

## Five

# A Cold Wind from Rome

### **Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments**

**I**T WAS THAT FINAL STAGE IN THE LONG PROCESS that caused all the bother. After the many years of work from 1982, work that involved not only the international commission but also the English-speaking conferences of bishops, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments refused to give the revised translation its confirmation.

Why did this sad situation occur?

Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), bishops' conferences had been submitting translated texts to the Holy See for its confirmation. Texts in English, French, German and Spanish were particularly important because they were going to be used, in each case, by a number of countries. English texts, however, that is, those which were ICEL translations, had a special importance. This was because many bishops' conferences, mainly in the developing countries of Africa and Asia, were understood to use the English texts as the basis of their translations into many local, non-European, languages.

### **Relations, friendly and otherwise**

During the years since the Council, the Congregation for Divine Worship had generally maintained friendly and constructive relations with ICEL. There were some exceptions to this, and the reason for variations in the quality of relations, easy or difficult, seemed to depend on the cardinal who happened to be the prefect (i.e., head) of the congregation at any given time. The different attitudes of the

English-speakers who were officials in the congregation and who changed from time to time could also be very influential. Relations had been difficult in the 1980s, during the years when Cardinal James R. Knox, an Australian, was prefect. After him, and under subsequent prefects, cordial relations were resumed – until 1996. It was then that Cardinal Jorge Arturo Medina Estévez, who had been archbishop of Valparaíso in Chile, was called to the Roman Curia by Pope John Paul II and put in charge of the Congregation for Divine Worship.

It soon became clear that things were going to change. Until then, it was common for ICEL to send a few officials to Rome from time to time for informal discussions with officials of the congregation. They would speak about ICEL's work at the time and of the progress of the work; they answered questions from the congregation's representatives, heard their comments and, in a word, worked collaboratively for the good of English-speaking Catholics throughout the world.

From the start of his reign Cardinal Medina let it be known that relations with ICEL, if any, would be formal and cold. There were no further collaborative meetings, no advice or comments were forthcoming in the course of our work and, in general, we felt that we were under suspicion.

ICEL's two principal officials are, first, the chairman of its Episcopal Board and, second, the executive secretary (nowadays called 'executive director'). Since 1980 the executive secretary had been Dr John R. Page, an American layman, a wise, learned, hard-working and totally conscientious servant of the Church. The chairman of the Episcopal Board was elected for a term of two years, renewable, by his colleagues on the board. Over the years there had been some illustrious figures holding the position: Cardinal Gordon Joseph Gray, archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh; Archbishop Denis E. Hurley of Durban; Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati. The last-named left office in 1997 and I was elected to succeed him – a great honour and, as it turned out, something of a poisoned chalice (perhaps an appropriate metaphor for a liturgy appointment).

My term as chairman of ICEL saw the finishing touches put to

our definitive new translation of the revised Roman Missal and its despatch to the conferences so that, as long as each had taken its formal canonical vote and the necessary majority had been obtained, the conference could then seek Rome's confirmation. In addition, we continued with work on a number of other liturgical books – some revised translations, some translations of new books issued by Rome. But during all my time in office, we were aware of the increasing hostility of the Congregation for Divine Worship. There were various demands for changes to which we attempted to respond appropriately; but the threatening situation induced in us a growing fear for the very existence of the international commission.

For example, we had done a translation of the revised Latin edition of *The Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests and of Deacons*. When our translation, approved by English-speaking conferences of bishops, was sent to Rome for confirmation, the response (20 September 1997) came back in very scathing terms. The translation was deemed full of unacceptable elements: errors, liberties taken with the original Latin text, unlawful changes etc. Not only was the congregation's confirmation denied, but the peremptory and unfriendly tone of the response was unprecedented and ominous.

There was an important player in the developing situation whom I have not yet mentioned. When my predecessor as ICEL chairman (Archbishop Pilarczyk) left office, he also retired from ICEL. He was succeeded, as the United States member of the Episcopal Board, by Cardinal Francis E. George O.M.I., the newly appointed archbishop of Chicago. Although he became a member of the Episcopal Board in 1997, the first meeting which he was able to attend was in summer of 1998, a few months after he had been made a cardinal.

Cardinal George arrived at that meeting straight from Rome. His message to the other bishops, members of the board, was stark and dramatic: if ICEL did not change radically, it was finished. Rome, he said, was very dissatisfied with us and its patience was not inexhaustible; moreover, the United States bishops felt that the revised missal had already been too long in its preparation. They wanted texts

and, if ICEL could not oblige, they might leave the commission and provide their own translations.

Cardinal George's statement to the Episcopal Board produced very mixed, but strong, reactions – dismay, fear, anger. Apart from the dissatisfaction of Rome, the threat of United States withdrawal from ICEL was rightly seen, if it were to happen, as the end of the international commission. The United States' importance and influence in the commission (because of the size of the Church there) were far greater than those of any other bishops' conference. The rest of us could not possibly operate as an international commission without the United States, especially if the latter were operating as an alternative commission.

