

A Lecture
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**The Relationship of the Active Participation of the Assembly
to Liturgical Translations**

Brother Bishops, Abbot Klassen, All Co-Workers in the Ministry of Christ,
Friends:

I would like to preface this lecture with a personal tribute to a gifted and
graced monk, Godfrey Diekmann, who decisively influenced the liturgical reform
in the United States. He is universally recognized as an apostle of liturgical
renewal.

From the very beginning of the American liturgical movement, Godfrey
Diekmann was a prominent leader, a sought-after lecturer, an acclaimed writer
and editor of *Worship Magazine*, a regular advisor to Bishops, and a leading
consultant at Vatican II. He persuaded people by his sincerity, spirituality, and
scholarship. He had a profound influence on drafting the *Constitution on the
Sacred Liturgy* of Vatican II. He championed the use of modern day languages
in the liturgy and was a founding member of the International Commission on
English in the Liturgy (ICEL). He helped frame the statement on liturgical
inculturation --- a major breakthrough at Vatican II. In all of these endeavors and
accomplishments, Godfrey Diekmann remained focused on one essential: the

liturgy of the Church must be always at the service of pastoral life. His scholarship was not esoteric, but pragmatic --- always directed to improving the worship life of God's people --- always intent on full, conscious, and active participation.

Forty years after Vatican II we need to remind ourselves of the struggles and successes of this liturgical reformer. We need to continue what he and other liturgical pioneers began. We need to keep alive his vision that vernacular translations must reflect the liturgy as the rich prayer of all the people and not just those in the sanctuary.

We have all benefited from the liturgical legacy of this Benedictine monk. The Abbey of St. John's nurtured, educated, and enabled Godfrey Diekmann to be a dynamic liturgical leader. The Church gives thanks to the Benedictine Community of St. John's for the gift of Godfrey Diekmann to the universal Church. The Church also gives thanks to this Abbey for its special charism in revitalizing the liturgy.

I have chosen in this lecture to speak to you on the relationship of the active participation of the assembly to liturgical translations for two reasons. First, translating the Sacramentary and Lectionary are major contemporary issues, pivotal problems, facing the Church in the United States in a significant

way. The outcome of these translations will affect the worship life of every Catholic in the United States and even beyond. Secondly, I want to build on the foundational work and insights of Godfrey Diekmann and the first members of ICEL, revitalizing and expanding on their vision of translation. They stood closest in time to the Council Fathers of Vatican II and knew the intended relationship of vernacular texts to the active participation of those gathered around the Lord's Table.

Father Godfrey Diekmann always linked liturgy to life. He always promoted the cause that people should pray in the vernacular. As a founding father of ICEL, he helped establish the structure and philosophy for the translation of Latin liturgical texts into the people's own language. I strongly suggest that he would want that liturgical language today to be not just accurate and faithful to the original, but also intelligible, proclaimable, dignified and reflective of a word order, vocabulary and expressions from the contemporary mainstream of the English language as spoken in the United States. A translated text is intended for prayer, worship, lifting up the heart and mind to God. If a translation --- no matter how exact --- does not communicate in the living language of the worshipping assembly, it fails as a translation; it fails to lead to full, conscious, and active participation. This is the essential criterion and ultimate goal for all translations of the Sacramentary and Lectionary. This is the thesis which I advance in this lecture. A translated text must be more than exact

and faithful to the original; it must become the authentic prayer of the liturgical assembly. That means the worshipping community must own the prayer, its contents, its vocabulary, its style, its idiom, its cadence, its rhythm. The believer must be able to make the prayer his or her own. Only in this way can a translated prayer fulfill the definition of prayer --- “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God”.¹

In the proposed translation of the Sacramentary we meet words and expressions that many would consider not in the speech of the mainstream assembly. I cite the following examples:

1. The proposed translation for the Nicene Creed uses the phrase “consubstantial with the Father” to replace the present wording “one in being with the Father”. Also in this Creed the new wording “by the Holy Spirit [he] was incarnate of the Virgin Mary” replaces “he was born of the Virgin Mary”. Both words “consubstantial” and “incarnate” are not readily intelligible to the vast majority of those in the assembly. The present texts are accurate, orthodox formulations of our faith approved by the Holy See and prayed by our people for the past thirty-five years.
2. A proposed translation for Eucharistic Prayer I reads: “Grant them, O Lord, we pray, and all who sleep in Christ, a place of refreshment, light and peace.” The phrase “a place of refreshment” is a literal translation that

¹ **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, No. 2559.

