



NewsLetter

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Volume LIII

December 2017

Implications of *Magnum Principium* for Liturgical Translations

Following the promulgation of Pope Francis' *motu proprio*, *Magnum principium*, Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, USCCB President, asked the Committees on Divine Worship and on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance to study the new legislation and to provide observations to the Conference on its implications for future liturgical books. The Chairmen of the two committees, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Atlanta and Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, gave a joint response in a letter dated November 3, 2017.

The Archbishops indicated that their study took into account a letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (see below) and an October 15, 2017 letter of the Holy Father to Robert Cardinal Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation. The Chairmen then shared their understanding of the impact of the *motu proprio* with the following seven observations:

1. The Holy See has indicated (in the attached letter) that the *motu proprio* is not retroactive and that approved translations remain in force.
2. With the addition of “*fideliter*” to canon 838, §3, *Magnum Principium* makes it clear that new liturgical translations must be “faithful” to the Latin text. The new legislation clearly changes aspects of the Instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* that concern the approval process for liturgical texts. However, the principles of translation outlined in the Instruction remain in force, although the responsibility to determine what is appropriate and possible in the local vernacular falls more clearly on the local episcopal conference.
3. The new canon 838 makes a distinction between *confirmatio* and *recognitio* for liturgical texts. These terms are not synonymous, and by this distinction the Holy Father wishes to make the approval process easier and more fruitful.

The *confirmatio* applies to the translation itself. It is an act whereby the Holy See ratifies the approval the episcopal conference has given to a liturgical translation, confirming the bishops' determination that the translation has been executed fully and faithfully. While it is not a mere formality, neither is it the word-for-word review that had previously been an element of the *recognitio* process.

The *recognitio* applies to adaptations to the ritual not foreseen by the *editio typica*. This kind of approval process remains as it has been in recent years, with the Holy See having an active role in the review and evaluation of

proposed adaptations. The *recognitio* is meant to protect and ensure both conformity to the law and the communion of the Church.

4. Regarding new translations of liturgical books: overall, the process that is currently observed within the USCCB for the preparation of new translations of liturgical books will not require substantial changes. The approval process for new translations will still require a two-thirds majority vote of the Latin rite bishops. When the Conference submits a new translation of a liturgical text to the Holy See, however, it will henceforth request the *confirmatio* rather than the *recognitio*.
5. Regarding adaptations to the *editio typica*: if the Conference wishes to introduce adaptations to the liturgical books it will be necessary to request and receive the Holy See's *recognitio*. In these cases, the approval process will be similar to what has been observed in recent years, with the Holy See continuing to exercise an active role in reviewing and evaluating the proposed adaptations.
6. Regarding the Conference's relationship with ICEL: we do not foresee any significant changes in this regard. It is our understanding that the Holy See has in a general way indicated to the Conference that it prefers unified English translations worldwide, insofar as this is reasonably possible. Therefore, ICEL will continue to prepare base translations – reviewed by its member bishops and experts – which will subsequently be submitted to all the members of the USCCB for observations, suggestions, and edits.
7. Regarding the English translation of the *Missale Romanum* currently in use: while the Conference has the right to propose revisions to the translation of the Missal, the Conference would need to decide whether the project would be necessary or opportune. This decision could be made within the framework of the currently approved strategic plan. If the Conference were to vote to proceed with a revision, including an agreement as to the scope and budget for such a project, this would then require either a change to the current strategic plan or its inclusion in a future strategic plan.

The letter referred to in the first observation was from Rev. Corrado Maggioni, S.M.M., Undersecretary of the Congregation, and was addressed to the Presidents of all the Conferences of Bishops. Dated September 26, 2017, the letter (Prot. n. 431/17) included the following commentary on the *motu proprio* (unofficial English translation by the Secretariat of Divine Worship):

The new guidelines, concerning the translation and the adaptation of liturgical books in the modern languages, concern both this Dicastery and the Conferences of Bishops. As such, we all must, with respect and acknowledgement, accept the thrust of this Pontifical document, of the motivations and the principles raised in it, in a particular way, the intention that brought about the modification of this canon, namely to “make the collaboration between the Holy See and Bishops Conferences easier and more fruitful.” The Pope, in fact, wishes “a constant collaboration full of mutual respect, vigilance, and creativity.”

