

a philosophy of language that could both sustain *imyaslavie* and maintain orthodoxy. What is needed, Florensky in particular would argue, is an ontological understanding of the verbal symbol as a sharing between a knowing object and a knowing subject.<sup>30</sup> Without such an approach, Florensky could see only the rise of an "onomoclasm" in language, just as iconoclasm had previously assaulted the aesthetic realm.<sup>31</sup> On this score, he certainly seems to have augured the deconstructivist tendencies in linguistic studies so pandemic in our own time. The efforts of Florensky and Bulgakov were partially successful insofar as the debate was reopened at the Council of 1917 in Moscow. Even though the events of history did not permit a resolution to the problem at that time, there is no reason why the debate cannot be taken up in our own time. Certainly interest in hesychasm has not waned, least of all in the Russia of today. The refreshing, probing essays of S.S. Khoruzhii, a new light in contemporary Orthodoxy, penned in search of a vital Orthodox philosophy that can duly articulate the experience and insights of traditional hesychasm are a case in point.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, however real the speculative challenges of hesychasm for philosophical and theological thought may be, it must still be borne in mind that hesychasm is, first and foremost, a life of unceasing prayer. It would be a disservice to the spiritual life to deflect contemplation back into the arena of worldly disputation. Disputation can never "prove" the truth of hesychast spirituality. As "self-acting prayer," hesychast prayer is its own measure. □

*Filosofiya imeni* ("Philosophy of the name"), published posthumously (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1953).

<sup>30</sup>*I vodorazdelov mysli*, 287-89, 324, 329-30.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>32</sup>See his "Isikhazm i istoriya" ("Hesychasm and history"), *Chelovek* (1991: 4): 72-83; (1991:5): 71-78; "Problema lichnosti v pravoslavii: mistika isikhazma i metafizika vseidinstva" ("The problem of personality in Orthodoxy: the mysticism of hesychasm and the metaphysics of pan-unity"), *Zdes; i teper'* (1991:1): 94-106; and "Isikhazm, bogochelovechestvo, noogenez i nemnogo o nashem obshchestve" ("Hesychasm, God-manhood, noogenesis and a little about our society"), *Nachala* (1992:2): 4-12.

## The catechetical role of the liturgy and the quality of liturgical texts: The current ICEL translation

*Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis*

The distortions and weaknesses of ICEL are omnipresent, constituting a serious breach of fidelity . . . , making difficult the liturgy's catechetical function.

To go from the current ICEL translation of our liturgical texts to the Latin original is like discarding a stale water, served in a plastic cup, in order to drink from a pure and energizing fountain.

It is true that I am a teacher of languages and literature, a philologist with a strong interest in theology, and a professional translator of theological works. This, I think, entitles me to have an opinion on the matter of liturgical translation. But what I am, above all, is a needy Christian layman in search of frequent solid sustenance for his mind and heart, so as not to "faint along the way." What I will say here, then, shall not derive from a pedantic professorial compulsion to make mountains out of molehills and be a nit-picker concerning the niceties of verb tenses, lexical choices and turns of phrase in liturgical texts. I am convinced that the texts we American Catholics are currently being offered for our prayer and meditation represent only very badly, and often even misrepresent,

both the beauty and the theological content of the Latin originals they are supposed to translate. As such, the ICEL translation is in my view an obstacle to, rather than a vehicle of, full liturgical prayer and participation.

If I seem to be overstating my case I would simply reply that, if the current translation does not really appear to be as bad as I say, this is attributable not to any intrinsic excellence the translation possesses but rather to the fact that the texts of the Catholic liturgy are so powerful that, even in bastardized form, they cannot fail to have an impact. Such was the case of Kafka's mouse-singer, Josephine, who had forgotten both how to sing and the words of the ancient songs of her race: she was reduced to squeaking. But even this caricature of authentic song enchanted her needy audience.

I admit I have nursed a long-standing dissatisfaction with the ICEL translation: it almost uniformly lacks quality in both the literary and the theological sense: *quality* as the very opposite of mere nicety or refinement; *quality* as referring to solidity, authenticity, fullness, beauty, fidelity, and actual ability to nourish. As a teacher of language and literature, I could give ICEL no better than a C grade. If, analogously, such a translation were the only one available for a great novel or a cycle of poems, I would rather not include it at all on the syllabus for one of my courses.

And here I must make an embarrassing confession. Over the years I have developed the theoretically reprehensible, but in my case necessary, habit of using a Latin missal both in church during the liturgy and for my private prayer. Please note that I have little sympathy for integrists who clamor for Latin and the so-called "Mass of Pius V." What I am looking for is good, faithful, beautiful translations of the liturgical texts. Why is this so much to ask for? I must make use of my Latin missal in church because I want to pray with the universal Church of all times and places, and not only with the American Church of 1993. In this respect, we American Catholics are the poor cousins of the Spanish, Italian, and German Catholics, who have superior translations, and also of those English-speaking Catholics who are fortunate enough to use the translation approved by the Episcopal Conferences of Australia, England and Wales, and Ireland—"poor cousins" too, by the way, of those mainstream Protestant bodies, such as the Anglican and the Lutheran, who in their liturgical books have preserved a sense of the living power and beauty of God's Word at worship. If besides this we consider the verbal power

and beauty in the worship of grass-roots churches, such as the Baptist, a good case could be made for American Roman Catholics, of all English-speaking Christian groups, having the least inspiring, least beautiful, most pedestrian, most vague and, simply, *weakest* of all worship experiences, at least in what pertains to liturgical language.