- conveys the image of a heavenly spa or tap room at the heavenly hotel. Using the word “place” wrongly identifies heaven as a geographical location. Presently we translate this prayer as follows: “May these and all who sleep in Christ find in your presence light, happiness, and peace.”
3. A proposed translation for Eucharistic Prayer II reads: “Make holy these gifts, we pray, by the dew of your Spirit.” This is an exact translation of the Latin, but it would not make sense for most in the assembly. While the phrase “dew of your Spirit” is a beautiful biblical metaphor, its literalness as translated does not resonate or communicate with contemporary Christians.

In our current Lectionary we encounter similar examples of accurate literal translations which result in impoverished English texts making them impossible to proclaim or understand. The following are examples:

1. On the Third Sunday of Advent, B Year, in John 1:6-8, 19-28, we read: “When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, ‘I am not the Christ.’” Clarity is missing in this exaggerated literal translation which comes from our revised Lectionary translated in Rome.² People

² The translation prepared by the Bishops Committee on Liturgy (BCL) was originally based on the New American Bible. American biblical scholars --- Rev. Joseph Jensen, O.S.B.; Rev. Alex DiLella; Rev. Frank Gignac; and Rev. Claude Peifer, O.S.B. --- were involved in adapting the NAB text to the Lectionary at the request of BCL. The BCL translation was endorsed by more than two-thirds of the U.S. Latin Rite bishops but failed to gain the approval of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments. A group of three American archbishops then met in Rome as part of a working group with

- are confused about what was admitted and not admitted. The former Lectionary simply said: “The testimony John gave when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask, ‘Who are you?’ was the absolute statement, ‘I am not the Messiah.’” I would simply add, if this isn’t broken, don’t fix it.
2. On the Twenty-Fifth Sunday, C Year, in Luke 16:1-13, we read: “Then to another steward he said, ‘And you, how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘One hundred kors of wheat.’” Does anyone in the assembly know the meaning of “kors of wheat”? The Lectionary sent to Rome by the American Bishops said: “A hundred measures of wheat.” The Lectionary from Rome uses a technical, unintelligible term “kors”.
 3. In 2Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12, we have nine lines literally translated for one sentence. The lector is out of breath by the ninth line. A proclaimed text cannot possibly be understood by the hearer when it is so long. This is a frequent failing in our present Lectionary. Little consideration was given to the fact that a scripture translation in the Lectionary is to be suitable for proclamation. This requires different punctuation and treatment of subordinate clauses as found in the original.

representatives from the Congregation for Doctrine and the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments and with a translator. They drafted a revised text, substantially different from the Lectionary submitted by the U.S. Bishops in 1992.

4. Any number of examples could be cited to illustrate that the present Lectionary slavishly translates pronouns, failing to supply nouns.³ In a translated text for public proclamation a pronoun should often be replaced by a noun for the purpose of intelligibility and clarity.

All of the texts cited translate the original exactly and faithfully, but they must do more --- they must dispose the liturgical assembly to communicate its authentic prayer in its own living language and lead that worshipping assembly to full, conscious, and active participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.

To develop this thesis I ask three questions which will serve as the outline of this presentation:

1. What are the supporting arguments for this thesis?
2. To what extent does the sacred vernacular as advocated by the Roman document *Liturgiam Authenticam* meet the standard of full, conscious, and active participation for the liturgical assembly?
3. Do our translated liturgical texts reflect the cultural context of the assembly thereby enabling active participation?

³ e.g. Matthew 26:14-27, 66 (Palm Sunday Passion): “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you? They paid him thirty pieces of silver and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.” Verbal proclamation demands clarity, namely the specification of Jesus and Judas.

Arguments in Favor of the Thesis

Article 21 of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* has confirmed the importance, meaning, and effectiveness of liturgical language in these words: “Texts and rites should be drawn up so that they express more clearly the holy things which they signify. Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them with ease and to take part in them fully, actively, and as it befits a community.” This conciliar statement forthrightly states that translated texts must convey unambiguously, faithfully, precisely what was essentially in the original. The Council Fathers then declare that “Christian people, as far as possible, should be able to understand them [these texts and rites] with ease”. This is the goal, the norm, the expressed wish of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. I see in this text a standard --- a prerequisite --- that calls for not just the accuracy of translated texts but for the easy understanding of these texts. This conciliar statement then concludes that such liturgical texts will enable full, active participation by the community, that is the assembly.

