Systematic Perspectives and Historical Issues', *Horizons*, 13 (1986) 239–252.

34 See Rossé, Chs. 5, 7 and 8.

35 For this distinction I am indebted to Ruth Burrows, *Guidelines for Mystical Prayer* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1977) 36.

36 See 78–83.

37 'The Primitive Christian Kerygma and the Historical Jesus', in Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville (eds.), *The Historical Jesus and the Kerygmatic Christ* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press), 1964, 24. Eberhard Jüngel adopts Bultmann's position in *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 105.

38 For the connection meaning/integration and meaninglessness/disintegration, see Herbert Fingarette, *The Self in Transformation* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

39 See Max Zerwick, *Analysis Philologica Novi Testamenti Graeci* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1953), at Mt 27:46 and Mk 15:34: The verb *engkataleipo* (I abandon) means 'relinquo in aliqua mala condicione.'

40 *Face à la mort, Jésus et Paul* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 128–129.

41 In Ch. 2 of *Mimesis* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Book, 1957), to which Frei refers on 116.

42 124–125.

Translations and Liturgical Tradition

Patrick Gorevan

> The perennial question whether translation is, in fact, possible is rooted in ancient religious and psychological doubts on whether there ought to be any passage from one tongue to another. So far as speech is divine and numinous, so far as it encloses revelation, active transmission whether into the vulgate or across the barrier of languages is dubious or frankly evil .... [thus] the belief that three days of utter darkness fell on the world when the Law was translated into Greek (George Steiner, *After Babel*).[1]

Such reflections may have a place when it comes to the translation of liturgical documents. They may even be required reading before the awesome task be undertaken. It would be indeed unfortunate if the next English version of the Roman Sacramentary in English were to spark off power cuts all over the English-speaking world!

Perhaps we need not worry. Recent articles in *New Blackfriars* by

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Eamon Duffy and Bruce Harbert have shown that the revised translation of the Roman Missal, now in draft form, shows some interesting improvements on the 1973 version: greater fidelity to the cadence, the nuances and, above all, the meaning of the original; a distancing from the Pelagian optimism which characterised the earlier translations and a return to the true Roman liturgical style: simplicity encrusted in a majestic flow and rhythm.[2] In this article I would like to draw attention to the challenge this sort of translation faces: that of being faithful to the liturgical tradition.

Many of the 'ordinary-speech' translations of liturgical texts in the last twenty-five years have been faulted for falling short of the living tradition of the liturgy, reflecting rather the prevailing idiom and ethos. George Steiner claims, by contrast, that

> The bulk of literary, historical and philosophical translation, even where it concerns fiction, political writings or plays intended for production, shows symptoms of retreat from current speech.[3]

For Steiner the most successful translation, or 'domestication', is probably the King James Bible. It made the Bible somehow native to the spirit of the language and of English feeling.

This, he believes, is due to the slight archaicism which, even at the time, characterised it (it is rather more Tudor than Jacobean), and kept it at a slight distance from the idiomatic speech of the readers. He believes that this 'ingestion' of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin sources into English sensibility would not have occurred had the scholars and editors of 1604-11 laboured to be modern.[4]

In another sense they were very modern indeed. Julien Green claimed that the King James translators

> were determined to give England a Hebrew book ... and succeeded ... because they understood that in the case of such a book as the Bible only a literal translation will do

—this at a time when foreign books were translated with anything but literal accuracy.[5] They were helped by the similar 'barbaric beauty' of Anglo-Saxon and Hebrew. In translating the Latin prayers of the liturgy it will be necessary to render what Green termed the more 'intellectual beauty' of the Latin words, preserving abstractness, rhythm and repetition.

The priority, at all events, was and is not to reflect the exact state of political and linguistic correctness, but to find the best way of taking possession of the fullness of liturgical tradition. So as we look forward to new translations which will embody the vitality of our worshipping spirit, it is worth reflecting on what that tradition actually means for the liturgy.

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Three aspects of liturgical tradition, and their implications for translation, will occupy us in the remainder of this article:

1. liturgy expresses faith;
2. liturgy is sacramental;
3. In the liturgy we share in the work of God.

Liturgy expresses faith

The Church prays as she believes. Her faith forms her prayer and her prayer does justice to the faith she holds:

> In any form of prayer ... which is intended for the ultimate use of a corporate body, the whole fullness of religious truth must be included. The liturgy condenses into prayer the entire body of religious truth.[6]

Some styles of translation impoverish our language, leaving us unable to pray as we should. A small but significant instance of this impoverishment is the excessive use of 'Father' as the title by which God is addressed in the opening prayers of the 1973 translation of the Roman Missal.