I note with dismay that, to my knowledge, during the past quarter-century since the promulgation of these texts and their publication by the Catholic Book Publishing Company, the only complaint regarding them raised by persons in a position of being heard has been over the question of gender-inclusive language. Whatever the merits of this question may be, what I think is curious from the theological standpoint is that few seem concerned about the beauty and doctrinal content of the texts, while many seem exceedingly agitated over the question of masculine pronouns. In other words, the sociological and political question at once quickens the pulsebeat, while the theological and aesthetic question leaves us cold. Clearly, the rights of man have primacy over the rights of God—and over the rights of believers to receive the whole inheritance to which they are entitled.

We may distinguish two opposite opinions on the matter of liturgical texts, opposites which, as we shall see, in the end coincide. First there is the older "*ex opere operato*" mentality, which says that the liturgy is something *done to you* in such a way that you need not understand the arcane Latin formulas. All you need is just "get the grace" they automatically are thought to release. In this view, it is probably *better* not to understand what the words mean, as such ignorance is thought to bathe one in some sort of "mystical night" and thus is evidence of receptiveness to mystery. A usual corollary to this view is the aesthetic sense of "transcendentalism" and "traditionalism" conveyed by a ritual occurring in a different "space" from ordinary experience: locally, the sanctuary; linguistically, Latin.

At the seemingly opposite extreme there is the "progressive" view that declares itself allergic to all pre-established verbal formulas in liturgical practice, since we must allegedly make up our own "authentic" expression of individual faith-experience with every new occasion. At least one priest has replied to my query concerning his arbitrary changing of the Eucharistic Prayer with a contemptuous smirk, and the remark: "Oh, you mean the sacrosanct canon . . . Don't you know that the words have to come from the community and I as priest know what the community wants?"

These extremes coincide in dismissing the importance of *understanding the liturgical language* so as to derive the benefit of its teaching and, also, so as to *pray with the Church* not only formally but with the full reality of our personal faculties. And both views are in strident opposition to every impulse of the Second Vatican Council and of the very nature of liturgy. The Christian liturgy is not just a "rite" that operates mechanically—whether we conceive of it archaically as an enactment of quasi-magical formulas or modernistically as a spontaneous happening that springs exclusively from a specific gathered community. Both sacred *action* AND *ecclesial word* enjoy equal dignity and importance in the liturgy, and any particular individual or church community prays with and as the entire Church Catholic of all times and places.

Before entering into particulars, I would like to outline the general grounds for my dissatisfaction with ICEL.

First of all, at best ICEL always tends to *trivialize the act of prayer*, and this it does in a variety of ways: by oversimplifying meaning; by opting for vague expressions rather than forceful images; by dulling the edge of biblical insight and replacing it with harmless platitudes acceptable to everyone, whether Christian or not.

At worst, ICEL plainly *misrepresents* and at times, incredibly, even *reverses* the meaning of texts containing solid doctrine.

But the greatest defect, which permeates ICEL at almost every step, is the *trivialization of the reality of God*: the majesty, transcendence, and claims of the divine order quite disappear before the reductive imperative of this translation. What ought to be awesome, solemn—a phrase conveying the knowledge of the holy, the presence of the greatest mystery—becomes the flat, declarative repetition of worn-out generalities and terms without content drawn more from the boring storehouse of contemporary cant, capable of expressing only the most impoverished view of man, than from the treasure of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Take the collect for the Saturday after Ash Wednesday. The Latin has, in literal translation: "Almighty and eternal God, look down kindly upon our weakness and protect us by extending the right hand of your majesty." Here what is evoked is the power and mercy of the eternal King of the ages, sitting on the throne of his majesty and extending his favorable *right* hand (the side of election) to the weak, imploring servants that we want to be. But ICEL renders: "Father,

look upon our weakness and reach out to help us with your loving power." This is surely not a bad prayer; but it is very much weaker than the original because it dilutes the dramatic situation of the King in majesty *protecting* his servants against the attacks of the evil Adversary. Particularly a prayer about our *weakness* should be a strong prayer full of *boldness*!

In sum, such language contributes to the liturgy's ceasing to be an act of profound worship, adoration and communion with God and with man in God, and to its becoming a horizontal, social event of mere mutual recognition by members of a like-minded group of contemporaries. It in no way fosters a trans-temporal communion with the Church everywhere and at all times.

Now, does not a simple, common-sense axiom apply here? Namely, that what we say is what we mean, and if we don't say it it's because we don't mean it, and if we deliberately mistranslate it it's because we want to change it, and we want to change it because we don't like it. Dilution and trivialization may be the worst vices of translation, especially when it pretends to be a translation while in fact being a negative and misrepresentative interpretation. Remember, *lex orandi lex credendi*: or, How am I to believe what I do not profess (or am not allowed to profess) in prayer?

