

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE ON ENGLISH IN THE MASS: English for the Mass, Part II. 1967. Burns & Oates.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to elicit detailed comments on sample translations of various prayers, readings, and so on, and it is not particularly susceptible of a review; one can only commend the Committee for offering us this invitation, while regretting that they allowed us only one month in which to respond to it. I propose rather to discuss some fundamental points which arise, and which seem to be often overlooked (this is no fault of the Committee, whose mandate is severely limited).

As my starting point I take one of the additional principles of translation mentioned in the pamphlet: 'biblical and patristic allusions should not be lost in translation'. This raises the fundamental problem. Liturgical translation is not simply a matter of translating isolated texts: it involves a body of texts, often closely related to one another. Now the Latin liturgy is dominated by the Vulgate Bible, and is full of echoes of it. But some of the texts so echoed have no counterpart in the original Greek or Hebrew, especially in the Psalms. We are now definitely leaving the era of the Vulgate; our modern Bibles are on the whole based on the original texts. And this means that some liturgical echoes simply do not work. To take as an example one of the prayers given in the pamphlet, the post-communion for Advent Sunday; it begins: *suscipiamus, Domine, misericordiam tuam in medio templi tui*, a rather curious sentiment, whose sole rationale is an echo of Ps. 47, *suscipimus, Deus, misericordiam tuam* etc., which is used at Christmas mattins (this verse supplying the antiphon for it). The crucial word, *suscipimus*, comes from the LXX and is not in the Hebrew. Thus the echo fails totally to make contact with the Grail version of the psalm, or Knox, or the RSV, or the Jerusalem Bible. Then there is the notorious apostle-text from Ps. 138, which again is based on the LXX and makes no contact with versions based on the Hebrew.

In such cases what are we to do? It is possible to preserve the text, and abandon the literary echo; the Latin liturgy itself contains such 'abandoned' echoes, e.g. *regnavit a ligno Deus* in the *Vexilla regis*, which no longer makes contact with Ps. 95; and the use of the canticle of Habakkuk at Christmas (*consideravi opera tua . . . in medio duorum animalium*—Mattins, fifth responsory in the Sarum and Dominican rites); this depends on the erratic LXX version of the passage, which is not followed by the Vulgate.

Such recondite echoes can only be justified if they are sufficiently pointed by themselves, and very often this is not the case (as in the collect cited above, and the apostle-text, or the use of *laudate pueri* for saints especially associated with children, e.g. St John Bosco). On the other hand, restoring the authentic scriptural text makes liturgical nonsense. In such cases, until we are given greater freedom actually to change texts, we cannot expect to produce a satisfactory English liturgy. (One might further remark on the undesirability of separating translation and revision of the Mass from that of the Divine Office.)

This raises the whole question of uniformity in liturgy. The arguments against trying to produce a text common to all English-speaking peoples are well-known and formidable, and we should be quite prepared to abandon the project. But more deeply, the possibility should be entertained of allowing different countries to develop different rites, with different liturgical texts. (The Vatican Council stressed the importance of preserving local rites: *Sac. Lit.* 4; *Orient. Eccl.* 4; the possibility is envisaged of new rites in mission territories: *Sac. Lit.* 65.) It seems fairly natural that different peoples with different cultures should have different liturgies, and this could have a profound oecumenical importance, especially in countries like England, where the main non-Catholic church is a national church, which has influenced and been influenced by the national culture at a very deep level. Given a generous freedom to diverge, we could begin to evolve a genuine English liturgy, in which the historic role of the Vulgate would be filled by English versions of the Bible (the Grail psalter and the RSV have clearly established themselves; the Jerusalem Bible may well join them). It is impossible to say what might emerge; but to give a small example, our Ascension liturgy would lose some of the texts which have *ascendere* in Latin, but do not have 'ascend' in English (e.g. the communion antiphon from Ps. 67: *ascendit super caelos caelorum*, where English must have 'rides'), but it would gain the Songs of Ascents (thus, with slight variations, Grail, RSV, JB), which do have a genuine typological relevance to the Ascension. In this sort of way we could acquire a liturgy structure on our own English Bible, and this might help us to rediscover a Christian language, which does not embarrass us by its strangeness and unreality.