The Episcopal Board took a very serious view of the situation. We felt vulnerable, maligned and unjustly treated but, in the dire circumstances, we knew that we would have to do something. However, to know what we had to do was not easy to decide. Just how radical were the demands being made of us came in a letter to me from Cardinal Medina and dated 26 October 1999.

### **The letter of 26 October 1999**

I had written to the cardinal earlier in the year, seeking (in our quandary) a meeting between some officials of the Congregation for Divine Worship and a few ICEL members. Previous meetings of this kind, when other cardinals had been in charge of the congregation, had proved very useful in a number of ways.

Cardinal Medina replied (26 October 1999), informing me that while, as a bishop, I would always be most welcome if I happened to be in Rome, the "certain steps" which his letter required to be taken by ICEL would render the larger meeting that I had proposed unnecessary at that time; and, in fact, he added, such meetings between the congregation and the commission had no formal basis and were of doubtful feasibility. His message, couched in diplomatically courteous language, clearly rebuffed my request.

The cardinal's letter went on to speak of 'the gravity of the pres-

ent situation of the Mixed Commission' (the congregation seemed reluctant to use the words 'International Commission on English in the Liturgy' or even 'ICEL') and adduced a number of examples to illustrate his assertion.

ICEL's executive secretary, Dr John R. Page, was criticised for having taken 'certain liberties' (unspecified) and the Advisory Committee of ICEL lacked 'satisfactory membership'. The latter criticism implied that the committee, as well as having assumed an autonomy to which it had no right, was drawn from those who followed a liberal and progressive view of liturgical renewal and was not properly representative of other strands of thought in the Church.

The letter then accused the commission of having an attitude of arrogant intransigence. The congregation had had its communications to ICEL discussed, criticised, 'countered with unfounded charges of personal grudges and hostility to the Commission'. Moreover, 'not a few Bishops have expressed concerns, notably about the quality of the translations produced by the Mixed Commission, but also about procedures which they felt limited their own ability to obtain corrections and improvements that they considered necessary for the accuracy of the texts'.

Further examples were given in the letter to illustrate the congregation's conclusion that 'the Mixed Commission in its present form is not in a position to render...an adequate level of service'.

Claiming that 'the constitution, the regulation and the oversight of an international commission for liturgical translation are rightfully the competence of the Holy See to a degree which is not always sufficiently reflected in the Statutes which govern such bodies', Cardinal Medina declared that 'a thoroughgoing reform and revitalization of the Mixed Commission is needed'.

"For these reasons, this Congregation...hereby directs the Statutes of the 'International Commission for (sic) English in the Liturgy' be renewed thoroughly and without delay'. We were told to carry out this revision within six months 'in active consultation with this Dicastery [Congregation] and incorporating within the Constitution of the

renewed Commission the considerations attached to this letter’.

These ‘considerations’, seven in number, were peremptory and draconian. They included the following instructions:

- ICEL was forbidden to provide any more original texts and was ordered to cease having contacts ‘with bodies pertaining to non-Catholic ecclesial communities’;
- ‘Careful reconfiguration’ of the office of executive secretary was to take place;
- ICEL employees were to be on fixed term contracts, with any extensions being reserved to the Congregation for Divine Worship;
- Everyone working for ICEL (except Episcopal Board members) had to receive clearance from the congregation;
- The redrafting of ICEL’s statutes was to be done directly and exclusively by the bishops of ICEL.

One of Cardinal Medina’s principal demands, as we have seen, was that ICEL’s constitution be radically altered. This constitution had been formulated in ICEL’s early years as a codification of what seemed necessary and right for the successful fulfilment of the tasks which the conferences of bishops had given to the commission. The constitution had worked well, it had been accepted by the conferences which ICEL served and, until the arrival of Cardinal Medina as Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, had never been criticised by Rome.

Nonetheless, we had to do something or, quite probably, perish.

The Episcopal Board held an emergency meeting in London in January 2000. It was a dismal affair in cold, dismal weather. Cardinal George introduced a document which he had prepared as a draft of a new constitution. There was reluctant acquiescence that it provided a start to our deliberations. Following the London meeting, a small group of Episcopal Board members continued the work, in contact with each other by e-mail, fax and telephone. The full Episcopal Board met again in July 2000 in California and there we pursued our

difficult and, at times, unpleasant task. We managed to come to an agreement on a revised version of ICEL’s constitution. This was sent to our member conferences and, most crucial of all, to the congregation in Rome, hoping that Cardinal Medina and his officials would be satisfied with our efforts.

Although the Episcopal Board complied with the congregation’s demand for a thorough revision of ICEL’s ‘Statutes’ (the congregation had told us to stop using the word ‘Constitution’), we felt aggrieved and that we were being treated harshly, even unjustly. The severity of the criticisms of John Page, our executive secretary, caused great hurt, especially since the accusation that he had taken ‘certain liberties’ was unsubstantiated and, by us who worked with him, seen as false. The allegation that the congregation had been informed that ‘not a few Bishops’ were dissatisfied with ICEL and its work was strange. If ‘not a few Bishops’ were dissatisfied, this should have been said at meetings of their conferences and brought to our notice. But the conferences always gave ICEL their approval of its work and its productions. ICEL could not be expected to satisfy every bishop in every bishops’ conference – that would have been an impossibility.