The ICEL translation gravely underestimates or altogether neglects the *formative role* of religious language. Shabby, imprecise, or incomplete, not to say distorted, religious language—in such a crucial area as the liturgy—will most likely produce a similar spiritual outlook and practice. It is sobering to remember that at all other great moments of Church reform a primary concern has been the rediscovery of the most authentic scriptural and liturgical texts, as well as the purest forms of liturgical chant. Think of Charlemagne in the eighth century, sending to the pope for monks to come to Aachen with the very best choir books to teach the Franks how to pray and sing authentically, with the mind of the Church. Or think of St. Stephen Harding, founder of Cîteaux in the twelfth century, sending monks to neighboring Troyes in order to confer with rabbis there on the most authentic form of Old Testament texts. What an irony that, in this age of technological hyper-information, when nearly every text to be had is available to the least undergraduate, we often care very little about whether we worship and pray with the full mind of the Church. . . .

Aware as I am of the danger of any supposition smacking of a "conspiracy theory," it is nonetheless difficult not to detect in the ICEL translation the pattern of some explicit project to change, minimize, and dilute the specific content of the texts, in the name of . . . what precisely?

Perhaps the goal of some translators was "pastoral efficacy." In this case, they aimed at stressing the more comforting and accessible areas of human experience—social concerns and values, feelings of love, a God who is so exclusively a kind father (or a doting grandfather!) that he ceases to be the eternal Lord of history. But this approach ends up condescending to the faithful as if they were semi-moronic children who cannot understand clear, poetic and solidly religious English capable of kindling the human being's deepest vocation to heroic sanctity.

Or could the intention perhaps have been an actual *protest* against the specific doctrinal and mystical content of the texts? In this case, the Latin original, I conjecture, was judged to be overly severe at times in stressing the sinfulness of man and the primacy of grace, overly lyrical and embarrassing at other times when the texts explode with the soul's yearning for and joy in God alone, overly complex in their expression of the delicate divine-human relationship, or overly absolute in their adoration of the one eternal God. But, precisely: Can one protest against these things without protesting against the very heart of Christian faith?

In any event, the evidence is clear: If the ICEL translation is inferior in its quality, it is certainly not due to the fact that the translators had a faulty knowledge of Latin. In some sense, the translation's lack of quality results from a deliberate project to *alter the meaning of the original*. How the American Catholic Bishops' Conference approved such a translation—one that we have had to bear with for over a quarter-century now—and, especially, why nothing has been done to improve it, remains a nagging mystery.

### 1. *Some magisterial texts related to liturgical translations*

At this point, by way of background, it would be useful to refer to certain magisterial texts related to the catechetical role of the liturgy and, by extension, to liturgical translation.

In the Council's 1963 *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* itself (n.33), we read that, "although the sacred liturgy is principally the worship of the divine majesty, it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful. When the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished, and their minds are raised to God so that they may offer him their rational service [*rationabile obsequium*] and receive his grace more abundantly" (Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, 11f). Here we clearly see that the faithful are being catechized in the very act of their worship, and that the result is a worship of God not only with the heart and the will, but also with the mind shaped by Christian truth. Plainly, the words themselves used will determine whether this formation takes place or not.

When speaking of the Divine Office (n.90), this same *Constitution* teaches that, "because it is the public prayer of the Church, [it] is a source of piety and nourishment for personal prayer" (Flannery, 26). The words of the liturgy, then, are not merely formal utterances that the wind carries away. Along with Sacred Scripture, they constitute the ordinary, habitual school of faith for the believer, both during the celebration of the holy mysteries and in the intervals of private study, prayer and meditation that insure that the reality of those mysteries takes root. The Missal (both the "sacramentary" and the "lectionary") and the Book of Hours are by definition the foundation of all prayer and "spiritual reading" for the Catholic.

*Actuosa participatio*, "active participation," in the liturgy by all the faithful, as we all know, was one of the primary emphases of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. However, this phrase and ideal has been widely interpreted in an activist sense: that is, everyone must be busy during the liturgy, and as many "parts" as possible must be distributed as broadly as possible among the congregation. Let us look at one of the passages in the document that deals with this point (nn.10-11):

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. . . . [The liturgy] prays that [the faithful] 'hold fast in their lives to what they have grasped by their faith.' . . . But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful[s] minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must, therefore, . . .

ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it. (Flannery, 6-7)

What is meant here, quite obviously, is not an external busyness during the liturgical celebration, but that interior alertness and keen spiritual activity which is aware of the meaning of what is being done and which disposes a person to embrace fully—with heart, will, and mind—the transforming mystery of Christ. The full effect of the liturgy depends on the faithful's minds being attuned to their voices, and on their lives becoming embodiments of what has been grasped by faith. But how can this attunement, this embodiment, this grasping, occur if the words that communicate the meaning and power of the liturgy are wholly inadequate to convey that mystery? The root of the faithful's authentically active participation in the liturgy is their being shaped in all their being by the powerful truths the liturgical language contains. If this foundation is absent, we are building on sand. And I suppose the primary "pastors of souls" this text intends are the bishops themselves, the very ones who have given their approval to a most defective liturgical translation. Shall the faithful, then, be shaped defectively too, as they strive to participate actively and give themselves over to be formed by the liturgy?

