

In his essay “Why Don’t We Say, ‘Wait?’” (Dec. 14), Father Michael Ryan describes his involvement in the liturgical renewal following the Second Vatican Council. Let me begin my response to his article by doing the same.

I was a freshman in high school when the “vernacularization” of the liturgy began and a junior in college seminary when the process reached its climax. Having majored in classical languages, I naturally was quite interested in the process and flattered when I was invited by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) to participate in the translation effort. Frankly, I was also surprised that someone of my thin experience had been asked to take part in a project that would influence the spiritual lives of millions of Catholics for decades to come.

When I first reviewed the translation guidelines sent by ICEL, I was disappointed. Ideology, it seemed, had taken precedence over accuracy. *Anima* was not to be rendered as “soul,” I was informed, because doing so would set up an unnecessary dichotomy between body and soul. No feminine pronouns were to be used for the church, and common words were favored over precise theological or liturgical vocabulary. The goal was to capture the general meaning of the text, rather than a faithful rendering of a rich and historically layered Latin prose. I tried to work within these parameters, but I found it difficult to do and still remain true to the original text. My translations were evidently unsatisfactory because, upon submitting them, I was politely but firmly uninvited from serving on the commission.

When the English *Missale Romanum* appeared in 1970, it was clear we had been handed a paraphrase instead of a translation. As a young priest required to use these texts, I quickly determined that something needed to be done to return to the people of God what Father Ryan dubs “their baptismal birthright”—that is, an English liturgy that seeks to convey all the depth, truth and beauty of the original Latin. By 1992, I had assembled a team of scholars who produced an alternative translation of the Ordinary of the Mass and presented that effort to the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy in Washington, D. C., and the Congregation for Divine Worship in Rome. Hostility was the response from Washington—copies of our draft were gathered and destroyed at the bishops’ meeting—while Rome expressed a guarded interest in our project.

Ultimately, the Holy See came to the realization that many of the vernacular translations of the liturgy were problematic. (English was not the only example, just one of the more egregious.) In 2001 the Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated *Liturgiam Authenticam* setting forth a coherent philosophy of translation. The document called for revised translations in keeping with these norms and the establishment of an oversight committee. *Vox Clara* to ensure the fidelity of future translations.

**H**OW HAS THIS never been done before? Rehearsal videos—*each individual voice!*—for the best Roman Catholic hymns ... completely free of charge! Search the **Brébeuf Portal**: <https://www.ccwatershed.org/brebeuf/list/> for items like “Easter” or “Advent” or “Eucharist.”