A liturgical scholar and professor of liturgy at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome, Father Anscar Chupungco, OSB, has emphasized that the vernacular “plays an absolute role in assuring the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy.”⁴ That absolute role demands that liturgical texts be easily understood in order to enable active and prayerful participation. This very point

⁴ **Handbook for Liturgical Studies**, Anscar Chupungco, OSB, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1997, p. 152.

is stressed in Article 48 of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which says: “Through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers, [Christ’s faithful] should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively.” Many would say this is all common sense, but it is actually a question of theological debate and discussion. In 2001 the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments issued a new Instruction on vernacular translations entitled *Liturgiam Authenticam* [The Authentic Liturgy]. This Instruction provides detailed norms, principles, and criteria for the translation of liturgical books from Latin into vernacular languages. The emphasis in this Instruction is on exact, even literal translation. Explicit mention is made of translation being “as literally as possible”.⁵

Liturgiam Authenticam rightly stresses exactness in rendering liturgical and biblical texts into the vernacular in order to assure doctrinal fidelity. But even St. Jerome, the great doctor of the Sacred Scriptures, who spent twenty years translating the Bible, was not a literalist. He himself said: “If I translate word by word, it sounds absurd.”⁶ Father Chupungco has observed: “Fidelity to the original refers to the content or meaning of the text, not to its form or component words and phrases. That is why a word for word translation is not a guarantee of fidelity to the original text.”⁷ And yet *Liturgiam Authenticam* in norm 43 specifies: “It should be born in mind that a literal translation of terms which may initially

⁵ Paragraphs 56, 57, 59. “Certain expressions...are to be respected by a translation that is as literal as possible, as for example the words of the people’s response ‘et cum Spiritu tuo’ or the expression ‘mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.’”

⁶ DOL786.

⁷ **Newsletter**, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, December 1994, Vol. 21, No. 6.

sound ODD in the vernacular language may for this very reason provoke inquisitiveness in the hearer and provide an occasion for catechesis.” I see this statement clashing with the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which states: “The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity...They should be written within the people’s powers of comprehension and normally should not require much explanation.”⁸ There is even a fundamental inconsistency between norm 43 of *Liturgiam Authenticam* and its own general principle which says that the content of the original text should “be evident and comprehensible even to the faithful who lack any specialized intellectual formation”.⁹

This is especially true when recalling that liturgical texts are to be proclaimed and heard, sung and prayed, by people of the third millennium --- children, teenagers, adults, those with varying degrees of education and those with English as a second language. Pastoral consideration of simplicity and clarity argue for liturgical texts to be translated in such a way that they lead to full, conscious, and active participation. Liturgical texts must be conveyed in a living language. The assembly needs prayer texts --- words and forms --- that are intelligible and able to lift the heart and mind to God. The translator needs to keep one eye on the original text and the other eye on the intended recipients. Scholarship and pastoral reality go hand in hand.

⁸ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Para. 34.

⁹ *Liturgiam Authenticam*, No. 25.

Recall Jesus' words: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."¹⁰ The risen Jesus prays with the assembly, rendering its prayer efficacious. Did Jesus ever speak to the people of his day in words beyond their comprehension? Did Jesus ever use terms or expressions beyond his hearer's understanding?¹¹

Having a liturgical text which "may initially sound odd" and having an artificial language which requires people to seek out the celebrant of the Eucharist for an explanation fails the standard of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which says Christian people "should be able to understand them with ease" and "be within the people's powers of comprehension" and "not require much explanation". Are these not supporting citations of the thesis that a translated liturgical text must be more than accurate? It must also be intelligible, proclaimable, easily understood, enabling the assembly to have full, conscious, and active participation.

¹⁰ Matthew 18:20.

¹¹ Jesus did explain the parable of the sower privately to his disciples, cf. Mark 4:10-12 and Luke 8:9-10. In John 6 many of Jesus' disciples found his Bread of Life Discourse hard to accept. In these instances it is the content, the message, not the vocabulary that requires further explanation.

Latin liturgical texts and biblical texts in Hebrew and Greek do not give up their riches easily. Translation endeavors to unearth those riches. Translation deals fundamentally with communication and is much more an art than a science. Texts handed down from another time and culture must communicate with people of a vastly different time and culture. To bridge this gap, translators must select new word alternatives, new grammatical structures and new lexicon systems. An accurate and faithful translation cannot be judged simply on the basis of word-for-word verbatim transcription from one language to another.