The other problem I wish to raise is that of the *Deus qui* construction in a considerable number of liturgical prayers. It is notoriously difficult to translate, and it will be worth while to examine the nature of the problem. I take it as axiomatic that 'Thou' cannot last much longer; and I trust that 'you who' is a non-starter. On the other hand, English is not a language suited to complex constructions, and this one of the vocative followed by a relative clause has disappeared entirely (even in the translations given in the pamphlet there is only one instance of it, apart from versions using 'Thou'). Either we must get round it (as is usually attempted), or we shall have to re-introduce the required construction into the language. This latter may well prove necessary (how get round the *Agnus Dei*?); but if so, it draws attention to the need for acting oecumenically in this respect. In view of the current non-Catholic disaffection for Cranmerian English, it would be foolish for us to try to insert ourselves into the Anglican tradition of liturgical language (as Crashaw did, with surprising generosity); but the principle remains good, that we should try to pray in the same language as our separated brethren. Though we are in a position to give a lead, this does not entitle us to act in isolation; the latest Anglican liturgical books propose the adoption of our new *Pater noster*, but how much better to have produced one together in the first place! This will be specially important if we are actually going to try to modify the

language for liturgical purposes (and if we are going to do that, we must be well aware of doing so).

It must be a last resort to create new modes of speech, but in this case there is no easy alternative. English tends to prefer series of short sentences, but this leads to the sort of prayer which is primarily concerned with telling God what he already knows (the 'as thou readest in the *Manchester Guardian*' type of prayer). One of the versions we are offered of the *Deus qui nobis sub sacramento mirabili* begins: 'This great sacrament, God, is your bequest to us'. I have found increasingly that the only workable formula is quite different, and involves a fairly drastic alteration: and that is the formula we now have in our Bidding Prayers. Most of the subordinate clauses would be taken right out of the prayer, and used to expand the *Oremus* (which would thereby gain more point, as would the ensuing silence). Thus the prayer for Corpus Christi might be something like this: 'In this wonderful sacrament our Lord has left us a memorial of his suffering. Let us thank him for it, and pray that we may attain to salvation by it. (Pause.) We ask you, God, to enable us to worship these holy mysteries of your body and blood in such a way as to feel and enjoy within ourselves always the fact that you have redeemed us. Amen.' (The full trinitarian ending seems quite out of place; it belongs with prayer addressed to the Father).

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NEW DICTIONARY OF THE LITURGY, by Gerhard Podrasky. Edited in English by Lancelot Sheppard. *Geoffrey Chapman*. 50s.

This is a book designed for those who wish to familiarize themselves with the structure and meaning of the liturgy so that it may become for them the fountain of spiritual life which the Council has declared it ought to be. Much scholarship has gone into its making, but it is not a reference book for scholars for it gives neither references nor bibliography. It does, however, supply a wealth of information based on the best historical and pastoral studies. A good example is the article, *Good Friday*. This is divided into five sections. The first, entitled *meaning*, describes in about 270 words the sense of the celebration: 'Good Friday, therefore, is the dark and painful aspect of the Easter mystery; as such it marks the beginning of the one indivisible Easter festival, which can only be properly understood if Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day are viewed as a whole'. The second section describe the liturgy of the day briefly. The third gives a fine résumé

of the historical development in 650 words. A fourth on Canon Law reminds us that it is a day of fast and abstinence. The final section, entitled *customs*, mentions neither the Stations of the Cross nor the seven last words, but stresses the importance of the day for all Christians as one of deep seriousness and points out that in many places, where factories continue to work on this day, the Y.C.W. have instituted a minute's complete silence at 3 p.m.

First published in 1962, some of the rubrical information has been outdated by recent documents on the liturgical renewal. On the whole, however, the book preserves a high standard of accuracy and will be found a helpful guide. Many good photographs of both modern and ancient liturgical furniture provide inspiration for those coping with the tasks of reconstruction and adaptation.

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