

Interview two: The content of the new English translation

Can you explain the Latin principle, *Lex orandi, lex credendi*? Both the Roman Missal and the instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* tell us that the Roman Rite is perhaps best defined by the rites and prayers of the Sacred Liturgy. This is a simple application of the ancient principle *lex orandi, lex credendi*, or, the practice of our prayer is the practice of our belief. How we pray best defines what we believe. This is one of the reasons why an accurate translation of liturgical texts is so essential to the life of the Church. We will never have a clear idea of what we believe until we have a clear idea of the texts we have prayed in the Sacred Liturgy for over a millennium.

Briefly, what is the difference between “dynamic equivalence” and “formal equivalence” as methods of translating the Roman Missal into English? Can you give an example of a familiar passage that has been translated both ways for comparison sake? The principles of translation applied in an earlier time sought to re-imagine the Latin liturgical texts in a fairly dynamic process which often reconfigured the text and obscured certain aspects of its real meaning. The more recent principles of translation seek to produce a beautiful and memorable translation which is, at the same time, able to be effectively proclaimed at the Sacred Liturgy and precise in its rendering of the meaning contained in the original Latin text.

A simple example would be in the peoples’ response to the priest immediately before receiving Holy Communion when he raises the Sacred Species and declares: “Behold the Lamb of God . . .” We presently respond, “Lord I am not worthy to receive you . . . ,” while the new translation translates the original scriptural reference: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”

Can you provide some examples of how the Latin Missal was badly mistranslated into English? It is important, I would suggest, not to see the first translation as bad and the new one as good. The new translation is an improvement, based upon forty years of experience by the Bishops and the Holy See in effecting liturgical translations. This improvement is reflected in the introductory dialogue at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer, where *Dignum et iustum est* has been translated rather dynamically as *It is right to give him thanks and praise*. The new, more precise rendering is: *It is right and just*.

Cardinal George has commented that with the new translation’s “formal equivalence” approach, multiple levels of meaning in the original texts are preserved and made accessible. Could you comment on this and give us a few examples? The Collect (opening prayer) for Christmas day is a great example:

O God,
who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature
and still more wonderfully restored it,
grant, we pray,
that we may partake in the divinity of him

who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

This new translation incorporates the Latin prayer's reflection on the betrayal of our God-given human dignity in the fall and its restoration in Christ. It also directly quotes the beautiful prayer used when water is added to the wine in the preparation of the gifts, a symbol of how we are transformed in the mystery of the incarnation. All of these important elements were missing from the prior translation:

Lord God,
we praise you for creating man,
and still more for restoring him in Christ.
You Son shared our weakness:
may we share his glory.

One glaring change in the new English translation is in the repeated dialogue between the priest and the people. When the priest says, "The Lord be with you" why are we supposed to now respond with "And with your spirit"? This dialogue between priest and people precedes every important liturgical prayer or blessing and is designed to prepare us to fully participate in the forthcoming rite. In the liturgy, only a priest says, "The Lord be with you." The priest is reminding the people of their baptismal sharing in Christ's Priesthood and how he now acts among those who gather in his name. On their part, the people pray that the priest might now act with that "spirit" he received in his ordination, as did the seventy elders who received a portion of the "spirit" which God had imparted to Moses in days of old.

Some have complained about the rhetorical style of the new translation. What are they objecting to? What do you say about that? In our day, "formal rhetoric," once so common a way of speech, no longer enjoys the currency it once did. The Roman liturgical prayers, however, are written in a very formal style of high rhetoric. While we may find such a way of speaking less familiar than in previous generations, an accurate translation of the Roman liturgical texts require that their original high rhetorical style be respected and reflected in their translation into English.

When do you think the new translation will begin to be used? The Bishops Conference of the United States has indicated the possibility that the texts will begin to be used sometime around Advent of 2011.