Recall the memorable words of the Council Fathers: “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.”¹² Full and active participation entails an understanding of the translated texts --- texts proclaimable and easily understood. Full and active participation entails that those gathered around the Table of the Lord enter totally into the meaning of liturgical prayer by making it their own. Liturgy is the people’s prayer. This same eloquent and much quoted passage of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reaches a crescendo with the words: “In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to

¹² **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**, Para. 14.

be considered before all else.”¹³ Can we, therefore, not say that in the preparation and promotion of translated liturgical texts, the full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else?

Sacred Vernacular

It is a challenging and complex task to provide vernacular prayer texts. The Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments in its instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* has introduced a new dimension --- a sacred vocabulary for liturgical texts. Norm 27 advocates “a sacred style that will come to be recognized as proper to liturgical language”.

Liturgiam Authenticam wants a more profound sense of the sacred, a transcendent emphasis in liturgical translations. Paragraph 47 contains a particular norm in this regard: “Liturgical translation...will facilitate the development of a sacred vernacular, characterized by a vocabulary, syntax and grammar that are proper to divine worship.” The text then goes on to claim that this sacred vernacular “has occurred in the languages of peoples evangelized long ago”. Some liturgists dispute this claim. Liturgical scholar Peter Jeffery comments: “Try as I might, I cannot figure out what historical period or language

¹³ Ibid.

they are talking about. When and where did liturgical translation of the Roman Rite create a sacral vernacular that even shaped every day speech?”¹⁴

A similar testimony is given by liturgical theologian Frank Norris in these words:

One reason that the celebration of the Eucharist in the East and West was so splendid during this period (4th and 5th centuries) was that the liturgy followed the language of the people... There was no such thing, in East or West, as a sacred or hieratic language. Obviously, the language of the Holy Eucharist was never the language of the street. It was always a dignified, literary language... basically, the language of the people. It never occurred to anyone in the Church to create a “mystique” of a sacred language, to suggest that a sacred language was a sign of unity or that it added to the mystery of the Eucharist.¹⁵

¹⁴ **Translating Tradition**, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2005, p. 66.

¹⁵ **Current Trends in Theology**, Image Books, Garden City, NY, 1965, Donald J. Wolf and James V. Schall, p. 104.

In spite of these convincing assertions we are faced with a sacred language in the proposed Sacramentary and in the Lectionary. What prompts this new approach? Many would contend that after the Second Vatican Council and after the introduction of a new vernacular Missal, there was a decided loss of a sense of awe, mystery and transcendence in the liturgy. In an attempt to restore this transcendent element, *Liturgiam Authenticam* mandates a sacred vocabulary. For example, Norm 50 stipulates: “Words used to name liturgical ministers, vessels, furnishings, vesture are not to come from vernacular terms for similar things used in everyday life.”

Therefore, the proposed Order of Mass uses the word “chalice” where we had previously said “cup”. Eucharistic Prayer I says: “When supper was ended, he took this precious chalice into his holy and venerable hands.” Did Jesus at the Last Supper use a “precious chalice” or a “cup”? The gospels clearly say “cup”, but even in the Lectionary from Rome we have the word “chalice” imposed on the inspired text to carry out this “sacred language”. “Chalice” is not the translation of the New American Bible, nor the New Revised Standard Bible, nor the Oxford Annotated Bible, nor the Jerusalem Bible, nor any current or older translation. Greek-English lexicons and authoritative biblical commentaries all say the meaning of the Greek word which describes what Jesus drank from is “cup or drinking vessel”. To say not just “chalice” but “precious chalice” in

Eucharistic Prayer I is clearly not a reflection of the biblical text. Should the agenda of a sacred vocabulary, no matter how well-intentioned, be allowed to circumvent the inspired word?

No one should be opposed to a transcendent dimension in liturgical translation, but an exaggerated attention to the sacred distorts the balance between transcendence and immanence. We must never forget that Sacred Scripture presents God under a two-fold image: King and Neighbor, transcendence and immanence. At times God shows himself as an awesome and powerful presence. God is the mighty monarch controlling the universe. Revealed as King, God prompts reverence and respect, awe and fear in his people. This is the transcendent image of God. We see an example of this in the Old Testament when God appears to Moses at the burning bush. Moses takes off his sandals because he is on holy ground, he bows his head. In the prophets, God emerges as the transcendent one. The foundation of the temple shakes before God's presence. God presides with might and splendor.