Our work in providing some ‘original texts’ (i.e., prayers not translated from the Latin but composed especially for the missal in English) had been included in ICEL’s remit at its inception, as we have seen, and such texts were in the 1974 translation of the missal. Similar original prayers, usually alternative Opening Prayers for Sundays and feasts or some extra votive Masses, are to be found in missals in other languages also, and with the congregation’s *recognitio*.

Moreover, our contacts with non-Catholic liturgical agencies had resulted in a number of agreed common texts for prayers etc. used by other Christians as well as Catholics; this ecumenical initiative was appreciated by non-Catholics and its prohibition by the Congregation for Divine Worship (contrary to the founding conferences’ instructions) was a great disappointment to many non-Catholics and, in fact, also to the Holy See’s Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

ICEL was certainly not above criticism or incapable of improvement. We would have welcomed a broader representation of liturgy scholars as members of the very important Advisory Committee of the commission. Inevitably also, the scholarship, expertise and experience which ICEL could command (and the work committed to the commission by the conferences) might easily give the impression that the commission was making the decisions or dictating to the bishops' conferences. The latter relied on ICEL to do the work and, on the whole, appreciated what they received from the commission. We saw ourselves as serving the conferences and English-speaking Catholics the world over and we felt very privileged to have been given that task.

ICEL sought and welcomed constructive criticism of its work, but the tone of Cardinal Medina's letters and the general attitude of hostility in the Congregation for Divine Worship from 1997 onwards made things very difficult. The commission sent the congregation copies of all the *Progress Reports* and of the missal segments as they were ready; yet, during all those years of work and expense, the congregation never once moved to warn us of their views about our translation which, in the end, they found so defective. The congregation, in fact, showed little, if any, appreciation of the work done. There was no affirmation of the skill, expertise and learning of ICEL members; just peremptory and threatening demands – do this, or else...

### Role of the Bishops' Conferences

One aspect of the dispute that should not be overlooked was the role of the bishops' conferences that ICEL serves.

Since the international commission had been established by the English-speaking conferences and not by the Holy See, we had understood that our 'superiors' were the conferences, which therefore had power to change the rules by which we operated as well as the personnel who worked for the commission.

Quite suddenly, the congregation declared that it was the authority to which ICEL was subject. Did this declaration not need to be

discussed by the conferences and between the congregation and the conferences? Did the conferences not wonder whether there was a kind of usurpation of authority taking place, a centralisation that was removing authority rightly held by bishops' conferences in accordance with the ecclesiology of Vatican II and the principle of subsidiarity? I shall return to this matter at the end of this section.

On a number of occasions ICEL arranged for the presidents of English-speaking bishops' conferences to have worldwide telephone link-ups to discuss the crisis all together. These involved the participants having to 'meet' at different, and often very inconvenient, hours of the day or the night. Even this, we felt, was not enough, especially in the new and serious circumstances that had arisen.

Consequently, responding to a plea from me for directions from the sponsoring conferences of ICEL, the U.S. conference convened a meeting of the presidents of the conferences in Washington in Easter week, April 2000, to discuss ICEL's situation. Subsequently and again at ICEL's request, the conference presidents went twice to Rome for meetings with the Congregation for Divine Worship and also with the Congregation for Bishops. Although prior to the meetings the presidents expressed their support for the international commission and their determination 'to do something', the meetings with the congregations produced no effective results. Surely there had occurred an unwarranted extension of the aphorism, '*Roma locuta est, causa finita est*'. By the way, the congregations stipulated that no one from ICEL should take part in, or even be present at, the meetings with the presidents of the conferences!

### Towards a crisis point

Cardinal Medina's letter of 26 October 1999 was the start of an intense correspondence between the congregation and ICEL. The congregation's letters were signed by the cardinal prefect or by his deputy, Archbishop Francesco Pio Tamburrino. They were addressed to me, as chairman of the Episcopal Board of ICEL. It was I who had to write on behalf of ICEL, although I consulted before doing so.

Only a month after the long letter of October 1999, there was another from the congregation directing me to send details of the steps that ICEL had taken to implement the demands of the earlier letter. I was also told to send to the congregation copies of the letters which I had written to the bishops' conferences on the subject.

Then in early December 1999 there was another letter from Cardinal Medina, telling me that my reply to his letter of 26 October was unsatisfactory. He said that there was to be no argument about the congregation's allegations concerning ICEL, that only bishops were to be involved in drawing up the new ICEL statutes, and that these latter must be ready by 26 April 2000 (i.e., six months after his October letter). His December letter went on to complain that ICEL had not yet sent to the congregation any clear idea of its plan for the new statutes and that, if we continued in this unsatisfactory way, the congregation would become more involved in our work.

