

Search for truth and poetry

A new translation of the Order of Mass into English from the Latin text has been a lengthy and sometimes controversial process. The challenge for the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, the body charged with the task of translation, has been to provide a version that is solemn and profound, yet, as its chairman reports here, accessible as well

Earlier this summer bishops of eight English-speaking countries voted to approve the new translation of the Order of Mass which was prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). I was present at two of these meetings and have received reports of the others. In each case, after thorough discussion, the vote was decisively in favour. Clearly, we have reached a significant moment.

It strikes me that this is a good time to offer a brief review of ICEL's work in translating the third edition of the *Roman Missal*, which of course is ongoing – the Order of Mass

forms only a part of it. I should like to look both at the process of consultation – which has been profoundly collegial – and at the process of translation, which has produced liturgical texts that are of a high aesthetic and theological quality and which will make a major contribution to evangelisation in the coming decades.

It may be helpful to recall the reasons why ICEL was given the task of producing a new translation. Firstly, while there have been three Latin editions of the *Roman Missal* since the Second Vatican Council, the English text we presently use is a translation of the first edition. Secondly, this translation was only ever intended to be provisional: the bishops who produced it freely acknowledged that of necessity it was produced in a hurry.

More than 30 years of use, of course, makes us all reluctant to change. Indeed, praying our present texts for such a long time has, in a sense, sacralised them. But this is not change for change's sake; this is a change to bring to light the depth of riches contained in the liturgy of the Roman Rite.

The favourable vote of the Episcopal Conferences is undoubtedly a milestone in preparing an English translation of the third edition of the *Roman Missal*. For four years, ICEL has been in dialogue with the bishops of the countries it serves, honing its work to meet their wishes while seeking to remain faithful to the original Latin texts. Some people have criticised this process, arguing that consultation should extend beyond these bishops. It should be remembered, however, that when bishops meet, they do so not to express their personal opinions, but to witness to the life and faith of the local churches.

The bishop is the one person who experiences liturgical life across the whole diocese, not only in large parishes with a variety of liturgical resources, but also in tiny communities where it is sometimes a struggle to organise any but the most rudimentary celebration, and in convents, hospitals, prisons – everywhere Mass is celebrated. He may consult with whomever he wishes, but ultimately it is the bishop who must exercise his apostolic ministry of discerning what is for the good of the local church. The liturgy is not just for experts: it is for everybody.

The work ICEL undertakes is an exercise

in collegiality, seeking to craft a liturgy that will serve the entire English-speaking world. This cannot be done without a degree of compromise. For instance, we in Yorkshire might wish to read in 1 Corinthians 12:3 “Jesus is Lord, is Jesus” because that is the idiom of this area, but we accept the commoner form “Jesus is Lord” for the greater good. The same is true internationally, although this is not everywhere acknowledged. Some English people say our new ICEL texts are too American, and some Americans say they are too English. The truth of the matter is that ICEL is keeping its eyes on International Standard English, recognised by linguists but hard to define.

Collegiality serves catholicity: if we can produce a single worldwide English liturgy it will be both a sign and a safeguard of the Church's catholicity. Given that the liturgy preserves the apostolic tradition of faith, the bishops have worked collegially with the Pope to ensure that the English liturgy is a channel for that tradition. At the same time, ICEL seeks continually to involve other collaborators from as many countries as possible. These include not only translators but some highly expert musicians, for liturgical texts are sung as well as spoken.

The work of ICEL is guided by *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the document published by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 2001, which has been criticised for putting the clock back, whereas in fact it puts the clock forward. For more than 30 years, liturgical translators were advised to aim at “dynamic equivalence”, rendering the content of a text while freely reshaping its form. This method was devised for the translation of Scripture, and can work well in the translation of narrative. For instance, the two sentences, “John baptised Jesus” and “Jesus was baptised by John”, clothe the same informational content in two different forms.

