

# All Together Now

By RORY COONEY

Much ink has already been spilled both in defense of Vox Clara and ICEL and in repudiation of their work. Many people saw *Comme le prévoit*, Paul VI's translation mandate that, with cultural respect, authorized use of the principle of "dynamic equivalence" with the Latin *editio typica* as the model for vernacular versions, as the document of *entente* that put flesh on the spirit of *aggiornamento* and global Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Many people equally interpreted *Liturgiam authenticam*, which demanded of translations a "formal" or "integral" equivalence with the Latin edition,<sup>2</sup> as the ecclesiastical equivalent of eminent domain, a taking back of land once ceded to and owned by the various language groups.<sup>3</sup> Further, an explanation offered for the need for the stricter and more literal principles of *Liturgiam authenticam*, suggesting that the English translation process had to be reined in because its texts had become the *de facto* international model used to translate the Latin (Roman) Rite into other languages, has been countered by the sane suggestion that a scholarly formal translation be prepared and used for such cases, while a pastorally sensitive, poetic, and musical "dynamic equivalent" translation be offered for use in Anglophone worship. But this suggestion seems to have fallen on deaf ears at the appropriate dicastery, and so elements of excellent Latin text structure that don't work well in English are about to make a big comeback in English-language worship.

## The Issue that Remains

As I see it, the issue that remains to be resolved in the United States and in other English-speaking countries is not whether the folks in the pews—us—will adapt to the new/old English but whether bishops and priests will. (Let's just say "priests," because, let's face it, bishops have much

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Eagle Scout Court of Honor. Photo courtesy of Scout Troop 353, Eastchester, New York.

more latitude for action in their own dioceses.<sup>4</sup>) Submission to the rite is required of priests in a special way: "The priest must remember that he is the servant of the sacred Liturgy and that he himself is not permitted, on his own initiative, to add, to remove, or to change anything in the celebration of Mass."<sup>5</sup> So however well- or ill-conceived the new translation may be, its use by those specifically charged with its implementation is an important issue of justice.

In this respect, let me just make a few observations about the liturgical dialogues as introduced for use under the *ancien régime* of the 1973 English version of the *Roman Missal* (then called the *Sacramentary*) and the catechetical and therefore ecclesiological repercussions of those, and then let you draw your own conclusions. Luckily, blessedly for us, there is also good news in this brouhaha over the new translations, because we're neither the beginning nor the end of the story. I'll finish up, briefly, with an appeal both to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the New Testament.

## Ritual Functions

Among the functions of ritual, particularly those of important initiation rituals like the Eucharist, are two that are important for this discussion: Ritual defines the boundaries of a group's identity, and it establishes relationships among the group's members.

My previous parish, St. Jerome in Phoenix, Arizona, sponsored a Boy Scout troop that was among the top five percent of troops in the United States in producing Eagle Scouts, and during my years there, I attended dozens of courts of honor. Within those evening celebrations, one witnessed the core values of scouting made visible: love of the outdoors, good citizenship, respect for elders—what one might call civil virtue. At the same time, all the various rankings of scouts were present in the emblems of their rank and participation, including many adult Eagle Scouts who had long before added that status and all that it represents to their résumé. The ritual of becoming an Eagle Scout vividly and robustly demonstrates the values of

scouting and the relationships among its leaders, members, and their families.

The Eucharist—and, really, all the sacraments—being of the anthropological genus “rite,” has dynamics of identity and relationship analogous to those found in the scout ritual. Both in what we do and in how we do it we express our nature as baptized children of God, resident aliens in another empire, incorporated by the gift of the Holy Spirit into the living Christ who, in pouring self out for the life of the world, offers a perfect sacrifice of *agape* that adoringly, mimetically, mirrors the nature of *Abba*, the One from whom he is sent. At the same time, the liturgy incarnates the diversity of the Holy Spirit’s gifts and the myriad ways we are sent into the world as its foot-washers and meal hosts. There are Church orders within the liturgy: bishops, priests, and deacons; the faithful; and catechumens. There are different ministries among the faithful. We interact with one another in the act of worship in which we are caught up with Jesus in offering praise and thanksgiving to God.

But among these orders and ministries, within the carrying out of our rites, certain aspects of our faith are never forgotten or misrepresented. Primarily, there is the faith that God is God and we are not; that Jesus, dead and risen, has handed his Spirit over to us from the cross so that the messianic mission might continue; that God is *agape*, “world-making love” that is at once the fullness of life and the complete giving away of it—the paschal mystery. Also among these is the conviction that “*poder es servir*,” or as Scripture has it, “those who would be first among you must serve the rest.” Another is that, among the children of God, “there is no Greek or Jew, servant or free, woman or man,” that there is a universal equality in the human race that is ontological, by virtue of creation, but explicitly embraced by the baptized.

Because this equality shines through the rite in the important dialogues between the presider and the rest of the assembly, it *matters* that the priest sings, “The Lord be with you,” and we respond, “And with your spirit” (or “And also with you,” or whatever a future translation might require.) While the language matters, it is more important that the dialogue be exchanged with ritual integrity. When we make that exchange of faith which proclaims the Lord’s presence, we are acting as equals, as partners, all of us equally submitting to the discipline of the rite as

a means of acknowledging our common bond as the children of God. No one is free to fudge the syntax (for instance, for the priest to change the subjunctive verb in his greeting to an indicative one, “The Lord *is* with you.”) Nor are we free to improvise or riff on the text: “The Lord be with each and every one of you.”

This is not because one or the other version is truer to the Latin, however, since “*Dominus vobiscum*” is verbless and of unknown origin. It is because the *rite interprets us*, and not the other way around. We submit to the rite’s discipline so that we learn its relentless incarnate message of equality. If Father can improvise, in other words, then we can all improvise, and instead of a body, we have a mob.