Our correspondence continued on a regular basis and in similar icy terms. On 15 January 2000, for example, Archbishop Tamburrino wrote to me. The congregation's impatience and frustration are evident.

As Your Excellency knows, over a very considerable period of time the Congregation has made sincere, repeated and patient efforts to suggest, to counsel, to prompt and to urge improvements in the policies, procedures and attitudes of the variegated and complex reality that has become known under the acronym ICEL. The issue has never been theory or questions of personality, but quite simply the question of the quality, pastoral suitability and doctrinal reliability of the translations produced by the Mixed Commission.

The efforts of the Congregation have scarcely met with success. Appeals of a generic sort, detailed elucidations of problems, and pointers to faulty procedure have been of scant avail...

Even though they have attempted to build on seemingly hopeful recent developments, the initiatives and requests

of the Holy See continue to meet with responses which appear, in all honesty, to be negative and obstructive, notwithstanding clear and detailed communications from the Congregation in recent months which have indicated in a confidential, dispassionate, courteous and respectful manner that the time for half-measures is now passed and that concrete solutions cannot further be delayed...

The Episcopal Board had a meeting in London in early January 2000, as I have already explained. I kept the congregation informed of this and of what progress we were making in revising the statutes of the commission. I had also to reply to a stream of letters from the congregation demanding action, seeking detailed information, threatening severe measures unless... In illustration of this, among the frequent letters received, Cardinal Medina, writing (or, rather, signing) on 19 March 2000, informed me that:

The Congregation has indicated a workable plan for remedying the problems which have arisen, but if it is not put into action expeditiously, other innovative means will have to be found to the same end. These might include the withdrawal of any degree of approbation, presumed or explicit, of the present Mixed Commission by the Congregation. This is a step which the Congregation for some time has been reluctant to take but the present difficulties regrettably bring such definitive actions to mind...

After the meeting of the Episcopal Board in San José, California, at the end of July 2000 at which we produced proposed new statutes, I wrote to Cardinal Medina and enclosed a copy of our proposals for his consideration. His reply notes some welcome progress by ICEL in meeting the congregation's demands, but there continued to be criticism, including a complaint about the long delay in responding to the congregation's instructions. It was as if the cardinal had little understanding that the Episcopal Board members were all bishops with diocesan duties and commitments and that we lived in Europe, Asia,

Africa, America and Australasia. By the way, my letter to him was sent on 30 July (the day on which our California meeting ended); the cardinal's reply, complaining of our lack of urgency, was dated 6 October.

In the final months of 2000 there were suggestions that the congregation was willing to allow, as an interim measure, a two-years trial of the new statutes of ICEL as formulated in California in July. This was confirmed to me in a letter from Cardinal Medina (6 December 2000), provided there was:

a thorough and genuine renewal of the personnel to be involved in the preparation and administration of any translation projects [of the commission]...together with the exclusion from the same projects of those individuals heretofore involved in similar projects.

This last and new demand seemed to us to be so extreme and astonishing as to be almost outrageous. In ICEL we felt that it was time to engage the bishops' conferences in a much more involved way. ICEL was their commission. We existed to serve them and their people. They needed to know what was going on. So I wrote to the conference presidents on 8 January 2001 to tell them of the cardinal's latest demand and send them a copy of his letter. I listed the problems it caused:

- it was impossible to work without some continuity of translators and secretariat;
- the order was against natural justice, especially towards ICEL's employed staff;
- it showed lack of trust and respect towards the Episcopal Board and the conferences which had appointed the translators and the secretariat staff.

### Questioning the Basics

As already indicated, there was also an important canonical question (which, in retrospect, I think we should have raised earlier in our exchanges with Rome). Did the congregation indeed have the right

to issue instructions and demands to ICEL as it had been doing since Cardinal Medina became prefect? Let me explain.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments claimed that ICEL was subject to it in virtue of canon law (canons 113-118) and certain post-Vatican II papal decrees (especially the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, article 65). These have relevance for 'mixed commissions' (i.e., commissions which serve more than one bishops' conference) and which formally have been constituted with a juridical personality in law.

To oppose the congregation's claim, we contended that ICEL, though a mixed commission, had never been given a juridical personality and that it was never more than an agency (without juridical personality), set up to serve English-speaking conferences. The presidents of the bishops' conferences, at their meeting in Washington in April 2000, had confirmed this. Therefore, we contended that ICEL was created by, and was subject to, the bishops' conferences which had established it in 1963. Furthermore, there is no legal or other requirement that every mixed commission must have juridical personality. There is provision for such bodies without juridical personality in canon law (canon 459) and acknowledged in various papal documents and in the practice of bishops' conferences with no objection from the Holy See (until the arrival on the scene of Cardinal Medina).

If this argument regarding ICEL's status had been accepted by the congregation, it would have meant that the latter's demand to vet and approve every person (except bishops) who worked for ICEL was illegal. Likewise, the order for ICEL to cease composing original prayers for liturgical use and to break off its ecumenical contacts would have been invalid. It would also have followed that ICEL's compliance with the instructions of the congregation was done not out of required obedience but only to foster good relations and close collaboration with the congregation.