But we do more with language than provide information: we seek also to persuade. In liturgy, we seek to persuade God. If we want somebody to close a door for us, we might simply say, “Close the door”, or we might say, “Would you mind closing the door for me, please?” Both sentences transmit the same information (that I wish you to close the door), but the second form seeks to

Soeterbeeck Programma

Radoud Universiteit Nijmegen



Summer Course

Globalization: diversity, identity, dignity

From 28 August till 1 September 2006 the Soeterbeeck Programma of the Radoud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, will organise a summer course on globalisation. The course is organised in cooperation with specialists from among others Sarum College (UK), the Catholic University of Louvain and the University of Antwerp (Belgium).

Participants will be scholars at (post) Master level on the one hand, and policy makers in international aid organisations (Cordaid, ICCO, NCDO, Justitia et Pax, as well as similar organisations in Britain and Belgium) on the other hand. The aim is to analyse and discuss issues of globalisation within the intellectual frameworks set by authors like Jonathan Sacks, Richard Sennett, Zygmunt Bauman, Rüdiger Safranski and others. Religious intellectual cultural heritage will play an important role in the course.

Lectures will be presented by, among others, Prof. Wil Derkse (Radoud University Nijmegen), Prof. Jacques Haers SJ (KU Louvain), Prof. Hendrik Opdebeeck (University of Antwerp), Richard Steenvoorde MA (Sarum College, Salisbury) and Dr Wilf Wilde (Sarum College, Salisbury).

Further information can be obtained on website www.ru.nl/globalization or by sending an email to Prof. Wil Derkse: w.derkse@soeterbeeck.ru.nl

persuade rather than command.

The originator of the idea of dynamic equivalence, Eugene Nida, himself ceased to use it in his later writings. In insisting on the importance of linguistic form and its interdependence with content, *Liturgiam Authenticam* takes account of recent work in linguistics. It must have been a difficult document to write, for it is always difficult – some would say impossible – to write about language prescriptively and well. But something needed to be said, for the current texts we use simply do not hand on the tradition of prayer that we find in the *Latin Missal*.

Whatever is said about *Liturgiam Authenticam* by its critics, it has served us well as a key to unlock the treasury of the *Missal*. We have been surprised and delighted by the riches that a careful attention to forms of prayer has revealed to us.

For example, we have translated the Prayer after Communion for Easter Day like this:

With unfailing love and care, O God,
watch over your Church,
so that, renewed by the paschal mysteries,
she may reach the bright glory of the
Resurrection.

Notice first that, whereas our current texts often begin with an address to God (“O Lord” or “O God” or simply “Lord”), we have delayed mentioning the divine title until a little later in the prayer as the Latin does. This seems to give prayers a less peremptory, more courteous tone.

Secondly, whereas in English a word or phrase that qualifies a verb usually comes after the verb, we have followed the Latin in putting it before. A more natural English word order would be “so that she may reach the bright glory of the Resurrection renewed by the paschal mysteries”, but this ends the prayer on a diminuendo whereas our proposed version ends on a climax with the word “resurrection”. Frequently the Latin prayers will end on a note of hope, naming what we look forward to either in this world or the next. We have judged it worthwhile to follow this pattern even though it often involves using constructions such as parentheses (like “renewed by the paschal mysteries” in this text) that may offer a certain challenge to the one who proclaims it.

We are constantly concerned with the issue of register. A register is a subset of a language suitable to a particular context: I would use one register to address Parliament and a different one to speak to a class of young children. Early in the process, we proposed that towards the end of Eucharistic Prayer 1 (the Roman Canon) the priest should say: “To us sinners also ... deign to grant some share and fellowship with your holy apostles and martyrs.” “Deign” was greeted with howls of derision from all sides: it was thought to belong to too formal a register for the liturgy. So we tried a much more colloquial version, “please grant some share and fellowship”. This was judged too informal. So we finally settled on “be pleased to grant ...” which seems to fall between the two.



