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On May 7th the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship made public the Fifth Instruction “For the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council”—*Liturgiam Authenticam*. This document deals with the principles and procedures for vernacular translations of the Latin text of the Roman rite. According to an article by Paul Likoudis in the May 17th *Wanderer* this is “the most important liturgical document issued by the Holy See since Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” because it “reverses the 40-year project of the modernist liturgists in Western Europe and North America to de-Romanize the liturgy of the Western Church.”

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One might also say that *Liturgiam Authenticam* is an attempt to overturn the almost 40-year project of neo-modernists to de-sacralize the liturgy. One of the key problems in theology before the Council was the tendency of some theologians to blur the distinction between grace and nature. Ultimately this led to the position that all of nature is seen as already “graced” and the distinction between the sacred and the secular collapsed. What follows from this is that the purpose of worship—if there is to be such a thing—is to celebrate this already “holy creation,” perhaps even to celebrate “contemporary social movements” (i.e. political liberation, feminism) which are seen as divine “irruptions” in creation.

The correct view is that while all of creation is good, it is not holy—only God is holy. However, things involved in the worship of God can acquire that charism of holiness by association. This is the concept of the “sacramental;” thus there can be such a thing as *sacred* music, *sacred* vestments, and a truly *sacral* language. *Liturgiam Authenticam* seems to have this in mind when it says in article 47 that “liturgical prayer not only is formed by the genius of a culture but itself contributes to the development of that culture. . . . Liturgical translation that takes due account of the authority and integral content of the original texts will facilitate the development of a sacral vernacular, characterized by a vocabulary, syntax and grammar that are proper to divine worship, even though it is not to be excluded that it may exercise an influence on everyday speech, as has occurred in the languages of peoples evangelized long ago.”

The point is that, while it is a bit of a two-way street, for the most part grace flows out from di-

vine worship (the true locus of the holy) and transforms society, not vice-versa. This brings us to the thorny question of “inculturation.”

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Let us see what the instruction says about inculturation: “Indeed, it may be affirmed that the Roman Rite is itself a precious example and an instrument of true inculturation. For the Roman Rite is marked by a signal capacity for assimilating into itself spoken and sung texts, gestures and rites derived from the customs and the genius of diverse nations and particular Churches This characteristic is particularly evident in its orations, which exhibit a capacity to transcend the limits of their original situation so as to become the prayers of Christians in any time or place. [Therefore the] . . . work of inculturation, of which the translation into vernacular languages is a part, is not to be considered an avenue for the creation of new varieties or families of rites” (article 5) Later on the instruction says that “the translation of the liturgical texts of the Roman liturgy is not so much a work of creative innovation as it is of rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language. . . . [The translation must be done] integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses. Any adaptation to the characteristics or the nature of the various vernacular languages is to be sober and discreet.” (article 20)

Contrast this with the view of Msgr. Frederick McManus, prominent among the post-Conciliar *liturgisti* and a founding member of ICEL, expressed in an article published in May 1964(!): “In a broad sense, the proper evolution of the liturgy *demand*s far more than the literal or even free translation of liturgical texts from the Latin language into the vernaculars. The future adaptation of the Roman or other rites *demand*s that new expressions and forms of prayer be composed and created. The immediate question, however, is the pastoral need of the faithful; and this is best satisfied by the translation, although not in any slavishly literal sense, of the existing texts of the Roman rite.” (emphasis added) [from “The Constitution on Liturgy Commentary, Part One.” *Worship*, Vol. 38, No. 6. pp. 356-357)

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I recommend reading this 1964 commentary by Msgr. McManus, because in it is revealed—less than a year after the Liturgy Constitution

was passed—the quirky, ideological way in which the liturgy establishment intended to interpret article 36 of the constitution. After the gratuitous slam on Latin, notice what Msgr. McManus says next: “Although it is not the original language of the Roman rite by any means, the Latin language is here acknowledged to have the first or principal place, and as such it is to be retained. *It may be that in some areas the retention will simply mean employing the Latin texts as the basis for translating into the vernacular, at least in the case of those parts of the Roman rite which are themselves original, such as the collects.*” [emphasis added (p. 351)] Did you get that? In “some areas” (he means the United States, not Kenya) the “retention of Latin” will not mean the retention of Latin, and this total vernacularization will only in some cases use the original Latin as “the basis for translations.” What is particularly funny about the last sentence is that the Calvinist-leaning Archbishop Cranmer showed far more respect and sensitivity to the original Latin collects in the English translations he did for the 16th-century Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* than ICEL ended up showing in the 1970 Roman Catholic *Sacramentary*.

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It is also very interesting to note that Fr. McManus, a canon lawyer, is quite anxious in this commentary to establish that the “confirmation” of the Holy See required in article 36 only touches on the decrees (*acta*) [i.e. the legal decision of whether and to what extent to translate] and not the actual translation. To quote Fr. McManus, this confirmation “is termed ‘recognition’ by the canonists. It consists in a simple inspection of the acts by the Apostolic See and their correction if this is necessary, that is, if they should in any way exceed the authority of the body of bishops or council.” (p. 355) Later on he states that “ ‘confirmation’ means that the law enacted by the inferior legislative authority (i.e.

the national conference of bishops) is subsequently acknowledged and completed by the higher authority (i.e. Rome)—the subsequent confirmation given by the higher authority confers an additional juridic or moral force, but it does not change the character of the enactment.” (p. 356)

I am not a canonist. Msgr. McManus’ interpretation may be correct. Ultimately, however, it does not matter. Since “[r]egulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the . . . the Apostolic See” (Liturgy Constitution, article 22), any powers granted to lesser authorities in this matter—even in an Ecumenical Council—are matters of prudence and can be modified or even withdrawn by this same authority “in light of the maturing of experience.” (*Liturgiam Authenticam*, Article 7)

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Could this be the new liturgical movement’s Battle of the Coral Sea? That is, the first time that a seemingly unstoppable foe was stopped and the tide began to turn. Even if this is the case, it is important to remember that after the Battle of the Coral Sea it took considerable “blood, sweat and tears”—and two atomic bombs—before the Japanese were finally defeated. Sorry to be so grim, but I do sometimes think that our neo-modernist *liturgisti* have the determination of those Japanese soldiers who would hold out for 20 or more years in caves after the end of WWII rather than surrender.

We need to have the same determination.

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