What is the right response to “The God of Jesus is with each one of you”? Those who have experienced a greeting like this at Sunday worship—and we are legion—know the kind of ritual confusion this improvisation begets. Change the scene to a mixed congregation at a funeral or wedding of people from various communities unaccustomed to the personal quirks of the parish’s priest, and the simplest of responses (“*Amen*?” “Glory to you, O Lord?”) becomes anemic and inaudible. We don’t know, in fact, whether we *should* say “*Amen*”! If the priest can take these kinds of liberties, why shouldn’t everyone else? And the real question is, if priests don’t take the current translation and its connection to authentic ecclesial rite seriously, why on earth will they do so with a new translation?

## All Are One

Only if *everyone* submits to the new translation will it demonstrate the ecclesial equality of the children of God. The ritual of the Eucharist is a roadmap and rehearsal script of service and Gospel life, in which all receive the life of the Spirit as God’s gift and, as the Body of Christ, render back to God the “sacrifice of praise.” But in order for the equality to be apparent in the ritual, everyone has to play by the rules. If one person (the presider) is improvising, riffing on the texts as so many are doing with the 1973 text, being *less* formal than usual and not more so, as one would expect from the structuralist rhetoric of the formalists, then we’re not equal. If I’m stuck with “And with your spirit” but the priest can say “The Lord is with you” or “The Lord be with each and

every one of you” or “Good morning,” and if he then says “Thank you” when we reply, well, we don’t have ritual equality. That very priest might imagine himself to be a champion of lay leadership and collegiality, but in fact every ritual word he speaks undermines the foundation of the *ecclesia*.

My only entry point into this new translation is that when all is said and done, it’s *only* liturgy. As important as liturgy is for keeping us together and focused on the truths mentioned above (God is God, we are not; the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church; and so on), it remains true that “the sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 9). This salvific sentence at the very source of liturgical renewal hearkens back to the language of the prophets, serving to remind us that sacraments—even the Eucharist, even the meals of Jesus himself—are symbols of the rest of life, and for there to be truth in the symbols, life has to be lived well. As *Sing to the Lord* further explains: “The Paschal hymn, of course, does not cease when a liturgical celebration ends. Christ, whose praises we have sung, remains with us and leads us through church doors to the whole world, with its joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties . . . Charity, justice, and evangelization are thus the normal consequences of liturgical celebration” (STL, 8–9). It will thus continue to be true that the quality of the translation, as well as the efficacy of the liturgy itself, will be judged not on how well we sing it, say it, or abuse it, but on how the neighborhoods are being changed, how we are voting, and whether or not the “poor are filled with good things.” Neither we, nor this new translation, are God’s last chance.

## The True Measure

What I have some control over, what I can attend to, is the making explicit of this link between submitting to the rite and the ecclesiology that underlies it. “The word of God is not chained,” writes St. Paul to Timothy, and it is not chained even in the golden prison of the liturgy. The only true orthodoxy is unity; unity comes from understanding, dialogue, and finally the service of the other, especially the stranger, especially enemies, that flows from *agape*. Everything else is ideology.

Over the years, as I’ve reflected on my life as a human being, husband, father,

and Catholic, I've come gradually to the conclusion that "being right," that most prized of Catholic virtues, is overrated. I have learned this from Jesus Christ, who "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped." You can't be more "right" than being God, and yet Christ laid all that aside, and "became sin" for us (2 Corinthians 5: 21). What matters most is not being right, but being one. When we get to the place where conscience conflicts with the prevailing wind, where "rights" begin to clash, the Christian must try to act in *agape* like the Master. Focus on the Gospel. Change the neighborhood. No matter what translations we use (or even if we should stick with Latin and Greek, for that matter), it will be of some comfort to know that our actions speak louder than words, more beautifully and convincingly than our music. At least, that is, until the *parousia*, when word and deed will be reconciled, and all will be one.

#### Notes

1. The instruction *Comme le prévoit* (January 25, 1969), described the principles of the dynamic equivalence approach to translation in paragraphs six through eight:

[6.] . . . To achieve this end, it is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time. A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words: the total context of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language.

7. Thus, in the case of liturgical communication, it is necessary to take into account not only the message to be conveyed, but also the speaker, the audience, and the style. Translations, therefore, must be faithful to the art of communication in all its various aspects, but especially in regard to the audience for which it is intended, and in regard to the manner of expression.

8. Even if in spoken communication the message cannot be separated from the manner of speaking, the translator should give first consideration to the meaning of the communication.

The full English text of the instruction is available online at [http://www.natcath.com/NCR\\_Online/documents/comme.htm](http://www.natcath.com/NCR_Online/documents/comme.htm).

2. The instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* (March 28, 2001) described its basic principle

this way in paragraph twenty:

While it is permissible to arrange the wording, the syntax, and the style in such a way as to prepare a flowing vernacular text suitable to the rhythm of popular prayer, the original text, insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses. Any adaptation to the characteristics or the nature of the various vernacular languages is to be sober and discreet.

The full English text of the instruction is available online at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20010507\\_liturgiam-authenticam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html).

3. A liturgical translation "must faithfully communicate to a given people, and in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time" (*Comme le prévoit*, 6).

4. After all, "the diocesan Bishop, the chief steward of the mysteries of God in the particular Church entrusted to his care, is the moderator, promoter, and guardian of the whole of its liturgical life" (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [GIRM], 22).

5. GIRM, 24.

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Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo sings the Eucharistic Prayer at the 2009 NPM Convention.