A trawl through the whole year's set of collect prayers in the Missal reveals that the word '*Father*' is used either alone or in formulae like '*God our Father*' in nineteen of the thirty four weekly prayers. The original prayers, however, never address God in that way, opting rather for forms of address such as 'Lord God,' 'God,' or 'Almighty, ever-living God'. Josef Jungmann, in his classic study of the Roman liturgy, points out that it is only at the Preface and at the resumption of the Eucharistic prayer after the *Sanctus* that the confident term 'Father' is used, 'probably inspired by the nearness of the grace-laden mystery .... The name of Father is otherwise very rare, even in the older Roman liturgy'.[7] This pattern is also followed in the original of the present Missal.

The intention of the change introduced in the English translation was probably to introduce a stress on God's paternal care and to reflect the fact that liturgical prayer is addressed to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. But the emphasis on the word 'Father,' for all its scriptural aptness, may also impoverish and oversimplify our discourse about God, at a point when it needs to be most rich and varied. Abbot Vonier is rather contemporary here:

> the greatest misfortune that has befallen modern religious thought is the setting aside of all the other divine names for the one name of Father, as if this one alone expressed God adequately .... No single

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> human word expresses the functions of the Deity; and even when all human terms that are available have been pressed into service to describe God's relationship with man, there always remains this glorious certainty that God deals with men in a way that is entirely His own, that has no name, that is wonderful beyond comprehension.[8]

This problem, which I cite only by way of example, could be righted by returning to the spirit—and the letter!—of the ancient Collects, at least to the extent that they are preserved in the present Missale Romanum. This would contribute both a sense of inclusiveness and a respect for the mystery of God, but above all it would respect the liturgical tradition in which our understanding (or, more properly, lack of understanding) of God is preserved and given life.

The Liturgy is sacramental

The liturgy, for the *Catechism*, performs its task through signs and symbols. These signs are both natural and touched by human hands:

> The great religions of mankind witness, often impressively, to the cosmic and symbolic meaning of religious rites. The liturgy presupposes, integrates and sanctifies elements from creation and human culture, conferring on them the dignity of signs of grace, of the new creation in Jesus Christ.[9]

Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit; these may speak of God and symbolise both his greatness and his nearness (1147); washing and anointing, breaking bread and sharing the cup; these may all express the sanctifying presence of God and man's gratitude towards his Creator (1148). That is 'all' that the liturgy can do: baptise, feed, forgive, anoint. Through these elements the work of our salvation is carried out. Robert Sokolowski contends that we are prone to be suspicious of such symbols and 'appearances', contrasting them with a deeper and more objective 'reality'. He attempts to develop a 'theology of disclosure', sensitive to the visible forms of God's appearance. Symbolic presence is not opposed to real presence and is often its vehicle.

> [This] phenomenology can be of help in the treatment of the symbolic character of the Eucharist. For the Fathers of the Church and for the ancient world generally, a symbol did not only signify something; it also was thought to participate in that thing and to make it concretely present. The symbolic was not contrasted to the real.[10]

The early church was aware that this mysteriousness or sacramentality of the liturgy required some explanation, particularly to catechumens and neophytes. The *genre* known as 'mystagogical

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catechesis' carried out this task. It was an advance on the catechesis given to catechumens, for it sought to bring the neophyte Christians gradually into the mysteries. John Paul II has called for a renewed mystagogical catechesis today.[11]

The liturgy itself, however, and its language, ought not to take on the role of a mystagogical catechesis, for as we have seen it 'shows' rather than explains. The complaint made against some kinds of translation (and not simply against inclusive language translations) that they are obtrusive, does not just stem from their respective ideology. The problem is that they are trying to make liturgy do something which is not its role: explaining itself.

This will to clarify is noticeable in the way the third rubric of the Mass was translated.

The original reads: *Sacerdos, vel diaconus vel alius minister idoneus, potet brevissimis verbis introducere fideles in Missam illius diei.* [Literally translated this reads: 'The priest, deacon or other suitable minister may very briefly introduce the faithful into the Mass of the day']. The faithful may be brought into the mystery. The present English translation reverses the process, stating that he may 'introduce the Mass of the day'. With this wording it is now the Mass which needs an introduction if it is to make any sense to the faithful. Further on during the action of the Mass, the translation, unilaterally, adds in other opportunities where the priest may 'invite the people to a fuller understanding' of the rite. This highly didactic approach may have influenced the bland and simplified language in which the rites are presented by the translation.