There was yet another contentious matter. It concerns the right claimed by the Congregation for Divine Worship that all transla-

tions approved by bishops' conferences must be submitted to the congregation for its *recognitio*. The claim is based on article 36 of the Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. However, although in article 36 there is an obligation on conferences to seek Holy See approval regarding *which texts* should be translated (art.36.3), there is no such obligation to have Holy See approval of the *translations made* (art.36.4) [see page 37, above.]. In fact, the Council bishops deliberately resisted an attempt to have such a requirement enacted.

How, then, did the present obligation arise to submit the translations themselves to the judgment of the Holy See? Answer: it arises from a *Motu Proprio, Sacram Liturgiam*, issued six weeks after the promulgation of the Constitution on the Liturgy. In paragraph 9 of the *Motu Proprio* are the following words:-

Therefore it seems advisable to make it clear that vernacular versions [of the Breviary] must be drawn up and approved by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority as provided in article 36.3 and 4 [of the Constitution on the Liturgy] and that, as provided in article 36.3, the acts of this authority require due approval, that is confirmation, of the Holy See. This is the course to be taken whenever any Latin liturgical text is translated into the vernacular by the authority already mentioned.

These words are a conflation (unconsciously or deliberately) of two different decisions in article 36 of the constitution with the result that the requirement of Holy See confirmation of a decision to put some texts into the vernacular is extended (allegedly on the authority of the Vatican II decree) to the translation itself!

Such considerations as these, in addition to the onslaught to which ICEL was being subjected by the Congregation for Divine Worship, were the background to my letter of 8 January 2001 addressed to the conference presidents. The cry for help brought a quick and heartening response from most of them. Six of the eleven replied

with letters of support and agreeing that 'something must be done about this'. Another two presidents gave similar support, but orally. I had no replies from three.

### *Liturgiam Authenticam*

Life in the International Commission on English in the Liturgy had been uncomfortable, to put it mildly, since Cardinal Medina was made head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1996. His frequent letters contained instructions to us and demands unprecedented, threatening and ominous.

But in May 2001 the Congregation produced a new weapon to restrain and subjugate ICEL. The new weapon proved to be a disciplinary exocet missile.

This needs some explanation.

Translation from one language to another is not simply a word-for-word operation. There has to be a certain flexibility, otherwise the translation will be amateurish and will sound very stilted. Languages differ in their constructions and in their style. The translation has to be intelligible and must sound natural and not awkward and foreign. Translations of liturgical texts have also to read well when proclaimed as prayer. The optimum lies somewhere in the middle between strictly literal and word-for-word on the one hand and mere paraphrase on the other.

As guidance for those who had been given the task of translating Latin texts into vernacular languages, the Holy See published (25 January 1969) a booklet entitled *Instruction on Translation of Liturgical Texts*. It was issued by the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. This body, the purpose of which is obvious from its name, was established by the Holy See shortly after the Second Vatican Council. It had a separate existence until, in May 1969, it and its tasks were subsumed into the work of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

The document came to be known as *Comme le prévoit* from its first

three words in French. It is short – ten pages, 43 paragraphs – and is written in a direct and helpful way, with much common sense. It identifies the problematic issues in liturgical translations and gives guidance that is moderate and wise. The Instruction was a valuable, indeed an essential, instrument for ICEL and was constantly used and greatly appreciated.

Here, by way of illustration, are some extracts.

When a common language is spoken in several different countries, international commissions should be appointed by the conferences of bishops who speak the same language to make one text for all. (no. 2)

A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words; the total content of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language. (no. 6)

The translator must always keep in mind that the ‘unit of meaning’ is not the individual word but the whole passage. He or she must therefore be careful that the translation is not so analytical that it exaggerates the importance of particular phrases while it obscures or weakens the meaning of the whole. Thus, in Latin, the piling up of *ratam, rationabilem, acceptabilem* may increase the sense of invocation. In other languages, a succession of adjectives may actually weaken the sense of the prayer. The same is true of *beatissima Virgo* or *beata et gloriosa* or the routine addition of *sanctus* or *beatus* to a saint’s name, or the too casual use of superlatives. Understatement in English is sometimes the more effective means of emphasis. (no. 12)

The prayers (Opening Prayer, Prayer over the Gifts, Prayer after Communion, and Prayer over the People) from the ancient Roman tradition are succinct and abstract. In translation they may need to be rendered somewhat more freely while conserving the original ideas. This can be done

by moderately amplifying them or, if necessary, paraphrasing expressions in order to concretise them for the celebration and the needs of today. In every case pompous and superfluous language should be avoided. (no. 34)

Texts translated from another language are clearly not sufficient for the celebration of a fully renewed liturgy. The creation of new texts will be necessary. But translation of texts transmitted through the tradition of the Church is the best school and discipline for the creation of new texts so ‘that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already in existence.’ (Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §23). (no. 43)

For some years before 2001 we had been advised that the Congregation for Divine Worship intended to publish a document to replace *Comme le prévoit* and update the issues involved. We were somewhat concerned in ICEL because we had, of course, been guided by *Comme le prévoit* in our revised translation of the Roman Missal. (We had been assured at the time by the then prefect of the Congregation that our work would be judged by the criteria of the earlier instruction which had been in force for the duration of the complex and costly project of the English-speaking conferences. Our translation had been completed before the successor of *Comme le prévoit* had yet appeared. In the event the assurance, which was only verbal and not in writing, was not honoured – and not even acknowledged).

