

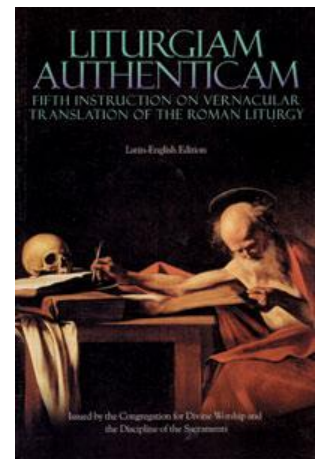
#8 TRANSLATING LITURGICAL TEXTS: TWO PRINCIPLES

As we have mentioned, we are awaiting a new translation of new edition of the Eucharistic Liturgy. As we continue to prepare for these changes it will be helpful to understand a little about the principles used to translate liturgical texts.

Translation is no easy task. My classmate, while I was in the Norbertine novitiate, helped me understand this difficult process. Jaime loved to read poetry from the great mystics, including St. John of the Cross. Jaime was also very interested in languages and set out to translate some of St. John's poetry. Jaime discovered that it was a rather challenging task to convey the syntax and capture the imagery of the Spanish text in English. If he translated the text word-for-word the English reader would have missed the rhythm and beauty of what St. John was trying to portray. Every language has certain rules and structures which help the listener understand the context and meaning of a phrase. It can be rather difficult to capture this kind of meaning in translation, because the new language has its own, different rules.

In 1969, *Comme le prévoit* was issued by the group charged with implementing the reforms of Vatican II. This document provided rules for translating the newly promulgated Latin texts. The overarching principal in this document is called "dynamic equivalence." It is not a word-for-word translation, but seeks to express the original message as if it had been written by a native speaker in the new language. This is the principal my classmate was using as he translated poetry so that it brought the sense of the Spanish style into a truly English structure.

This document governed all liturgical translations until 2001 with the publications of the instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* which changed the rules of translation. In 2007, the Vatican clarified this for English in *Ratio Translationis for the English Language*. These two documents are guiding the new English translations. The guiding principle in *Liturgiam authenticam* is called "formal equivalence." This principle tries to adhere to the language of the original text as much as possible, including phrasing, capitalizations, and gender. It is close to a word-for-word translation. Each method can bring out different strengths and each has its difficulties, but for now all translations must follow the principles of formal equivalence.



The new English text is being translated by ICEL (International Commission on English in the Liturgy). This group is comprised of English-speaking Bishops from around the world (i.e. Australia, Canada, India, South Africa, etc.). When these prayers begin to be used, you will notice a more formal style in both structure and words, which hopefully will point to our rich history and the Scriptural roots of the Eucharistic liturgy.