Part of the extraordinary achievement of the *Novus Ordo Missal*, so scorned by the traditionalists, is its inclusion of very ancient texts (far more ancient than the sixteenth century!), drawn from the total liturgical repertoire of the West—that is, not only the Roman Rite, but other venerable Latin rites such as the Ambrosian, the Mozarabic, the Gallican, and so on. The 1969 *Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Missal* states that:

many have expressed the desire that the riches of faith contained in these [ancient liturgical] texts . . . should be brought out into the light to warm the hearts and enlighten the minds of the Christian peoples. . . . Countless saintly men and women have drawn rich nourishment from [the Missal's] scripture readings and prayers [i.e., collects, secrets and post-communions], most of which were arranged in due order by St. Gregory the Great. (Flannery, 138 and 137)

Is it not profoundly ironical that, as the Church's authentic liturgical reform makes every effort to offer the faithful the greatest variety possible in the formulations of public prayer, liturgical translators should proceed to level the richness of this heritage by producing "official texts" so watered

down that any one of them tends to sound like every other? Are the faithful challenged in their piety by such homogenization or are they, rather, rendered apathetic?

Finally, I offer here a text from the 1970 "Third Instruction on the Correct Interpretation of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*" (*Liturgiae Instaurationes*):

To make the reformed liturgy understood, a great deal of work still remains to be done in translating accurately and in publishing the new liturgical books in vernacular languages. They must be translated in their entirety. . . . It would be better not to hurry the work of translation. With the help of many experts, not only theologians and liturgists, but also writers and poets, the vernacular liturgical texts will be works of real literary merit and enduring quality, whose harmony of style and expression will reflect the deep riches of their content. (n.11; Flannery, 219f)

Who would affirm that this important desideratum in liturgical translation has been achieved? Can guidelines be stated more clearly: *completeness* of translation (referring presumably not only to each item within a book being accounted for numerically, but to the *entirety of a particular text*, which would exclude arbitrary emasculation of the same), and, along with completeness, literary merit, enduring quality, harmony of style and expression—all of these achievements being subservient to the *richness of the content of the texts*.

## 2. *A sampling of collects and postcommunions*

The 1969 *Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Missal* ("*Missale Romanum*") tells us that, in the revision of the Missal decreed by the Second Vatican Council, "special attention has been given to the Collects. Their number has been increased so that they may better correspond with the needs of our own times, and the older Collects have been critically examined and amended in the light of their original texts" (Flannery, 141). The Latin Collect prayer has long been admired by theologians and stylists alike as a privileged distillation of authentic liturgical piety and of biblical, ascetical and mystical doctrine. It has evidently been the object of special care on the part of the liturgical reformers of the Roman Rite. The collects, then, offer us a particularly fruitful field of inquiry on which to test our criticism of the ICEL translation.

I would now like to examine eleven collects and two post-communion prayers, comparing the sense of the Latin original with the current ICEL translation. I have chosen these prayers almost at random, and, with one exception, they come from the cycle for Ordinary Time, since these texts recur numerous times over the course of a given week. I will first simply present the texts without any commentary, allowing the reader to make comparisons and come to certain conclusions on his own. Afterwards I shall supply a critical summary of these selections. If the inquiry appears a bit tedious, I would remind the reader that it is only such a broad and substantial sampling that will either corroborate or invalidate my claims concerning the faulty nature of ICEL. I am not building my case deceptively on an occasional flaw or slip; I argue that the distortions and weaknesses of ICEL are omnipresent, constituting a serious breach of fidelity and an instance of considerable negligence, making difficult the liturgy's catechetical function.

The translations from the Latin that follow, done by myself, claim only to be literal and make no pretense of being definitive or exemplary. In the texts that follow,

O = Latin original

LIT = Literal translation

ICEL = Translation of the International Commission for English in the Liturgy

The underlined words in LIT have either been altogether omitted in ICEL or drastically modified.

## COLLECTS:

### 1: Ordinary time, week 6

O: *Deus, qui te in rectis et sinceris manere pectoribus asseris, da nobis tua gratia tales existere, in quibus habitare digneris.*

LIT: O God, who declare that you abide in upright and guileless hearts: by your grace grant us to be persons in whom you will deign to dwell.

ICEL: God our Father, you have promised to remain for ever with those who do what is just and right. Help us to live in your presence.

### 2: Ordinary time, week 11

O: *Deus, in te sperantium fortitudo, invocationibus nostris adesto propitius, et, quia sine te nihil potest mortalis infirmitas, gratiae tuae praesta semper auxilium, ut, in exsequendis mandatis tuis, et voluntate tibi et actione placeamus.*

LIT: O God, the strength of those who hope in you! Be kindly attentive to our supplications and, since our mortal weakness can do nothing without you, grant us always the support of your grace so that, as we carry out your commands, we may please you by both our will and our deeds.