The *motu proprio* does not have retroactive force. The important outcomes, come to maturity in recent years, in obedience to the discipline even to now in force, retain their value. For the future, the guidelines concerning liturgical translations are to be interpreted in the light of what has been indicated by the Holy Father.

In recalling the genuine responsibility of Bishops' Conferences, the new norms do not fail to underscore the grave task of fidelity in translating texts for liturgical prayer that belongs to the Bishops, who must guarantee the unity of the Church that celebrates the Mystery of Christ. Liturgical adaptations require discernment and the *sensus Ecclesiae*, with the awareness that no one is master of the holy mysteries that we celebrate; rather, we are all servants, obedient to the mandate received from the Lord Jesus.

The collaboration between the Holy See and the Conferences of Bishops must be strengthened, knowing that this Dicastery intends to fulfill its humble and demanding service for the good of the Church and to the glory of God.

The committees' response emphasized their sense that the *motu proprio* does not require that already-approved translations, such as the current *Roman Missal*, be re-examined. They recognized that the bishops would have the right to do so, but that it would be a prudential question as to its necessity, requiring a discernment of whether it would be helpful to change liturgical books so soon after their promulgation and whether it would be worth the time and expense that such a project would certainly require. The committees also emphasized the important distinction between translation work and adaptation (or changes) with respect to the Latin editions of the liturgical books. While the bishops now enjoy greater authority in judging the quality of vernacular translations, they will continue to require the Holy See's *recognitio* if they wish to make adaptations to the books. Finally, the committees indicated their understanding that the translation principles outlined in *Liturgiam authenticam* continue to provide the general guidelines for future work, but with the bishops now having a greater voice in the interpretation of what is "appropriate and possible in the local vernacular."

Theology in the *Praenotanda*: Prayer

Building upon the ancient axiom that there is a reciprocal relationship between prayer and belief (lex orandi, lex credendi) "Theology in the Praenotanda" has been a series of articles exploring that relationship as it is reflected in the Introductions of the liturgical rites of the Church. Each article has highlighted some of the theological themes that are integral to the celebrations of the rites and has provided examples of the way in which the relationship between belief and worship is seen in the text of the rites. To conclude the series, the praenotanda of the Liturgy of the Hours is considered. "The faithful who celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours are united to Christ our high priest, by the prayer of the Psalms, meditation on the Word of God, and canticles and blessings, in order to be joined with his unceasing and universal prayer that gives glory to the Father and implores the gift of the Holy Spirit on the whole world" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1196).

General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (GILH)

In his public ministry, Christ "has left us the lesson of his own prayer... The work of each day was closely bound up with his prayer, indeed flowed out from it: he would retire into the desert or into the hills to pray, rise very early or spend the night up to the fourth watch in prayer to God" (GILH, no. 4). Jesus's ministry of healing, teaching, and proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom was sustained by his prayer life, which he practiced at all times and in all circumstances. "Jesus commanded us to do as he did... He taught us that prayer is necessary, that it should be humble, watchful, persevering, confident in the Father's goodness, single-minded, and in conformity with God's nature" (no. 5). The early Christian communities lived out Christ's example of a life of prayer and began to shape their lives around common prayer at set times during the day (no. 1). These times of "prayer in common gradually took on the form of a set cycle of hours. This liturgy of the hours or divine office, enriched by readings, is principally a prayer of praise and petition. Indeed, it is the prayer of the Church with Christ and to Christ" (no. 2).

Today, the Liturgy of the Hours continues the prayer of Christ, having as its purpose "to sanctify the day and the whole range of human activity" (no. 11). These theological themes, the sanctification of time and of humanity, are foundational to the general understanding of prayer. In its most basic sense, prayer is *the* form of communication between God and humanity. Through prayer, "[o]ur sanctification is accomplished and worship is offered to God in the liturgy of the hours in such a way that an exchange or dialogue is set up between God and us" (no. 14). The Liturgy of the Hours provides concrete moments throughout the day to enter into Christ's praise and petition to the Father in the Spirit, united with his Body, the whole Church at prayer. Indeed, "constant and persevering prayer... belong to the very essence of the Church itself, which is a community and which in prayer must express its nature as a community" (no. 9). When the people of God gather to pray the Liturgy of the Hours "in unity of heart and voice, they show forth the Church in its celebration of the mystery of Christ" (no. 22). The GILH reminds the laity in particular "that through public worship and prayer they reach all humanity and can contribute significantly to the salvation of the whole world" (no. 27). The prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours encompasses the needs of the entire faith community.