In the New Testament, Christ is transfigured before his apostles. He appears radiant; his divinity shines through his humanity. In the Pauline epistles

Jesus is the transcendent Lord, the risen One, exalted on high, who knocks Paul from his horse on the road to Damascus.

At other times the Scriptures reveal God appearing like a neighbor --- friendly, close to his people, personal, human in appearance. Revealed in this fashion God inspires love, intimacy, fervor. This is the immanent image of God. Consider, for example, the first five books of the Old Testament. Here God is generally revealed as immanent: God strolls with Adam and Eve in the garden, God chats with them as a friend; God eats in the tent of Abraham; God appears as a cloud of glory over the ark and marches before his people as pillar of fire. God is close to his people and visibly involved in their struggles.

In the New Testament we meet the same parallel. The Jesus of the gospels is the revelation of God's immanence. He eats and drinks with his disciples, he dines with sinners, he fishes with his apostles, he suffers disappointments, he lets people embrace him, he falls asleep in the boat. Yet the Jesus of the Pauline epistles presents a different appearance. For Paul, Jesus is the risen Lord, the glorified Lord. Paul never knew the Jesus who traveled with the apostles. Paul knew only the risen Lord he met on the road to

Damascus, and so he stresses the triumphant risen Christ --- the transcendent Lord.

We must always keep in mind that the inspired Scriptures reveal God to us in a two-fold way, both through transcendence and immanence. Both are necessary for a proper understanding of the revealed God. Balance is needed. The delicate balance between transcendence and immanence must be maintained in our liturgy. To those calling for more transcendence in liturgy, I would respond that a true idea of God's immanence cannot be overemphasized, for an adequate idea of an immanent God presumes a proper understanding of God's majesty and goodness as transcendent. Is there an imbalance between transcendence and immanence in our liturgical language? Is God's immanence reflected adequately in the language of prayer and in the norms of *Liturgiam Authenticam*?

Paragraph 27 of that instruction tells us that liturgical texts "should be free of an overly servile adherence to prevailing modes of expression". It even recommends that "a certain manner of speech, which has come to be considered obsolete" be continued in liturgical use. How do these principles relate to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* and its stress on liturgical texts being easily

understood? People need an understanding of the transcendence of God, but the use of expressions not prevalent in the speech of the assembly and the use of archaic words actually defeats that purpose and makes God remote and not relevant.

Other signs of sacred language in the proposed Sacramentary include the frequent expressions: “We pray, O God, be pleased to bless”; “Be pleased to grant her peace”; “Be pleased to look upon them with a serene and kindly gaze”. Does such formalism increase our love of the transcendent God? Does such formalism distance the liturgy from the assembly? In 1996 Pope John Paul II addressed the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments. He said: “Revelation is proclaimed satisfactorily and becomes fully understandable when Christ speaks the tongues of the various peoples and they can read Scripture and sing the liturgy in their own language with their own expressions.”¹⁶ Note the emphasis on “Christ speaks the tongues” of the people. Note the emphasis on “their own language with their own expressions”.

¹⁶ **Newsletter**, NCCB Committee on the Liturgy, May 1996, Vol. XXXII, p. 18.

A rigid formalism in sacred language can stifle authentic worship “in spirit and in truth”.¹⁷ The exaggerated use of sacred language risks losing touch with contemporary life and risks falling into archaic speech. Do we not see that in the King James Bible and Book of Common Prayer? These texts are the closest the English language has come to a sacred language. Will a sacred language with its ecclesiastical vocabulary, obsolete speech, and exaggerated transcendence enable the people of God to have full, conscious, and active participation? Liturgical and biblical texts are meant to inform, form and transform the assembly. How will unfamiliar and archaic words and expressions accomplish that?

For the early Christians there was no such thing as a sacred language. And yet they knew and loved the transcendence of God.

Inculturation

When people come to celebrate Eucharist they come with the everyday language of contemporary American culture in their ears and on their lips. That language reflects the influence of television, videos, movies, newspapers, magazines, and best sellers. The liturgical and biblical texts of the Eucharist can

¹⁷ John 4: 23-24.

only be heard and prayed in the culture of the assembly. Liturgical texts never exist in a vacuum. No one in the assembly can escape from being conditioned by the social environment and intellectual climate of our present day culture. If liturgical translations do not reflect the cultural context of the assembly, they lose intelligibility and diminish the full, conscious and active participation of the Eucharistic assembly.

