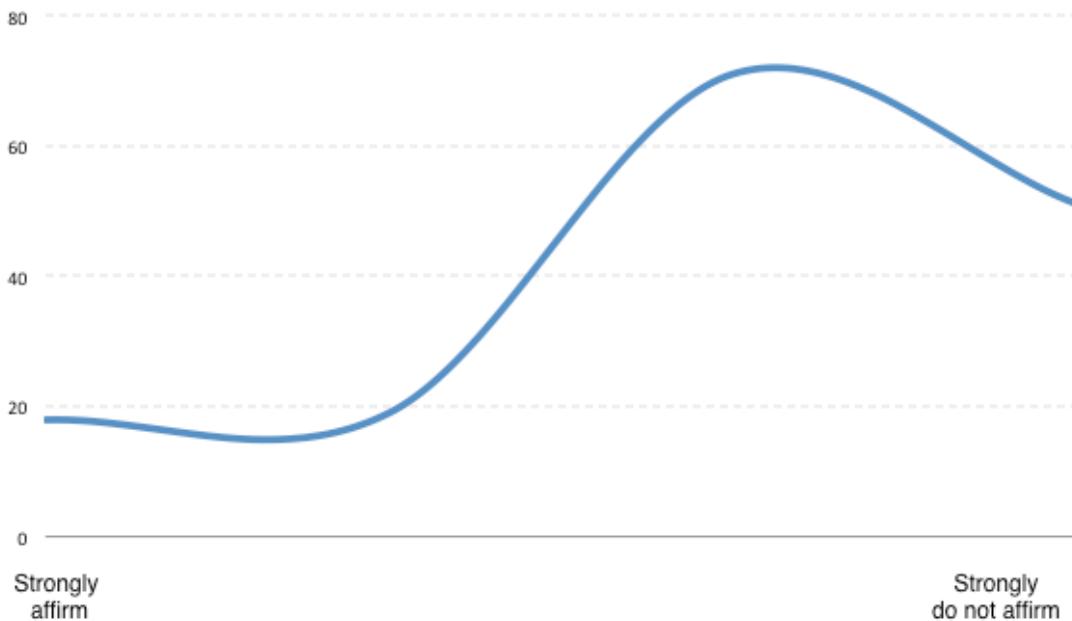
Over 90% who spoke of reception by the people express concerns that the language is “difficult to pray” and “difficult for people to understand.” Commenters said the prayers are distancing the faithful from the priest and God, do not engage them, “do not resonate with the ears/hearts of the faithful,” “made no attempt to include the people,” are “inaccessible,” do not allow true full and active participation, and are fueling a “return to passivity” in liturgy. Laity have voiced dissatisfaction and dislike for the Missal, but some seem to have “reluctantly accepted it” or are “enduring it remarkably well” (which one priest calls “a tribute to their faith and desire to worship”). Many priests also claimed to have been approached by laity to explain certain prayers and words.

The few who perceive a positive reception from the people said the new translation has “not been problematic” and that some “like them very much”; the Missal has made people “think and reflect more deeply,” presents a “wonderful opportunity for catechesis,” and has made Mass “more reverent.”

4. Translation principles

Treating issues of *Liturgiam authenticam*, dynamic equivalence, faithfulness to Latin, having the same English translation for all English-speaking countries.

Total comments: 159 (19.90%)