ICEL: Almighty God, our hope and our strength, without you we falter. Help us to follow Christ and to live according to your will.

### 3: Ordinary time, week 13

O: *Deus, qui, per adoptionem gratiae, lucis nos esse filios voluisti, praesta, quaesumus, ut errorum non involvamus tenebris, sed in splendore veritatis semper maneamus conspicui.*

LIT: O God who, by the adoption of grace, have willed us to be children of light: grant, we beg you, that we may not be enveloped in the darkness of errors but may always, rather, abide visibly in the splendor of truth.

ICEL: Father, you call your children to walk in the light of Christ. Free us from darkness and keep us in the radiance of your truth.

### 4: Ordinary time, week 15

O: *Deus qui errantibus, ut in viam possint redire, veritatis tuae lumen ostendis, da cunctis qui christiana professione censentur, et illa respuere, quae huic inimica sunt nomini, et ea quae sunt apta sectari.*

LIT: O God, who show the light of your truth to the wayward that they may return to the Way: grant to all who profess being Christian that they may disdain those things that are hostile to this name and follow those things that are proper to it.

ICEL: God our Father, your light of truth guides us to the way of Christ. May all who follow him reject what is contrary to the gospel.

## 5: Ordinary time, week 17

O: *Protector in te sperantium, Deus, sine quo nihil est validum, nihil sanctum, multiplica super nos misericordiam tuam, ut, te rectore, te duce, sic bonis transeuntibus nunc utamur, ut iam pos-simus inhaerere mansuris.*

LIT: O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing is sound, nothing holy: multiply your mercies upon us so that, with you as ruler and guide, we may now use passing goods in such a way that we may already now cling to those goods that do not pass away.

ICEL: God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value. Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given the world.

## 6: Ordinary time, week 20

O: *Deus, qui diligentibus te bona invisibilia praeparasti, infunde cordibus nostris tui amoris affectum, ut, te in omnibus et super omnia diligentes, promissiones tuas, quae omne desiderium su-perant, consequamur.*

LIT: O God, who have prepared invisible goods for those who cherish you: infuse into our hearts an eagerness for your love so that, cherishing you in all things and above all things, we may attain to your promises, which surpass every desire.

ICEL: God our Father, may we love you in all things and above all things and reach the joy you have prepared for us beyond our imagining.

## 7: Ordinary time, week 21

O: *Deus, qui fidelium mentes unius efficis voluntatis, da populis tuis id amare quod praecipis, id desiderare quod promittis, ut, inter mundanas varietates, ibi nostra fixa sint corda, ubi vera sunt gaudia.*

LIT: O God, who make the minds of the faithful to be united as by one will: grant all your people to love the things you command and to desire the things you promise so that, amid the instabilities of this world, our hearts may be directed to that place where joys are true.

ICEL: Father, help us to seek the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world. In our desire for what you promise make us one in mind and heart.

## 8: Ordinary time, week 27

O: *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui abundantia pietatis tuae et merita supplicum excedis et vota, effunde super nos misericordiam tuam, ut dimittas quae conscientia metuit, et adicias quod oratio non praesumit.*

LIT: Almighty and eternal God, who by the abundance of your fidelity exceed both the merits and the hopes of your supplicants: pour out your mercy upon us so as to forgive what our conscience fears and supply what our prayer dares not ask for.

ICEL: Father, your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires. Forgive our failings, keep us in your peace and lead us in the way of salvation.

## 9: Ordinary time, week 28

O: *Tua nos, quaesumus, Domine, gratia semper praeve-niat et sequatur, ac bonis operibus iugiter praestet esse intentos.*

LIT: May your grace, O Lord, we beg you, always both precede and follow us, and may it make us to be continually intent on good works.

ICEL: Lord, our help and guide, make your love the foundation of our lives. May our love for you express itself in our eagerness to do good for others.

## 10: Ordinary time, week 29

O: *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, fac nos tibi semper et devotam gerere voluntatem, et maiestati tuae sincero corde servire.*

LIT: Almighty and eternal God, make us always have a will devoted to you and serve your majesty with a guileless heart.

ICEL: Almighty and ever-living God, our source of power and inspiration (?), give us strength and joy in serving you as followers of Christ.

## 11: Saturday after Epiphany

O: *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui per Unigenitum tuum novam creaturam nos tibi esse fecisti, praesta, quaesumus, ut per gratiam tuam in illius inveniamur forma, in quo tecum est nostra substantia.*

LIT: Almighty and eternal God, who have made us a new creation for yourself through your only-begotten Son: grant, we beseech you, that by your grace we may be found to be in the likeness of him in whom our nature is already with you.

ICEL: God our Father, through your Son you made us a new creation. He shared our nature and became one of us; with his help, may we become more like him.

## POSTCOMMUNIONS:

## 12: Ordinary time, week 28

O: *Maiestatem tuam, Domine, suppliciter deprecamur, ut, sicut nos Corporis et Sanguinis sacrosancti pascis alimento, ita divinae naturae facias esse consortes.*

LIT: We humbly implore your majesty, Lord, that, just as you nourish us with the food of the most holy Body and Blood, so too may you make us partakers of the divine nature.