Recognizing this cultural factor in the life of God's people, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* called for liturgy to be inculturated. For over four hundred years all worship in the Roman Rite showed near-perfect uniformity. At Vatican II there came a radical change. The Council Fathers realized that social and cultural conditions had changed drastically in our day. So the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* stated: "Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters that do not affect the faith or good of the whole community; rather the Church respects and fosters the genius and talents of various races and peoples."¹⁸ The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* provided for legitimate variations in the liturgy. Article 40 asserted "an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed" in some places and circumstances. A good example of cultural adaptation of the Roman liturgy occurs in the Church in Zaire, which celebrates the Liturgy of the Word before the Penitential Rite.

¹⁸ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 37.

Recall Father Matteo Ricci, the great Jesuit missionary to China in the 1600's. He was the first European to be welcomed in the court of the Ming Dynasty. He shared scientific knowledge from the universities of Europe with the imperial court. He wore Chinese attire and accepted local customs. He gained the friendship of the leaders of the Chinese Empire. He was making great progress in introducing Christianity to China. He pleaded with the Holy See to permit the use of Chinese in the liturgy. Given the cultural and theological context of that time, Rome said "no". If Matteo Ricci had been successful in using the vernacular and adapting the liturgy to the culture of the Chinese, imagine what the result might be today. Would this most populous nation on earth possibly be Christian today?

We need to learn this important cultural lesson from the past. If the assembly's speech and forms of cultural expression are not evidenced in the Sacramentary and Lectionary, there will be an isolation of the liturgy from modern life. While I speak of the importance of recognizing contemporary culture in liturgical translations, I am not advocating that liturgy should be accommodated to the spirit of the times or subordinated to cultural forms. Liturgical content cannot be compromised. There must be a balance between preserving the

received liturgical or biblical message and expressing it in a relevant and understandable way.

This falls to the charism and genius of the translator who must faithfully communicate to the people of this millennium that message which the biblical or liturgical texts originally intended to communicate to a different people at another time. How is this accomplished? Translators have traditionally followed two methods. One is known as formal equivalence and the other as dynamic equivalence. In the formal equivalence method the translator renders each word of the original language into the receptor language and seeks to preserve the original word order and sentence structure as much as possible. In the dynamic equivalency approach the translator seeks to translate thought-for-thought as contrasted with word-for-word translation. The dynamic equivalency approach requires that the original texts be accurately interpreted and then rendered in understandable idiom. The emphasis is not on the meaning of an individual word or phrase, but on the whole unit of meaning or passage. The document *Liturgiam Authenticam* disapproves of dynamic equivalence, preferring the more literal approach.

Recall that when the New Testament was written, its authors used the everyday, ordinary language spoken in the marketplace, on the streets and at the supper table. The New Testament was not an elite literary composition. The first Christians did not need liturgical dictionaries or biblical commentaries to understand the message. The people grasped the meaning of what was celebrated in the Scriptures and in the Liturgy. Why then are so many of our scriptural and liturgical texts unfathomable and convoluted? Has literalism, sacred language, and the formal equivalency approach to translation failed the basic definition of translation, namely to bring the meaning of a text from one language to another?

We need to be sensitive to the problem that translators face in trying to bridge different cultures, the past and the present, classical and contemporary idioms. Roman collects or prayers are Roman collects, not American, and yet they are destined to become the prayers expressed in contemporary culture with English words and idioms. No translator can render into contemporary English a Latin text which has exactly the identical meaning, form, nuance, tone and feeling of the original. There will always be choices and interpretation. The Pontifical Biblical Commission notes that “a translation is always more than a simple transcription of the original text. The passage from one language to another

necessarily involves the change of cultural context.”¹⁹ This should be the guiding principle for the translation of the Sacramentary and Lectionary.

The Roman Rite itself grew up and developed in a Western/European culture. The Roman Rite was historically conditioned by the events and mentality of a particular time and culture. But that time and culture no longer exists. Liturgical norms and principles, that seek to absolutize and enshrine aspects of that Western/European culture of long ago in the liturgy of the Church today, fail to recognize that liturgy connects us to the Church of all ages: past, present and future. The Risen Christ is present among his people today, just as he was in former times and cultures. We need to recall the important distinction between Tradition and traditional. Vatican II tells us that Tradition represents “all that the Church is, all that the Church believes”.²⁰ Traditional represents ecclesiastical vocabulary, speech patterns, customs, and practices instituted by men and women in a particular age or culture to witness the faith. This traditional element can and must change with the culture. Liturgy does not belong in a museum. Liturgy belongs to the people of the Church here and now.