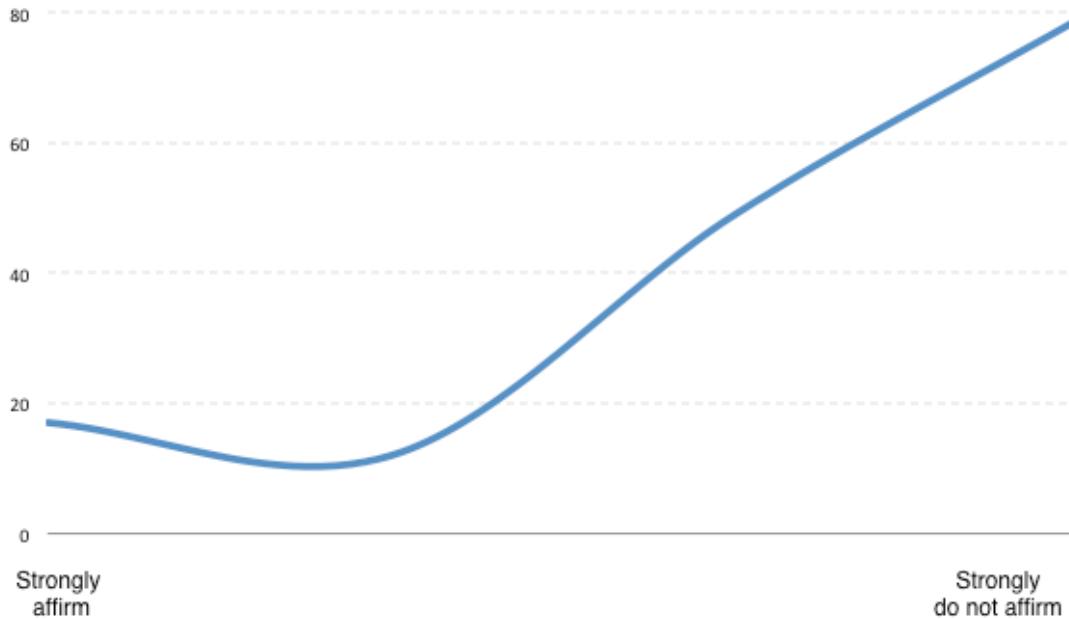
Over three-quarters of those who made allusions to the Missal's translation principles do not affirm them. Some claim the "principle of formal equivalence is faulty," do not agree that a "one size fits all" translation is best, and say that the Missal is a "transliteration, not translation." Several are concerned that the English language was made to conform to Latin syntax.

The minority who spoke favorably about the translation principles generally appreciate that the translation is closer to the Latin original.

5. Ecclesiastical process

Treating issues of leadership from Rome and bishops, collegiality, ICEL.

Total comments: 157 (19.65%)



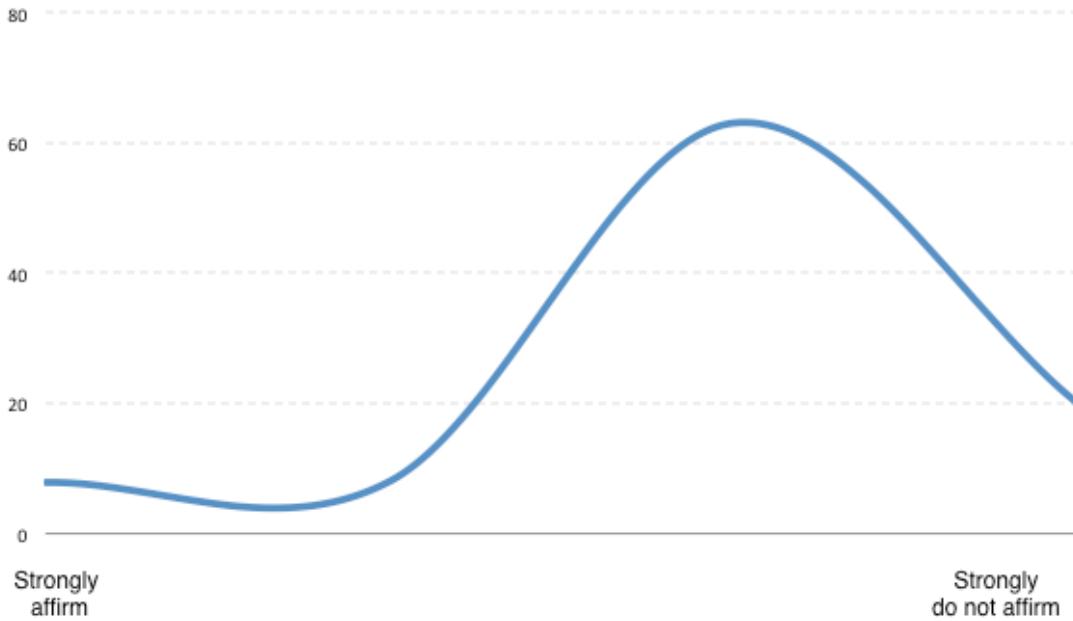
About 80% of those who referred to the ecclesiastical process of the new Missal do not affirm it. Several raise concerns that Rome had not respected the role of Bishops, citing a lack of collegiality between Rome, translation committees, and Bishops in the process. The Missal came off as a “top down” imposition on the faithful for many. Some feel that the lack of consultation with priests was a mistake; they could have offered opinions as celebrants. A couple note that the collaborative work found in ICEL’s original was ignored by Rome — “beautiful and proper prayers were submitted but rejected by the Vatican” and “comments and suggestions were almost universally ignored in the final edition.”