The new document is dated 28 March 2001 and became effective on 25 April of that year. It is longer than its predecessor: 39 pages with a further nine pages of notes; and it has 133 paragraphs. It is more formal and legalistic throughout, from its title to its conclusion. It is headed:

**FIFTH INSTRUCTION  
“FOR THE RIGHT IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY  
OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL”**

*(Sacrosanctum Concilium, art. 36)*

*Liturgiam authenticam*  
ON THE USE OF VERNACULAR LANGUAGES  
IN THE PUBLICATION OF  
THE BOOKS OF THE ROMAN LITURGY

The conclusion is no less impressive:

After the preparation of this Instruction by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in virtue of the mandate of the Supreme Pontiff transmitted in a letter of the Cardinal Secretary of State dated 1 February 1997 (Prot. n. 408.304), the same Supreme Pontiff, in an audience granted to the Cardinal Secretary of State on 20 March 2001, approved this Instruction and confirmed it by his own authority, ordering that it be published, and that it enter into force on the 25th day of April of the same year.

The Instruction is known as *Liturgiam authenticam*, the opening words of its Latin version. It is a very comprehensive document, dealing with many aspects of translation that *Comme le prévoit* had not considered. In ICEL, however, we could not but notice that all of the congregation's complaints against us with which we had become familiar through correspondence were fully included, as well as all of the demands and instructions that we had received from the congregation. It almost seemed as if ICEL had provoked the composition of *Liturgiam authenticam*. Less charitably, perhaps, it appeared that the author(s) of *Liturgiam authenticam* might have had ICEL in mind as they wrote the document. The congregation had had the text of the Missal revision in 1998 (along with requests from most of the conferences for the required *confirmatio*). Rome was silent for four years. But *Liturgiam authenticam* was issued in March 2001 and, exactly a year later, the denials of *recognitio* were being sent to the conferences.

#### Rules and regulations

In addition, there were other matters introduced into the new

document, all of which gave a general impression of control, restriction and general negativity. Here are some passages from *Liturgiam authenticam*.

While it is permissible to arrange the wording, the syntax and the style in such a way as to prepare a flowing vernacular text suitable to the rhythm of popular prayer, the original text, insofar as possible, must be translated 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. (no.20)

Certain expressions that belong to the heritage of the whole or of a great part of the ancient Church, as well as others that have become part of the general human patrimony, 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* in the Act of Penance in the Order of Mass. (no.56)

... a) The connection between various expressions, manifested by subordinate and relative clauses, the ordering of words, and various forms of parallelism, is to be maintained as completely as possible in a manner appropriate to the vernacular language.

b) In the translation of terms contained in the original text, the same person, number and gender is to be maintained insofar as possible... (no. 57)

The practice of seeking the *recognitio* from the Apostolic See for all translations of liturgical books accords the necessary assurance of the authenticity of the translation and its correspondence with the original texts. This practice both expresses and effects a bond of communion between the successor of blessed Peter and his brothers in the Episcopate. Furthermore, this *recognitio* is not a mere formality,

but is rather an exercise of the power of governance, which is absolutely necessary (in the absence of which the act of the Conference of Bishops entirely in no way attains legal force)... (no. 80)

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments erects such 'mixed' commissions at the request of the Conferences of Bishops involved; afterwards the commission is governed by statutes approved by the Apostolic See... (no. 93)

... The Members of the Commission are always Bishops... (no. 94)

Such a Commission, in fact, insofar as possible, should exercise its office by means of the resources of the liturgical commissions of the individual Conferences involved, using their experts, their technical resources, and their secretarial staff. For example, the work undertaken is coordinated in such a way that a first draft of the translation is prepared by the liturgical commission of one Conference and then improved by the other Conferences, even in light of the diversity of expression prevailing in the same language in the individual territories. (no. 96)

In addition, the 'mixed' commissions are to limit themselves to the translation of the *editiones typicae*, leaving aside all theoretical questions not directly related to this work, and not involving themselves either in relations with other 'mixed' commissions or in the composition of original texts. (no. 98)

... These [diocesan and national] commissions shall work in their own right for the purposes proper to them, and shall not cede the matters entrusted to them to any 'mixed' commission. (no. 99)

All of the principal collaborators of any 'mixed' commission who are not Bishops, and to whom a stable mission is entrusted by such commissions, require the *nihil obstat* granted

by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments before beginning their work... (no. 100)