The structure of the Liturgy of the Hours expresses these theological themes of life in Christ and the sanctification of time and humanity. It aims to foster the prayer life of the Christian faithful and the whole Church as it draws them closer to God. After the Second Vatican Council, “its structure [was] revised in such a way as to make each hour once more correspond as nearly as possible to the natural time and to take account of the circumstances of life today” (no. 11). In doing so, the two major hours of Lauds (Morning Prayer) and Vespers (Evening Prayer) act as hinge points for the day since they begin and end the day’s activities (see no. 37). Morning Prayer “recalls the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the true light enlightening all people (see John 1:9)” (no. 38), and “Evening Prayer is celebrated in order that we may give thanks for what has been given us, or what we have done well, during the day” (no. 39). Psalms and prayers are chosen for these hours that reflect these themes (see no. 126). This sanctification of time and of human activity is also demonstrated in the additional hours that are prayed throughout the day. The daytime hours of midmorning, midday, and midafternoon, as well as Night Prayer all offer short moments of prayer to be said during one’s work over the course of the day (see no. 74). Thus the Church offers the opportunity for prayers every few hours, so that all parts of the day and one’s life may be brought before God.

The psalms that are used in the Liturgy of the Hours are part of a long history of prayer, in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Jesus’ use of the psalms in his own public and private prayer testify to their power. “The origin of these verses gives them great power to raise the mind to God, to inspire devotion, to evoke gratitude in times of favor, and to bring consolation and courage in times of trial” (no. 100). While these emotions are not experienced at every moment, an awareness of them and their context within the Church and in Christ enables the Liturgy of the Hours to be relevant to all cultures and respond to the needs of humanity. In the Liturgy of the Hours “[t]he psalms are distributed over a four-week cycle in such a way that very few psalms are omitted, while some, traditionally more important, occur more frequently than others; Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer as well as Night Prayer have been assigned psalms appropriate to these hours” (no. 126). All “who pray the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours do so not so much in their own name as in the name of the entire Body of Christ. [...] The Divine Office, however, is not private; the cycle of psalms is public, in the name of the Church, even for those who may be reciting an hour alone” (no. 108). Finally, praying the psalms is an encounter with God, for “[t]he one who inspired the psalmist will also be present to those who in faith and love are ready to receive his grace” (no. 104).

In addition to praying the psalms, “[t]he reading of Sacred Scripture, which, following an ancient tradition, takes place publicly in the liturgy, is to have special importance for all Christians, not only in the celebration of the Eucharist but also in the Divine Office” (no. 140). The readings are chosen so that “in the course of the year the Bride of Christ may unfold the mystery of Christ ‘from his incarnation and birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the Lord’s return’” (no. 140, citing *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 102). The reading of Scripture is intimately bound up with prayer, since “in the liturgical celebration [it] is always accompanied by prayer in order that the reading may have greater effect and that, in turn, prayer – especially the praying of the psalms – may gain fuller understanding and become more fervent and devout because of the reading” (no. 140). Finally, praying the words of the Incarnate Word nourishes our growth in holiness. “Those taking part in the Liturgy of the Hours have access to holiness of the richest kind through the life-giving word of God, which in this liturgy receives great emphasis. Thus its readings are drawn from Sacred Scripture, God’s words in the psalms are sung in his presence, and the intercessions, prayers, and hymns are inspired by Scripture and steeped in its spirit” (no. 14).

“The excellence of Christian prayer lies in its sharing in the reverent love of the only-begotten Son for the Father and in the prayer that the Son put into words in his earthly life and that still continues without ceasing in the name of the whole human race and for its salvation, throughout the universal Church and in all its members” (no. 7). Participating in the prayer and love of Christ is one expression of “a special and very close bond between Christ and those whom he makes members of his Body, the Church, through the sacrament of rebirth” (no. 7). It is offered in and through the Holy Spirit, for “[t]here can be therefore no Christian prayer without the action of the Holy Spirit, who unites the whole Church and leads it through the Son to the Father” (no. 8). Prayer is not simply a rule to be followed; it is a way of life in Christ (see nos. 7 and 9), joining their voices to his “who lives for ever, making intercession for us” (no. 4).