The minority who affirmed the ecclesiastical process favor Rome’s centralized authority and note that the “Church is not, nor has she ever been, a democracy.” Some feel that priests need not be consulted — there are too many to consult and they “do not see the point”; a priest’s “first duty is to obey,” and “most priests have absolutely no expertise in this area.”

6. Vocabulary

Treating issues of vocabulary and word usage.

Total comments: 99 (12.39%)



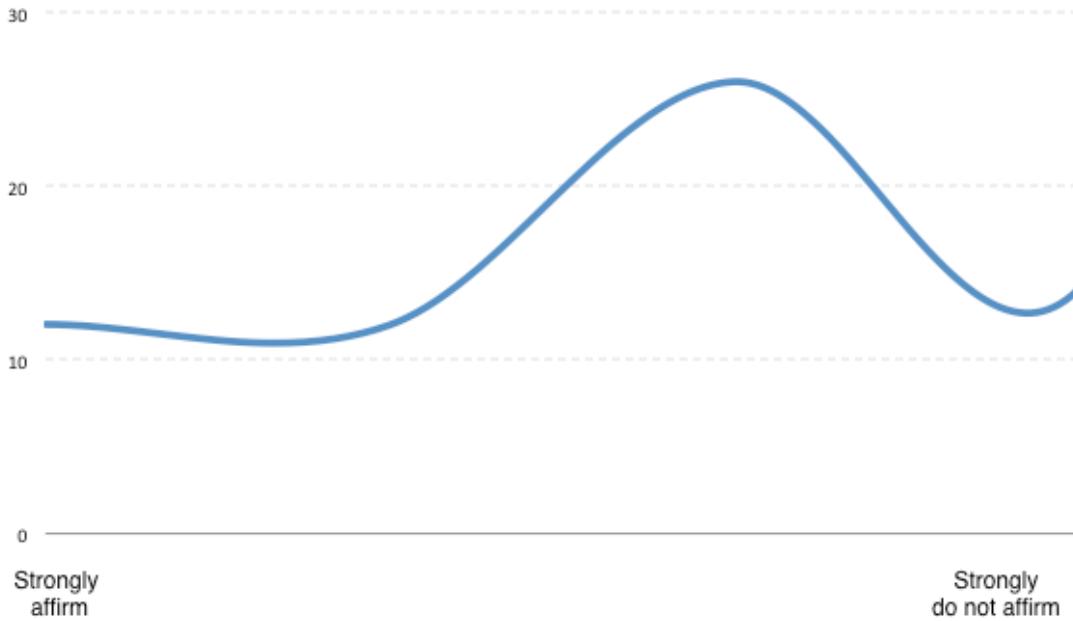
Approximately 80% of those who made comments on the vocabulary of the Missal do not affirm it. Words are described to be “archaic,” “lofty,” “distracting,” and “foreign.” Some words like “graciously,” “laud,” and “we pray” are repeated too often. Among other words identified as unfavorable are: “consubstantial,” “beseech,” “prevenient,” “chalice,” “oblation” and “dewfall.”

Those who affirm the vocabulary identify similar words as those who dislike the vocabulary, but state that the words are not problematic for them.

7. Theological Content

Treating issues of scriptural allusions, doctrine, theological anthropology, sin.