This phenomenon forms part of the 'fissuring' of the mystical and the real which Catherine Pickstock has drawn attention to in her treatment of Eucharistic representation in *After Writing*.[2] When signs are disconnected from the real, when we lose faith in the power of the symbol, we are left with a lot of 'explaining' to do. The 'merely' symbolic cannot do justice to what is going on, so a commentary has to be interposed, that the faithful may be touched by the presence of the real. But the Eucharist actually underlies all language, and defies 'explanations' of this kind.

In the liturgy we share in the work of God

Faith tells us that we receive our sense of ourselves precisely in liturgical terms. The postcommunion prayer for the feast of St Augustine, drawing from the saint's own writings, asks God to help us 'become what we have received'. The Eucharist is the centre and the source of the Christian life, helping us to discover, indeed to become,

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who we are. The Eucharistic gift is, ultimately, ourselves, remade, reborn and indistinguishable from Christ.

As Eamon Duffy and Bruce Harbert have pointed out, one of the motives for revising the Missal translation as it stands is precisely its tendency away from that understanding and towards Pelagianism, that is, laying great stress on our identity and the work we do for our salvation (*you know how firmly we believe in you*, from the First Eucharistic Prayer, for example). Harbert warns, in fact, that even some of the newly drafted collect prayers still lean towards a mild Pelagianism, where God's response to our efforts is portrayed as automatic: *give us the grace to keep these commandments / and so inherit eternal life* (Week 24).

Sensitivity to liturgical tradition goes beyond nostalgia and a yearning for a better style. Liturgical language is to draw us into a praise of God and of his works, which pass our understanding. This means that the words of the liturgy will occasionally scandalise us.

Take for example the prayer for Week 26. It addresses God as follows:

> Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas

—a daring assertion that God's forgiveness shows more power than his creation, that it is indeed a fresh creation. When it came to the English translation, this statement was markedly toned down. Was it felt that, humanly speaking, forgiveness is a matter of weakness rather than of power? Or was the thought that God shows his almighty power above all in mercy and forgiveness felt to be rhetorical exaggeration? In any case the translation limped as follows:

> Father [of course!], you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness

The *maxime* (above all) was excised and with it the echoes of the renewed creation. The liturgy usually uses every opportunity to express this reality, and I take as an example an Easter Vigil prayer whose translation, while not particularly accurate, does allow that note to ring:

> Almighty and eternal God,
> you created all things in wonderful beauty and order.
> Help us now to perceive
> how still more wonderful is the new creation
> by which in the fullness of time
> you redeemed your people
> through the sacrifice of our passover, Jesus Christ.
>
> *(Prayer after first Reading)*

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Guardini, in his writings on liturgy, spoke of a 'world' of divine realities into which liturgy introduces the soul. This 'universe', populated by notions of this kind which pass our understanding, is, I believe, at the heart of the liturgical tradition which we have received, the heritage into which we enter. It is not fashioned by language, and it is not always adverted to, but language is, sadly, capable of hindering our advertence of it, and its influence on our Christian lives.

Conclusions

It is always tempting to make liturgy relative to what we feel, understand or opine. Liturgy should not, however, be expected to cater for all tastes and sensitivities, and it may often be necessary 'to render Scripture and liturgical texts in their time conditioned, at times even inelegant mode of human expression' (Vatican Norms on translation, 1997). Jacques Maritain raised this necessity to the status of a virtue when he wrote in 1965 that:

> the first duty of a translator ... especially when one is dealing with an inspired text or a liturgical text, [is] to respect the word that was chosen by the author ... and to use the exact equivalent to it, even at the price of obscurity, a blessed obscurity, because it is the shadow borne upon our human language, of the grandeur of things divine.[13]

1 George Steiner, *After Babel*, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 239.
2 Eamon Duffy, 'Rewriting the Liturgy: the theological implications of translation', January 1997, and Bruce Harbert, 'What kind of Missal are we Getting?', December, 1996.
3 *After Babel*, p. 346.
4 *After Babel*, p. 349.
5 'Translation and the Fields of Scripture', in Julien Green, *Le Langage et son double* (ed. G. Lucera), Editions de la Différence, 1985, p. 206.
6 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, London 1937, p. 15.
7 Josef Jungmann S.J., *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1986, Vol II, p. 150.
8 Anscar Vonier, *Christianus*, Burns Oates Washbourne, London 1933, p. 114.
9 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1149.
10 Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence. A Study in the Theology of Disclosure*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1994, pp. 198-99.
11 John Paul II, *Renewal of Liturgy*, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Vatican II's Constitution on liturgy (1989), 21.
12 Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing. On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* Blackwell, Oxford 1998, pp. 254–5, 262.
13 Letter to Paul VI, March 1965, quoted in *Catholic World Report*, August 1992, p. 11.

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