ICEL: Almighty Father, may the body and blood of your Son give us a share in his life.

## 13: Ordinary time, week 27

O: *Concede nobis, omnipotens Deus, ut de perceptis sacramentis inebriemur atque pascamur, quatenus in id quod sumimus transeamus.*

LIT: Grant us, almighty God, that the holy things [sacraments] we have received may inebriate us and nourish us, so that we will pass over into [i.e., become] that which we have partaken of.

ICEL: Almighty God, let the eucharist we share fill us with your life. May the love of Christ which we celebrate here touch our lives and lead us to you.

## 3. Critical summary on the ICEL translation

First, a general remark. As even a cursory reading of these texts show, the present ICEL translation presents a very serious problem in both the literary and the theological

aspects of its texts. It may be said to obscure, if not misrepresent and distort, the sacred content of texts that are both the substance of the prayer of the Church in her worship of God and the ordinary means by which the faithful are instructed in their faith by their ever-deeper initiation into the Mysteries of Christ. Not only is the doctrinal nourishment contained in the texts often diluted to the point of banality, but the generally pedestrian rhetoric of the language is not apt to elevate the mind and heart of the faithful to the attitude of awesome reverence and filial thanksgiving alone conducive to profound adoration, exulting praise and confident intercession. This style of language and this vague content are not found, in light of Scripture and the Tradition, to be wholly worthy of the worship of the eternal Lord of majesty, nor do they effectively contribute to the spiritual formation in faith of the participating faithful.

All of this raises the serious issue of whether this translation does not constitute a substantial breach in the tradition of Catholic liturgy, in the literal sense of ceasing to hand down organically—through the living act of worship—the ever-ancient, ever-new deposit of faith. In other words, when an American Catholic attends Mass nowadays, can he be said to be praying the same liturgy as that prayed by Augustine, Monica, Ambrose, Leo, Benedict, Scholastica, Hildegard, Bernard, Aquinas, Teresa and Catholic Christians of all times? Surely the Mass is “valid”; but that is not the only important aspect of the question. What intellectual, moral, emotional and imaginative effect is the Mass having? And what can “spiritual effect” mean in isolation from all this, the finest parts of man?

Now I would like to make some particular observations summarizing our analysis of the collects as representative of the general flaws and tendencies of the ICEL translation:

1. “Father” almost universally supplants “God” and “Lord” when these are qualified with transcendental titles like “omnipotent” and “eternal.” In the Latin collects, God is never, or almost never, addressed as “Pater.” It seems that in the Liturgy of the Word, God is first celebrated as Lord and Creator and Father of the Messiah, truths which are stressed by the Kyrie and the Gloria. It is not until after the canon that finally, “obeying the Lord’s command, we dare to say ‘Our Father.’” (The *Praeceptis salutaribus moniti* . . . , coincidentally, is yet another formula that is never heard.) In any event, God’s Fatherhood of us is rooted, first, in his divinity, in his God-



head—which is what makes it such a mystery: He is not God because we first happen to like him as loving Father! The unity of revelation of both Testaments is here at stake: the Catholic cannot opt for a Father God whose pure goodness and kindness result from a dialectical rejection of the Old Testament's Lord of majesty, for instance, as revealed at Mount Sinai. A corollary is the dilution or disappearance of the doctrine of our *adoption by grace*. We are not God's natural children simply because we exist (which I have heard preached at a baptism, a ceremony interpreted by the officiating priest as our celebration of "the gift of a new life"). Christ is the *only-begotten Son*, and we God's children by the mercy of his grace.

2. "Love" has become the all-purpose feel-good word, intended to effect an automatic lift. It translates not only *amor* and *dilectio* and *affectus*, which themselves have striking nuances of meaning, but it also translates *pietas*, *misericordia*, and above all *gratia*. This is no place for a treatise on these vastly different attributes of the divine condescension to us. Suffice it to say that these particular lexical items in the collects are not late Latin innovations but the pillars of prayers which are inundated with scriptural phrases and images of impressive weight. Again, God's love out of mercy and compassion for us includes our knowledge of both our creatureliness and our sinfulness and of God's exaltedness, in a way that the simple word "love" cannot express, particularly in our day when each person can seemingly define its meaning eccentrically. *Misericordia* and *gratia* are probably the loveliest of all words in Christian Latin, and sadly the first to disappear in ICEL. They are the equivalents of Greek *eleos* and *charis*, which in turn constitute the heart of Pauline theology. It is a serious theological flaw to reduce God's "grace" to his "love," and all the more to simply "God" himself, as happens frequently when the word "grace" is altogether omitted.