Total comments: 64 (8.01%)



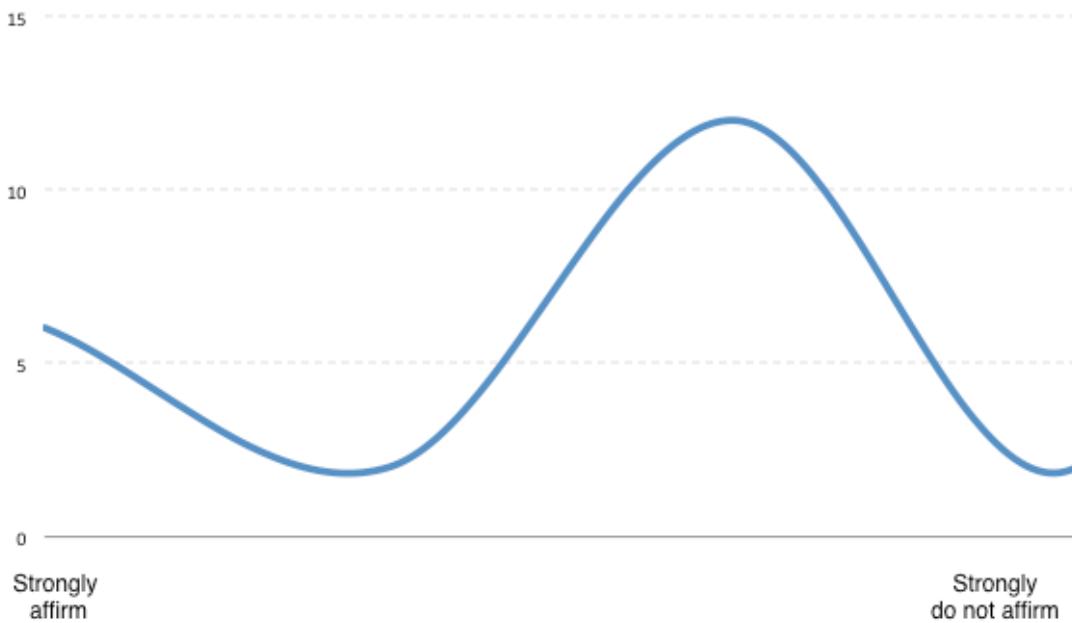
About 60% of commenters who allude to the Missal's theological content are not in favor of it. Some feel that the Missal reflects "old theology," expresses a false "holier than thou" image, is "disconnected from real life," emphasizes "sin" and "hell" (as in the Creed), and contains some "heretical" theology. A handful feels that the language sounds more like "theological statements" than prayers.

The other 40% favor the Missal's theological content for its fidelity to Scripture and biblical imagery, inclusion of sin, and increased "theological richness."

8. Book Format

Treating issues of appearance and weight of Missal and organization of content.

Total comments: 22 (2.75%)



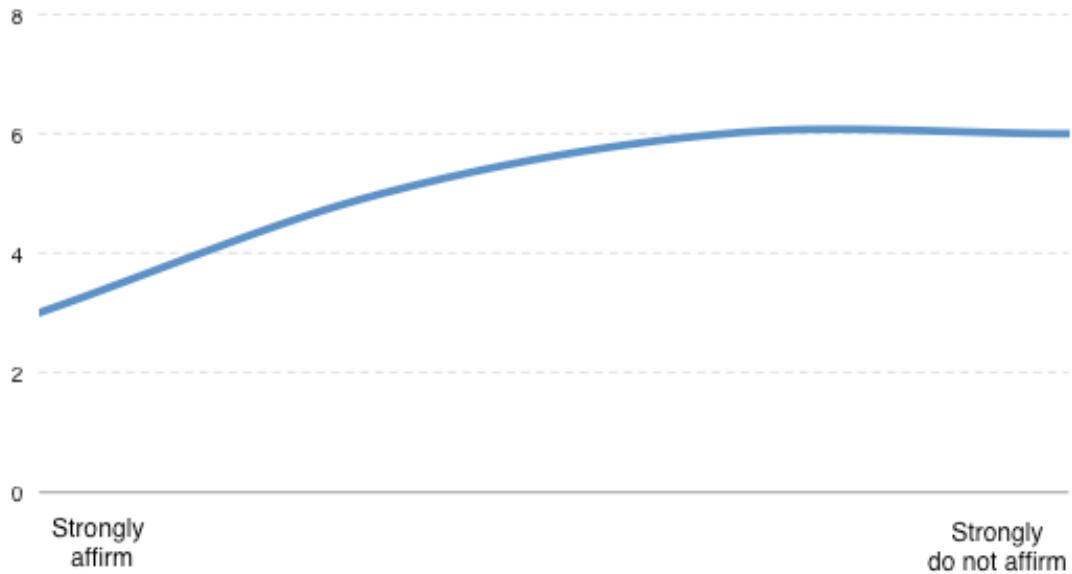
More than half of those who made mention of the way in which the book was formatted do not like the Missal. Some comments are publisher-specific: “art in the wrong places” and different pagination between publishers. Others note that scattered prefaces are confusing and offer opinions regarding which prayers and chants are placed in the appendix.