¹⁹ **The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church**, Pontifical Biblical Commission, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993, IV-B.

²⁰ **Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation**, Vatican II, No. 8.

Contemporary American culture uses inclusive language. To exclude inclusive language in liturgical and biblical texts is a serious problem since it fails to recognize the reality of contemporary culture. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* established the principle that liturgical language must enable the participation of all. Paragraph 14 says: “The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to full, conscious and active participation...Such participation...is their right and duty by reason of their Baptism.” The expression “all the faithful” certainly includes children, persons with disabilities, persons of diverse cultural backgrounds, and women. For the past forty years we have prayed with vernacular liturgical texts. We have prayed publicly in a language that is living. And that living language is inclusive. The very nature of the Eucharist, as a sacramental celebration of the event of universal salvation, calls for liturgical texts that do not exclude anyone from the call to participate at the Table of the Lord. The Eucharist is an all-inclusive celebration.

Modern English does not have grammatical gender the way French, German, and Spanish do. With the course of time and the influence of culture, the meanings of words have changed. Words that once referred to all human beings are increasingly taken as gender-specific and, consequently, exclusive. Words such as “man, brethren, forefathers” which were once understood as inclusive generic terms, today are understood as referring to only males. Certain

usages of “he, his, and him” once were considered to be generic and included both women and men, but today in contemporary American usage they refer to only males. For more and more people, generic language no longer works. To refer to women using masculine language does not promote full participation in the liturgy.

It is important to distinguish vertical inclusive language from horizontal inclusive language. Vertical inclusive language is God language, and the Bishops of the United States have stated long before *Liturgiam Authenticam*: “In fidelity to the inspired Word of God, the traditional biblical usage for naming persons of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to be retained.”²¹ Horizontal inclusive language refers to the use of inclusive or gender-neutral phrasing for references to humans, that is, terms which are intended to refer to both men and women. Today major newspapers, magazines, textbooks, television, network news anchors, government leaders, best-selling authors, all employ sex-inclusive language.²²

²¹ “Criteria for the Evaluation of Inclusive Language Translations of Scriptural Texts Proposed for Liturgical Use,” **Newsletter**, NCCB Committee on the Liturgy, October/November 1990, No. 30.

²² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not employ inclusive language. In Paragraph 1579 the catechism deals with celibacy and states: “Called to consecrate themselves with undivided heart to the Lord and to ‘the affairs of the Lord,’ they [the ordained ministers of the Latin Church] give themselves entirely to God and to men.” This is a most unfortunate translation in view of pedophile behavior in our society. This is not the language to promote celibacy in the contemporary culture of the United States. This is a dramatic example of why exclusive language is unacceptable.

In 1981 the Apostolic See permitted the dropping of the word “men” from the Words of Institution making the text inclusive. Recall what was said prior to 1981: “This is the cup of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting Covenant. It will be shed for you and for all men.” Why did the Church change? Was this not a recognition that exclusive language was misleading? Was this not a recognition that the contemporary culture in the United States no longer attached an inclusive meaning to the word “men”? And yet in the proposed translation of the Sacramentary we have continued use of exclusive language. For example, in Eucharistic Prayer IV we will pray: “Time and again you offered covenants to men.”

With respect to inclusive language, our present Lectionary without horizontal inclusive language is inferior to other biblical translations, even to those done by fundamentalists who certainly uphold the literal meaning of Scripture. Several years ago a new translation of the Bible, with a recommendation by Billy Graham, was published by Tyndale, entitled *Holy Bible: A New Living Translation*. This Bible is the work of conservative biblical scholars from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Southeastern College of the Assemblies of God, Westminster Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological

Seminary, and Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary --- to name just a few. This text of conservative biblical scholars boasts of the fact that it uses gender inclusive language. In the introductory notes the translators comment: "In the Pentateuch, most of the laws are stated in language that is replete with masculine pronouns. But since it is clear in many cases that the recipients of these laws were both male and female, we have used gender neutral language where appropriate."²³ If biblical scholars from the fundamentalist tradition, who clearly revere the literal interpretation of the Bible, employ gender inclusive language and Roman Catholics are denied that opportunity, there is not just a liturgical problem, there is an ecclesiological problem.

