

Sightings 9/4/08

New Revisions to the Catholic Liturgy
-- Heather A. Hartel

The words in the Catholic mass are changing, again. Over the protests of some liberal American prelates, the Vatican and the US Conference of Catholic bishops recently approved changes to the English translation of the central prayers of the liturgy. Granted, these modifications are not as dramatic as when, nearly four decades ago, the *Roman Missal* of Paul VI replaced the Tridentine Mass and allowed for the use of the vernacular. That transformation, influenced by the Liturgical movement, paved the way for traditionalist schismatic groups like Archbishop Lefebvre's Society of St. Pius X. And while an apostolic letter from last year supported use of the formal 1962 version of the Tridentine Mass upon parishioners' requests, the new English translation mandates the return of formal language by insisting upon better fidelity to the Latin *Missal* and, in so doing, emphasizes the hierarchal authority the Church and the role of its representatives as mediators between God and the laity.

The reintroduction of formal, elevated language is undoubtedly part of an attempt to follow the instructions of "Liturgiam authenticam," a guideline released by the Vatican in 2001 for how to translate the liturgy into the vernacular. This guideline indicates that translation is not to be a work of "creative innovation," but rather a "rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language." The original must be "translated...without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses."

Some of the new changes are minor, revising only a word or two to closer adhere to the Latin version. For instance, in the Nicene Creed, Catholics will no longer confess that Jesus is "one in Being with the Father." Instead, Jesus is "consubstantial with the Father," a very literal translation of "consubstantialem Patris" which introduces a vocabulary word that might well be found on a Catholic version of the GRE. Additionally, in response to the priest's "The Lord be with you," the people will no longer say, "And also with you" for "Et cum spiritu tuo." They will say, "And with your spirit." This change has larger implications than just the use of advanced vocabulary. First, of modern-language translations, the English is currently the only one that does not translate the word *spiritu*. Secondly, by recognizing the priest's spirit instead of his ego, the congregation acknowledges that he is the representative of the Church endowed with the Holy Spirit through ordination, and that the Spirit binds the hierarchy and laity, the Church as one, under God.

Other changes involve the reinsertion of entire phrases that were glossed over. In the current Penitential Act, the congregation recites, "I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do." This will change to "I have greatly sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." The repetition of "my fault" here, which is found in the Latin text, highlights the stereotypical notion of Catholic guilt. And for guilty Catholics with their grievous faults, salvation comes through the Church that mediates for them through the sacraments, especially those of penance and the Eucharist, neither of which can be fully realized without the unique powers of a priest.

From the Catholic point of view, the spirit of *aggiornamento* (or updating the Church for modern times) transformed the liturgy into a ritual accessible by all believers. Gone were the days of the faithful performing private devotions to their favorite saints or reciting the rosary during Mass because they did not understand Latin. Further developments in the early 80s allowed for lay Eucharistic ministers, lay lectors, and altar girls, all of which helped advance the laity's "full, conscious and active participation" as required by Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. However, when my non-Catholic students attend a Catholic liturgy for their field reports, they often comment on how the ritualized atmosphere makes them feel unconnected, unwelcome, and uninvolved.

Indeed, the Catholic mass is a formal, scripted ritual with little liturgical room for the same kind of spontaneity found in many Protestant gatherings. There is no priesthood of all believers in Catholicism,

even as its deaconate grows with the shortage of priests. Traditionally, the Holy Roman Catholic Church and members of its hierarchy mediate for the faithful, and making the language of the Mass even more ceremonial reinforces this arrangement.

The new translation will not be used immediately; the Vatican has instructed the US bishops to begin preparing people for the change and does not expect to complete the full translation until 2010. I can't help but wonder, though, if while learning the new words of the Creed, a Catholic schoolchild somewhere will mishear the word "consubstantial," and recite "Constantinople with the Father."

References:

Summorum Pontificum

<http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/b16SummorumPontificum.htm>

Liturgiam authenticam

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html

Changes in the Parts of the People in the Revised Order of the Mass in the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*

<http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/missalformation/peoplesparts.pdf>

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

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