Those who wrote favorably of the Missal praise the way the prefaces are placed with the Mass propers and mention liking religious art in the Missal.

9. Missal Chant

Treating issues of English Missal chant.

Total comments: 20 (2.50%)



Just over half of those who commented on the Missal's chant do not affirm it. One claimed the chant is difficult to learn. Some feel the chant is boring, has no beauty, and has awkward cadences. One suggested simpler versions of preface chants.

Among those who affirm the chants, one made mention that basic chants are being used at daily Mass. Others mention learning chants through listening and repetition.

Other insights:

138 comments made reference to preceding translations, generally reflecting unfavorably on the new Missal.

12 comments admitted to having witnessed textual adaptations or personally making them.

22 comments said the Missal was going against the directives of Vatican II; 2 from separate dioceses said the Missal was "hijacked by ideologues."

Appendix 1: Comparison of *The Tablet* and Diekmann Center Surveys (Given in percentages)

Question 1 (identical): Which of the following best sums up your attitude toward the new text?

	TABLET	DIEKMANN
Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it and I still don't like it.	64	44
Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it but I've changed my mind and I like it.	5	10
Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it and I still like it.	25	29
Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it but I've changed my mind and I don't like it.	6	15
I haven't noticed much difference between this text and the previous one.	1	2

For the following, the response percentages are given for these responses, in this order:

Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

Responses are rounded off and in some cases do not add up to 100%.

Question 2 (substantially identical):

TABLET: I like the more formal style. 26 / 5 / 3 / 18 / 48

DIEKMANN: I like the more formal style of language. 18 / 18 / 7 / 22 / 35

Question 3 (revised):

TABLET: Some of the florid language is obsequious and distracting 26 / 5 / 3 / 18 / 48

DIEKMANN: Some of the language is awkward and distracting. 18 / 18 / 7 / 22 / 35

Question 4 (identical): I think the new translation is an improvement on the old one.

TABLET: 26 / 5 / 1 / 14 / 54

DIEKMANN: 10 / 15 / 8 / 22 / 34

Question 5 (identical): I think the new translation urgently needs to be revised.

TABLET: 62 / 8 / 3 / 8 / 19

DIEKMANN: 43 / 18 / 10 / 14 / 15

Question 6 (new): I think work should go forward in translating the Liturgy of the Hours and all the other rites (Marriage, Confirmation, etc.) in the same style as the new Missal.

Question 7 (substantially identical):

TABLET: I like the plainchant settings. 20 / 12 / 33 / 20 / 15

DIEKMANN: I like the Missal's English chant settings. 10 / 23 / 40 / 16 / 11

Question 8 (new): I am confident that the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation.

Question 9 (new): I approve of the leadership of the Holy See in bringing about the new Missal.

One further question was identical to both studies: “The new translation is more prayerful and reverent – we need a special language with which to address God.” The Diekmann Center has since decided not to publish the results to this question because it concerns two separate issues.