

# The New Liturgical Translations Explained

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Shortly after a story headlined "Changes Coming to Catholic Mass" appeared in the June 16 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, my mom called me and asked, "What's this about changes in the Mass?" I told her, "Mom, it's a complicated story and I'd prefer to explain it to you over dinner, at your house!" Perhaps some of you had the same question as my mom after reading or hearing news reports regarding the recent vote of the U.S. Bishops to approve a new translation of the Order of Mass at their recent meeting in Los Angeles. Because this is a somewhat convoluted topic that might be raising some concerns among you, it is my hope that these modest reflections might prove helpful to understanding what is going on.

One of the pivotal documents of the Second Vatican Council was its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* that mandated both the renewal and reform of our sacred liturgy. This was the first document that was promulgated by the council. One of its important orienting principles was the support for the "full, active and conscious" participation of all the faithful in the worship of the Church. In light of this principle, the constitution opened the door for the introduction of vernacular languages into the Latin Rite sacramental formulas. Some of you might remember those early years after the council when the priest for the first time in more than 1,000 years spoke English in the Eucharistic liturgy. At first, English was

used only incorporated into certain limited portions of the Eucharistic liturgy but in time the complete Eucharistic liturgy and all the sacramental rites of the Church would eventually be celebrated in the vernacular.

Because of the importance of insuring accurate translations of the reformed ritual books that were issued in Latin after the council, the bishops of all the English-speaking countries agreed to establish a joint or "mixed" commission that would be responsible for producing in a relatively short period of time initial translations into English of these reformed Latin texts. This group would eventually be called the *International Commission on English in the Liturgy*, commonly known by its acronym, ICEL. For the past 35 years, ICEL has been providing our present English translations that we use at Mass and the other sacraments of the Church.

Because these "first generation" translations were needed rather quickly, ICEL was keenly aware that "second generation," or newer and more refined and poetic translations of the Latin texts, would eventually be needed. Scholars working with ICEL carefully and painstakingly worked on these new translations, incorporating the principles and criteria enunciated by the Holy See for translators. Translations were to be focused first on "meaning" rather than a slavish translation of words. The French have a rather facetious maxim about translations that maintain a kernel of truth: "Translations are like women: when they are faithful, they are not beautiful; and when they beautiful, they are not faithful!"

These early translators were utilizing a principle of translation known as "dynamic equivalency." By this principle, translators were more concerned about capturing the meaning of a word or text into English rather than be-

translation of the Latin text and is consistent and in continuity with translations found in other languages, (for example, in Spanish: *El Señor esté con ustedes. Y con tu Espíritu.*)

Before this draft translation can be approved for use in the liturgy, the bishops' positive vote must receive what is referred to as the "recognitio" or approval of the Apostolic See. Because other English-speaking Episcopal conferences already have received such "recognitio," most likely it will be granted with a possible nuanced exception. At their meeting in Los Angeles last month, the bishops were dissatisfied with some of the draft translations presented by ICEL for their approval. An example was the proposed change in the translation of one section of the Nicene Creed where we presently pray, "one in being with the Father." The newer translation proposes a more literal translation of the Latin, "consubstantial with the Father." The bishops, however, are requesting the retention of the present translation with no change. Whether this will be approved by Roman authorities remains to be seen.

The obvious question that perhaps is on the minds of many is "when?" When will we be using these newer translations? To avoid introducing these initial new translations in a piecemeal fashion, the U.S. bishops are wisely awaiting the translation and subsequent vote and then the "recognitio" of the Holy See for the entire translation of the Roman Missal. While there is no definitive timing as to when this will be completed, those who are familiar with the process are saying that we will not be speaking these new translations for at least two more years—if not longer!

Why is all this so important? As Catholic Christians, the holy liturgy shapes our faith lives and identities. The ancient maxim is that "the Eucharist makes the Church." The Eucharist does not belong to an individual priest, community or nation but rather is the precious legacy that belongs to the universal Church that is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. For that reason, great care must be exercised in insuring the accuracy of these translations that bring to every gathered assembly of the faithful our 2,000-year tradition of worship. No individual "owns" the liturgy, but rather all of us—bishops, priests and people—are called to serve faithfully what has been handed down to us with integrity from the apostles.

Additionally, there is another ancient maxim: *Lex orandi statuit legem credendae*—The law of prayer establishes the law of belief (Prosper of Aquitaine, c. 390-465). By this maxim we understand that the belief that shapes our lives as Catholic Christians is first and foremost found in both the texts and manner in which we pray the holy liturgy. Hence, the texts of the liturgy, the words that we use in praise and thanks, in a very real sense "shape our belief."

It has been my hope that these reflections on liturgical translation issues have proven helpful to shed some light on an issue that can be very complicated as well as a bit obtuse. As the time draws closer for the utilization of these newer translations, it will provide an opportunity for us all to appropriate once again the importance of the communal nature of our worship and our call to be engaged in these moments in a "full, active and conscious" manner. **ccc**

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ing obsessed with a direct or slavish "word for word" translation of the Latin.

In time, however, concern was expressed by certain segments of the English-speaking world that these initial English translations in some areas appeared to take too great of liberties in translating the Latin typical texts. In time, this became a concern of the Holy See, for it is the responsibility of the Holy See and the Holy See alone to ultimately approve all liturgical translations submitted by National Conferences of Bishops for use in their respective countries in the Sacred Rites of the Church.

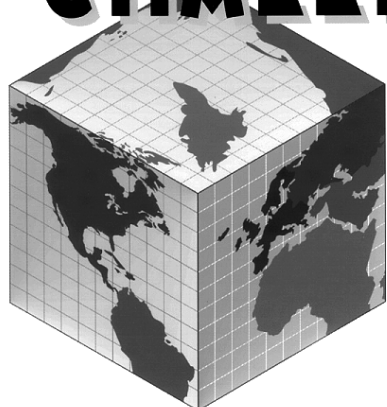
Because of this growing concern on the part of Roman authorities, a new set of guidelines was issued regarding the criteria that were from now on to be used in translating liturgical texts. The criteria no longer supported the use of "dynamic equivalency" but rather called translators to focus primarily and exclusively on the translating of the Latin text in as close a word-for-word fashion as possible.

With this new criteria at work, ICEL was required to set aside its nearly 12-year project that it had virtually completed in order to provide a "second generation" translation of the Roman Missal faithful to the new criteria. In addition, the Holy See established a separate commission called *Vox Clara*, made up of bishops from the English-speaking world, to oversee the work of ICEL to insure that its translations would be faithful to the originating Latin texts.

The recent positive vote of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops was in favor of the new draft translation of the Ordinary of the Mass—not the entire Roman Missal—that was prepared by ICEL, approved by *Vox Clara* and utilizing the new translation principles.

What is the difference in this new translation? By way of example, the present translation of the Latin greeting and response *Dominus vobiscum—Et cum spiritu tuo, The Lord be with you—And also with you;* has been rendered in the newer translation: *The Lord be with you—And with your Spirit.* This translation is obviously a direct and literal

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