The prayers of the Roman Rite use many expressions of courtesy in addressing God. To find the appropriate polite form for an occasion is not easy: ask yourself what you would say if you unexpectedly met the Queen, for instance. The liturgical texts that we currently use omit many deprecatory expressions found in the Latin original. We are restoring them, and in doing so trying to forge a new register of courteous address to God. Like any new register, it will need to be learnt.

ICEL's work has moved on now from the Order of Mass to the Proper of Seasons. Here the prayers – Collects, Prayers over the Offerings and Post-Communion Prayers – are shorter and bring new challenges. They are drawn from many sources, not only the *Veronese*, *Gelasian* and *Gregorian Sacramentaries*, which are the heart of the prayer books of the Roman Rite, but ancient sacramentaries from Milan and Spain, and more recent compositions.

Each source has its own distinctive mode of expression. The sobriety of expression, which the liturgist Edmund Bishop famously defined as characteristic of the Roman Rite, is not always to be found in texts from elsewhere, so that translators as they work through the *Missal* are constantly surprised. Should they aim to reproduce the variety of styles they meet, or render all the texts in a similar style? ICEL has chosen the former course. This means that the new texts will not display the homogeneity to which the current missal has accustomed us. They will take some getting used to, both for those who will proclaim and for those who will hear them.

Some people assume that liturgical language should be comfortably predictable: it should not shock. That assumption was not shared by the compilers of the post-conciliar Latin *Missale Romanum*. Following them, ICEL has not been afraid to introduce an element of surprise into the prayers we are offering. What is surprising eventually becomes familiar, while retaining the vividness that initially caused surprise.

Many of us could name a piece of music that shocked us when we first heard it and that, as it has become familiar, has continued to enrich our experience. Liturgical texts have a long life. We want the landscape

of the *Missal* to have some colour, some peaks and some troughs, not to be the dull monochrome desert across which we currently traverse year by year. To use a different metaphor, the *Missal* is a jewel-box, not a deep freezer.

A topic that has required particular attention has been the image of God that the *Missal* presents. Much of its language is drawn from that of pre-Christian Roman religion, which was greatly concerned with placating gods who would otherwise be angry. The Latin words for placation and propitiation and their cognates recur constantly. There is a line in the Third Eucharistic Prayer that asks God to recognise on the altar the Victim (that is, Christ) “by whose immolation you have willed to be appeased”. When we proposed these words as a translation of that line, many protested. Some objected that the word “appease” made them think of Neville Chamberlain. Others, more persuasively, argued that the image of an angry and vengeful God that it implies should have no place in Christian worship. ICEL in response deepened its research.

This is sensitive territory ecumenically, for Protestants have long objected that Catholic teaching on the Mass implies that Christ's sacrifice was insufficient to take away the sins of the world, so that each Mass is a further propitiatory act intended to placate God the Father. We found that, whereas in English “propitiation” and “placation” are what people try to do to gods, in Christian Latin they are characteristics of God himself. The prayers of the *Missal* appeal to God's “perpetual propitiation” and “perfect placation”, which are the result of the sacrifice of Christ offered once for all. So when prayers apply the epithet *propitius* or *placatus* to God, as they do very frequently, we are not asking God to be propitiated, but remembering that everything necessary for us to win God's friendship has already been done for us by Christ.

This most central of issues points to the importance of nuance in our theological understanding, and hence in our liturgical language. Our faith is both simple and mysterious, for God, its object, has both revealed Himself to us and dwells in unapproachable light.

Thirty-odd years ago there was a general assumption that, because vernacular liturgy was entirely new to Catholics, it should be easily assimilable. Thus texts were composed with a small vocabulary and a small repertoire of syntactic patterns. What we received all those years ago and have become used to has served us well, but in the long run, texts that transmit as many nuances of the original as possible, and which remain closer to their scriptural and patristic origins, will be more nourishing to the faith and the prayer life of the Church. Judging by the opinions which bishops throughout the English-speaking world have expressed in recent months, there appears to be a growing consensus on this.

■ Arthur Roche is Bishop of Leeds and the chairman of ICEL.