It is most instructive in this regard to realize how the Hebrew, Greek and Latin lexical traditions have consistently striven to do justice to the enormous range of divine and human affections. This is at least one area in which it simply will not do to set up false oppositions between the biblical-Hebrew world view and that of the alleged intruder, the Hellenistic mind. In the footnotes of John Paul II's encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, we see discussed five different terms for "mercy" that ICEL would probably translate simply as "love." The Greek linguistic situation (distinguishing *agape*, *philia*, *eros*,

and so on) is the same as the Latin, and the parallel between *rachamim* in Hebrew, *spilagchna* in Greek, and *viscera misericordiae* in Latin is a good example of how the Semitic and the Graeco-Roman minds *can* indeed think alike about a certain kind of love which is irreducible to current worldly notions.

The mystery of the mediation of life between the divinity and ourselves is perhaps the deepest in the theology of redemption, and the foundation of the Paschal Mystery that begins with the Incarnation. That mystery is not simplified and made obvious, but rather incredibly deepened and made more abysmal and paradoxical, by the coming of Jesus Christ. The very dispute as to whether divine grace is a created reality or an extension of the divine reality in ourselves points to the depth of this mystery. This simple omission of *gratia*, or its trivializing translation as unqualified *love*, or as mere *help*, is simply unconscionable. Grace is not a "help"; it is a transforming fire without which there is no Christian life. Translating *gratia* as "help" also points in the direction of Pelagianism—the heresy that teaches that we can basically sanctify ourselves by virtue of our works, only needing a "nudge" here and there by God. Both St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and Georges Bernanos, to name but two outstanding modern Catholics, have shaped their entire lives and vision on the truth that *grace is everything* (cf. the last sentence in the *Diary of a Country Priest*; Bernanos attributes the doctrine to St. Thérèse). But our age of self-determinators and overachievers finds it difficult to swallow the truth that the *absolute* source of man's meaning does not rest within himself and cannot possibly depend on his initiative. Apparently ICEL, as well, tends in this direction.

3. The translation shows an anti-intellectual bias in the sense that it dismisses the necessity of the human mind to be nourished with divine truth. Time and again, the Latin stresses the infusion of light and knowledge into human minds and hearts as a prerequisite for pleasing God and doing the divine will, and time and again ICEL omits the reference by translating a phrase like "infuse the light of your grace into our minds that we may know . . ." as something like "teach us to follow your will." The unity between the human intellect and will is implicitly flouted and the emphasis becomes wholly practical, leading to a spirit of holy busyness, a merely instinctive doing of what appears to be the "Christian thing." At the very least, there is an obscuring of the concrete process whereby a person can progress from being called, to wanting to

serve God, to discerning God's will, to being able to carry it out with the strong, transforming presence of grace.

4. Many images either disappear altogether or are "left hanging," empty of content, because of continual truncations and incomplete translations. "May we not be enveloped in the *darkness of errors*" (obviously referring to false beliefs, as often in Paul) becomes "free us from darkness." While no one could object to this—precisely because of its vagueness—there is a decisive test of faith in knowing that *right faith* alone can lead to God's light, as erroneous belief cannot. Likewise, ICEL quite neutralizes the boldness of the postcommunions that affirm that the sacred banquet produces a holy *inebriation* that is so powerful that it actually enables us to become what we consume. ICEL simply has: "may it fill us with your life." This retains the separation between subject and object which the affirmation of union through spiritual and sacramental inebriation has joyfully bridged. Non-believers seemed similarly to object to the Apostles' apparent state of intoxication in *Acts*, not understanding how the Spirit at Pentecost could break the conventions of classical decorum. Let us not forget that the Christian mysteries tend by their nature to *redeem our imagination* along with the rest of our being: and how can our imagination be redeemed without the infusion into them of the archetypal images of revelation?

And note another egregious example, which clearly illustrates how *censoring* (there is no other fitting term!) the original text by omitting a key image in translation results as well in a dire impoverishment of the biblical and doctrinal content of a prayer: Collect #1 is based on the fundamental biblical doctrine of God's *indwelling* within the heart of the believer and the believing community. This is shown by the two key verbs *manere* (to abide) and *habitare* (to dwell), which evoke the central scriptural theme of Yahweh dwelling among his people Israel in the form of the *shekinah* as they made their way through the desert. This fundamental theme is continued by the Johannine doctrine of divine indwelling in those who are loved by God and who love like God, and by the Pauline doctrine of rebirth by grace. Such a central biblical theme is then developed in various ways by the entire tradition of Christian mysticism, most profoundly by St. John of the Cross. ICEL, unbelievably, simply ignores all of this, omits the reference to the divine indwelling, to the believers' hearts, and to the work of grace, and gives us instead a phrase that is scandalously

bland: "Help us to live in your presence." Is this the vision that fired the martyr Ignatius of Antioch with courage and love of Christ?

5. Man's radical feebleness, his mortality, his waywardness and perversity, are the very conditions created by sin and out of which we have to be redeemed, and these are different from mere doubt, confusion, or alternate values and options. Scripture is uncompromising in portraying the depth of loss out of which man must be extricated by Christ, and this stark reality is continually voiced by the liturgical texts. Man cannot accept the fullness of redemption until he has measured the fullness of his fall—and the depth of this fall is often masked by ICEL. There is a certain squeamishness about calling a spade a spade, lest anyone be offended.