It is to be borne in mind that the composition of new texts of prayers or rubrics is not an end in itself, but must be undertaken for the purpose of meeting a particular cultural or pastoral need. For this reason it is strictly the task of the local and national Commissions... (no. 107)

### Critical reactions

On publication, the Instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* received a great deal of adverse criticism in reviews, letters to periodicals etc. Some of the criticism was directed at such matters as inconsistencies and errors in the document, excessive centralisation and micromanaging, an ethos of negativity, control and suspicion. The document appeared to deal exhaustively with practically every conceivable aspect of liturgical translation. The impression inevitably given was of a lack of respect and/or trust towards bishops' conferences and linguistic mixed commissions. Bishops and bishops' conferences seemed reduced to being the local agents of the Congregation for Divine Worship.

There was another element in *Liturgiam authenticam* that struck me as unhelpful. In many of its paragraphs, the text of the particular instruction or prohibition includes a phrase such as "in so far as this is possible" (or similar words). At first sight, this seems reasonable and wise. But, in any given case, who is to decide whether it is permissible to invoke that apparently sensible and generous concession? Answer: only the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Consequently, at the end of the long process of translation and the approval of the conferences of bishops, the congregation could decide that the 'as far as possible' phrase had been unnecessarily used; and so recognition would be denied.

In some cases the concession obviously would have to be used. *Sursum corda* could not be rendered as 'Upwards (the) hearts'. But in most cases the congregation's opinion would be totally unknown to the translators and to the bishops' conferences – and quite likely

to be strict and unyielding, even arbitrary. Hence, in order to avoid rejection at the conclusion of the whole process, the tendency would be to make the translation as literal as possible – and thus have an unsatisfactory vernacular rendering of the Latin original.

### Destruction and Defeat

I have described *Liturgiam authenticam* as an exocet missile against ICEL and we certainly felt bewildered – not only the Advisory Committee and the secretarial staff but also the bishops of the Episcopal Board. Indeed, I think that the various bishops' conferences, those members at least who took a special interest in, and had real pastoral concern for, the liturgical books, above all the Roman Missal, realised the seriousness of the situation.

We really felt at a loss to know what to do or how to proceed. The conference presidents went to Rome to meet officials of the Curia, especially the Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, but that meeting was a disappointment and inconclusive. The Episcopal Board and the Advisory Committee of ICEL tried to implement the new draft statutes. These included a provision that all the subcommittees of the Advisory Committee would be abolished, the work previously done by them to be carried out in future on a very *ad hoc* basis. This caused dismay and anger among the members of the subcommittees and only succeeded in increasing the atmosphere of gloom and despondency prevalent throughout the international commission. Whether the exocet had holed ICEL below the waterline or rendered us rudderless, we certainly felt disillusioned, hurt and abandoned.

Events then began to take over. A number of bishops who were on the Episcopal Board finished their terms of office. They were replaced by bishops who had no experience of the trials and tribulations of ICEL. Similarly with the Advisory Board where, moreover, morale was very low following the disbanding of its subcommittees and the criticism directed at it by the Congregation for Divine Worship. Efforts to recruit liturgical scholars to fill vacant places on the Advisory Board were unsuccessful – invitations were politely declined.

Another very serious development was the decision of our experienced and highly competent executive secretary, Dr John R. Page, to leave. He had been hurt and insulted by the unfair criticism of the Congregation for Divine Worship and his going was the sad loss of a much respected servant of the Church. Finally, I was 75, the age at which bishops are due to retire from diocesan responsibilities. I was of the opinion that it would not be right for ICEL to be led by a retired bishop; in addition, I had been diagnosed as suffering from cancer. When the Episcopal Board met in Ottawa in July 2002, I was receiving treatment for my illness and therefore absent from the meeting. However, in the circumstances of my age and my health, I intimated my wish to resign as chairman and to leave the commission.

At Ottawa a new chairman of the Episcopal Board, Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds, was elected and a new executive secretary (now called executive director) was appointed - Fr (now Mgr) Bruce Harbert, an English priest. With these new leaders and with a number of newcomers to the Episcopal Board, ICEL was able to resume operations. The changes produced a much more positive attitude on the part of the congregation in Rome and greatly improved relations between the two bodies.

As already noted, the English translation of the Roman Missal, on which ICEL had laboured since 1982 and which had been approved by all the eleven English-speaking conferences of bishops that are full members of the international commission, had been refused *recognitio* by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

By this stage, the congregation seems to have understood and used its *recognitio* not merely as a kind of *nihil obstat* (i.e., that the text was free from doctrinal errors and from unacceptable omissions from, and additions to, the Latin original). *Recognitio* had apparently come to be regarded by the congregation as the right simply to dislike the translation which the conferences had approved and so, on its own authority, to consign the whole immense effort to the waste paper basket. In other words, *recognitio* had now become identified

with approval. And thus the role of a bishops' conference to approve a liturgical text by its canonical vote had been abrogated.