Let me cite for you just two examples of non-inclusive language in our present Lectionary:

1. Matthew 10:41; 30th Sunday, "A" Reading:

"Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward."

This is a slavishly literal translation which excludes women. Compare this translation with the New Revised Standard Version of the same verse:

²³ **Holy Bible: A New Living Translation**, 1996, Tyndale House Publishers, p. XLV.

“Whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous.”

Here is a meaningful text that is also inclusive.

2. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 8:14; Pentecost, “C” Reading:

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

The New Revised Standard Version translates the phrase “sons of God” as “children of God”, making the text inclusive. Certainly women are also led by the Spirit of God and cannot be called “sons of God”.

These are just two instances of non-inclusive language in our Lectionary that leave out one-half of the assembly.

We have used inclusive language in liturgical texts since 1976 without any significant problem. We have used inclusive language in the Rites of Anointing and Viaticum, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Order of Christian Funerals. These texts have been well-received by our people because they resonate with the culture. Let it be stated forcefully that the use of horizontal inclusive language does not mean an endorsement of a feminist agenda or women’s ordination. Inclusive language is simply a recognition of contemporary

culture and the changes in the English language. It is clearly a response to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* that there be full participation in the liturgy.

To a great extent our present biblical and liturgical texts do not reflect the cultural context of contemporary Christians. Full, conscious and active participation suffers.

Conclusion

This lecture has advanced the thesis that the ultimate goal for translated liturgical texts is to lead the assembly to full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharist. This is the essential criterion. This is “the aim to be considered before all else” according to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. The primacy of full, conscious and active participation must be the dominant influence in translating the Sacramentary and Lectionary. Therefore, it is not sufficient that translated texts reflect “as literally as possible” the original. As foundational and necessary as it is to have a precise and faithful translation, much more is still required. Liturgical language must be easily understood, proclaimable and dignified. Liturgy is the prayer of the people. Translations destined for their prayer must resonate with the people, be owned by the people and be expressed in their living language. This necessitates that the vocabulary, word order, and

linguistic style of the mainstream of the people prevail. Simply using dictionary equivalence of Latin and Greek words and preserving as close as possible the original word order is not communication for people who pray in a living language.²⁴

People need the transcendent dimension of liturgy, but employing archaic speech and ecclesiastical words may actually distance people from the transcendent God, rendering their worship more and more remote. We need to imitate the early Christians who did not have a sacred language but did have a transcendent understanding of God and manifested it in their liturgy.

To produce full, conscious and active participation, a translated text must convey the cultural context of the assembly. If liturgical language is divorced from the reality of people's culture, communication is impossible. Liturgical prayer never happens in a vacuum. There is always a cultural impact.

In translating liturgical texts, the Church of today needs to learn a lesson from the Church of a former time. In 1951 the United States Catholic Bishops

²⁴ Fidelity to the original does not mean producing an English text that reads or sounds like the Latin or Greek. If the translated text clings too tightly to the original words and word order, the result will be artificial and foreign. Intelligibility and easy understanding will be compromised.

commissioned the translation of the Latin ritual book of the Church (collectio rituum). The bishops wanted this English edition of the ritual to be an instrument for catechizing the people in the liturgical truths of their faith. The bishops rejected the first draft since it relied too heavily on a British translation and sounded too British. The bishops decided they needed a text that would be more reflective of the English language in the United States. They appointed Father Michael Mathis, a liturgical scholar at Notre Dame University, to head a new translating committee.

The committee finished its work in 1953 and presented the following rationale for its translation:

A good translator must, while preserving the sense of the truths which he is translating, adapt his style to the genius of the language in which he is expressing himself...We have tried to make sure that it [our translation] would not be slavishly exact or loosely free; that it would not sound either archaic or foreign, but American; that it would not be difficult to

read aloud...that it would not be lacking in the simple
dignity characteristic of the prayer of the Church.²⁵

In 1953 the American bishops approved unanimously this ritual book translated according to these principles. This was long before the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which voiced the same openness and balance for liturgical translations. Will the wisdom of the American bishops in 1953 influence present-day bishops in their handling proposed liturgical translations? Will the primacy of full, conscious and active participation prevail in the translated public prayer of the Church?

We pray, we plead, we press, we prod. Thank you.

²⁵ **Michael Mathis: American Liturgical Pioneer**, Robert J. Kennedy, The Pastoral Press, Washington, DC, 1987, p. 19.