6. There is a pervasive attitude in ICEL which is eudemonistic: that the world is really largely good as it is. Collect #5 refuses to distinguish between passing and eternal goods, and therefore cannot see the possibility of embracing the latter already now through the action of God's mercy. It calls passing goods "the blessings God has given the world" and confuses "lasting goods" with "eternal life," which must therefore be postponed. The original teaches the hierarchical integration of passing and eternal goods here and now. Similarly, #7 reverses precisely the meaning of the original. First, the evident difficulty, but crucial necessity, of learning to "love what God commands" in order to "desire what he promises" is glossed over as "help us to seek values," which makes the prayer quite relative to the subjective human instincts—with the expected result: rather than "hearts being directed to where joys are true" (obviously a different place from where we are at present), we are made to ask for "lasting joy in this changing world"—which is plainly an impossibility.

7. The psychological realism of the drama of redemption, which is present even in the austere Latin collects, disappears from ICEL, as if this were too anguished a truth to put it into believers' mouths. The original of #8 has the abundance of God's mercy and fidelity pouring out over "what our conscience fears": without grace, the human conscience is its own cruelest persecutor. But ICEL translates superficially: "forgive our failings"! And the Pauline mystery of the Holy Spirit praying within us "in unsearchable groans," because our sense of sin keeps us from being fully bold in prayer, is flattened out to the generic: "lead us in the way of salvation."

ICEL is abstract, indifferent almost, timid at best, where the Latin is clear and bold in its affirmation both of human anguish and of trust in divine mercy.

8. The mystery of the Incarnation is not primarily a historical reality belonging in the past as an event: it is the abiding mystery whereby human nature is now inseparably a part of the life of the Holy Trinity in eternity. The paradoxical exchange of natures that the liturgy calls the *admirabile commercium* is in #11 diluted to a mere imitation of Christ, from the distance, as it were. The whole strength of the prayer comes from the affirmation in faith that the empowering reality that enables us to grow in the shape of Christ is the fact that our nature *is already found in God*. ICEL translates: "he shared our nature," a far cry from "in him our substance is already with you." If Christ had merely "shared our nature" as any other human being does, he would not have been able to redeem us. When God becomes incarnate, he takes on *all of human nature* and establishes an intimate relationship *with every other human being that ever existed or shall exist*. It is *we* who "share" in his divine nature as a result of Christ's having assumed *all of human nature* into the life of the Blessed Trinity.

9. This is made explicit in the theme of *divinization* or *theosis*, which according to the tradition, especially in the East, is the whole goal of the divine economy. Athanasius of Alexandria affirms: "Christ became a human being in order that man might become divinized." Collect #12 stresses this in connection with the Eucharist, as its natural effect. Becoming partakers of the divine nature is given as the goal of the Christian life, and often the postcommunions relate this with the possibility of living in the world a life which is an extension in our place and time of the very life of the incarnate and risen Word. ICEL again trivializes: "May the body and blood of your Son give us a share in his life."

10. Most formulas of reverence and awe are systematically omitted: "we beg, we beseech, we your suppliants, be kindly attentive." Any religion which forgets that God has to be approached with our souls' foreheads bowed to the ground has fallen below the level of religion as such. Any idol-worshipper can be more authentically religious than many a Christian in this regard! These are not archaic formulas, but phrases of divine courtesy corresponding to the nature of God when approached by our own human nature. Man is more, and not less, when he recognizes this. Has ICEL, with the

pretense of debunking "archaic religious terminology" while failing to supply any "relevant" alternative, not in fact thrown overboard a most crucial element of Christianity: the act of adoration? Even the iconoclastic modern poet, Rainer M. Rilke, admitted that man is never so sublime as when he is on his knees, adoring.

Is it to be lacking in the post-Conciliar spirit of renewal if I grow angry when I witness a plain obstruction of the full Christian heritage that is mine, regardless of the rationale behind this move? As a Catholic educator and scholar, as well as a professional translator, I want to affirm that fidelity in the translation of liturgical texts—that food which Mother Church puts in the mouth of our hearts and minds that our prayer may be the same as hers—is a major aspect of Christian fidelity to the Word of God and to the unpolluted and undiluted Catholic tradition. The first part of the Mass proclaims to us the scriptural revelation, presumably that it may enlighten us and shape our hearts and lives. And yet, the current ICEL translation makes it exceedingly difficult for Catholic worshippers to hear and pray in the collects and other liturgical texts precisely *what they are asked to hear and pray during the readings!*

Where is the initiative of the "pastors of souls," who continue to countenance our being nourished on such meager liturgical fare every single day of our Catholic lives?

Could it be that one of the profound ironies of post-Conciliar renewal will have been that, in our time, liturgical language—the language *par excellence* which should be the vehicle of man's union with God—will instead become another instrument in the world of *flight from God*, as described prophetically a generation ago by Max Picard? "In the world of faith," Picard has written, "an action occurs whenever a word emerges from the silence. Here, in the language of flight from God, the distance between silence and the word has vanished. Here one no longer ventures to make the leap from silence into the word: both have been dissolved into babbling." □