Nonetheless, some questions remain unanswered because the congregation will not discuss them or comment. For example, when the congregation refused its *recognitio*, who exactly made that decision? Not the prefect or his deputy, because they did not speak English. A native English-speaker employed at the congregation? Whom did he consult? We are not told... The Church may not be a democracy, but surely there ought to be some willingness to be less secretive in matters such as this.

Admittedly, ICEL's stock was not high in Rome. An ICEL translation of the psalter had its *imprimatur* withdrawn by order of the Holy See. Authorities in the Roman Curia had noted that the translation of the Order of Mass had barely received the required two-thirds majority in the United States conference. And the congregation had angrily rejected an English translation of the Rites of Ordination submitted to it in the late 1990s. So one may ask, though aware that the answer will never be revealed: if the congregation had not considered itself provoked by these incidents, would it perhaps have been prepared to discuss with the conferences and seek changes in the translation of the Missal, rather than issue the draconian rejection of the whole thing in its entirety?

Finally, it is tantalising to wonder how the congregation, or indeed the Holy See itself, would have reacted if the conferences of bishops, or even the conference presidents, had claimed that their legitimate authority had been infringed by the congregation's behaviour. Such a complaint was not, I think, put forward strongly enough. If it had been, is it too fanciful to dream that it might have led to a thorough examination of the role and activities of the Roman Curia?

## THE 'BANNED' TRANSLATION OF 1998

Although sadly of only academic interest, it can be interesting to examine the 'banned' translation, especially in comparison with the 1972 version and the Latin texts. Here are a few examples. (The new, acceptable translation could not be reproduced here as it had not been fully approved at time of printing.)

### 4th Sunday, Ordinary Time (Opening Prayer)

#### Latin Text

Concede nobis, Domine Deus noster,  
ut te tota mente veneremur  
et omnes homines rationabili diligamus affectu.

#### 1972 Translation

Lord our God,  
help us to love you with all our hearts  
and to love all men as you love them.

#### 1998 Translation

Teach us, Lord God,  
to worship you with undivided hearts  
and to cherish all people with true and faithful love.

### 17th Sunday, Ordinary Time (Opening Prayer)

#### Latin Text

Protector in te sperantium, Deus,  
sine quo nihil est validum, nihil sanctum,  
multiplica super nos misericordiam tuam  
ut, te rectore, te duce,  
sic bonis transeuntibus nunc utamur,  
ut iam possimus inhaerere mansuris.

#### 1972 Translation

God our Father and protector,  
without you nothing is holy, nothing has value,

guide us to everlasting life  
by helping us to use wisely  
the blessings you have given to the world.

#### 1998 Translation

O God,  
protector of those who hope in you,  
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy,  
enfold us in your gracious care and mercy,  
that with you as our ruler and guide,  
we may use wisely the gifts of this passing world  
and fix our hearts even now on those which last for ever.

#### 32nd Sunday, Ordinary Time (Prayer after Communion)

##### Latin Text

Gratias tibi, Domine, referimus  
sacro munere vegetati,  
tuam clementiam implorantes,  
ut, per infusionem Spiritus tui,  
in quibus caelestis virtus introivit,  
sinceritatis gratia perseveret.

#### 1972 Translation

Lord,  
we thank you for the nourishment you give us  
through your holy gift.  
Pour out your Spirit upon us  
and in the strength of this food from heaven  
keep us single-minded in your service.

#### 1998 Translation

Strengthened by this holy food, O Lord,  
we give you thanks and seek your mercy,  
that, through the outpouring of your Spirit,  
those who have been touched by the power of this sacrament  
may continue to live in sincerity and truth.

The 1998 (rejected) Missal also had a number of Original Texts (i.e., texts not in the Latin Missal but newly composed by ICEL and approved by the English-speaking bishops' conferences). They were mainly Opening Prayers with a special relevance to the Readings of the Sunday or Feast which were to follow. Here are a couple of examples.

For the Second Sunday of Advent (Year C) when the gospel is John the Baptist's preaching (Luke 3:1-6):

God of our salvation,  
you straighten the winding ways of our hearts  
and smooth the paths made rough by sin.  
Make our conduct blameless,  
keep our hearts watchful in holiness,  
and bring to perfection the good you have begun in us.  
We ask this through him whose coming is certain, whose day  
draws near;  
your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

For the Third Sunday of Easter (Year A) when the gospel is the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35):

O God of mystery,  
out of death you delivered Christ Jesus,  
and he walked in hidden glory among his disciples.  
Stir up our faith,  
that our hearts may burn within us  
at the sound of his word,  
and our eyes be opened to recognise him  
in the breaking of the bread.  
Grant this through Jesus Christ, firstborn from the dead,  
who lives with you now and always in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

In addition, the 1998 Missal contained original Collects for the following contemporary needs which may occur from time to time (and are not found in the Latin text of the Missal).

For a reverent use of creation

For victims of abuse

For the homeless

For victims of addiction

In times of epidemic

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