

Considering Images of God in The Order of the Mass

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There is a story that circulates in New England about two tourists who were enjoying the brilliant colors of the autumn foliage so much that they eventually found themselves far from any road that was on their map. After trying several unsuccessful lanes and byways, they came upon a farmer picking apples, so they stopped to ask him for directions. "Excuse me, sir," the driver said, "Can you tell us how to get to Warren?" The farmer looked at them quizzically for a moment, and then replied, "Yes, I can tell you how to get to Warren, but if I was goin' there, I wouldn't start from here."

When confronted with the task of getting from the *Missale Romanum editio typica tertia (MR)*ⁱ by way of *Liturgiam Authenticam (LA)*ⁱⁱ with the intention of arriving at an eloquent and engaging new English translation of the Eucharistic liturgy, there are similarly many places where "I wouldn't start from here" or at least "I wouldn't go this way" comes to mind. Before moving on to consider a number of theological issues, I believe it is important to begin by recognizing that not the least of the difficulties in this proposed journey involves that supposedly simple destination, a new vernacular translation, because (to continue the geographical imagery) English is not a village but a metropolis, with a complex mixture of public places, private places, ethnic neighborhoods, cul-de-sacs, one-way streets, and other complications.

In the general classification of Indo-European languages, English is categorized as a Germanic language, more specifically as a branch of the West Germanic group. But this linguistic taxonomy is woefully inadequate for conveying the real complexity of this multilayered tongue, which relentlessly continues to adapt and expand. The fundamental stratum is indeed Germanic, stretching back to a language once called Anglo-Saxon but now generally known as Old English. Many of the words we have retained from this

linguistic core are short, strong, and full of consonants. Yet in addition to these blunt, sturdy words are some surprising multisyllabic survivals. For example, the final word of Caedmon's hymn, which dates from the latter part of the seventh century, is "*aelmichtig*" — our present-day "almighty," a word to which I will return later.

This root language was forever changed in 1066 with the Norman invasion, which marked not just a military or political victory but also a social and linguistic one. As the French terms of the conquerors and new aristocrats found their way into use, they tended not to replace Germanic terms but to exist alongside them. As a result, the choices among this field of synonyms carried with them the ability to characterize the social level of the speaker or writer. Take for example, Msgr. Harbert's illustration, "Close the door." The choice of the post-Norman verb with the Germanic noun clearly registers this statement as upper rather than lower class, precisely because the lower class alternative still survives as an option: "Shut the door." We could even keep on spinning this out by choosing alternatives such as "back door" vs. "rear door," each of which would reflect an etymological—and therefore sociological—heritage. Although at one level this might seem like an amusing game to play, it is actually a highly significant subliminal component of what is conveyed in any current use of English vocabulary. In hearing or reading a statement, we are constantly evaluating how consistent and idiomatic the language is, both in general and in relation to the sociolinguistic milieu it represents. As a result, we attribute authority and persuasiveness to speakers and writers who manifest what we perceive as effective use of appropriate language.

A third layer was folded into English usage before, during, and after the Renaissance, as a result of a revival of interest in the classical languages. From Latin in particular all sorts of words were adapted and became part of English usage. Reflecting their origins, most of these words are polysyllabic and tend to exist alongside monosyllabic equivalents from earlier strata. To take an example well known to people familiar with the Saint John's campus: in the space now designated as the Great Hall, the Christus Pantocrator at the top of the apse is holding a codex bearing the words, "Ego sum via veritas et vita." We customarily translate this portion of John 14:6 as, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." But if we wanted to follow the stipulation of LA 59 to preserve as much of the original language as possible (including the alliteration and

assonance), we could render this inscription as “I am the viability, the verity, and the vitality.” Although this is perhaps an extreme example, it does demonstrate the special difficulties of trying to be faithful to Latin originals while also being mindful of how Latinate coinages are perceived in English. Given the strong monosyllabic core of English and the history of Latinate terms in professional applications, there is generally a perception that such language is either legitimately technical, legal, or medical, or perhaps only pretends to be. Though once fashionable in certain literary circles, such diction now seems extremely dated and often impenetrable. Even three hundred years ago Isaac Watts made an effort to remove Latinate diction from his hymns as being too poetical for Christians,ⁱⁱⁱ and Charles Wesley occasionally wrote himself into a very awkward situation by using a long Latinate adjective like “inextinguishable.”^{iv} Because many Latinate terms have been retained in legal contexts from the era when such matters were actually conducted in Latin, there is also an aura of authority—often imposed authority—lingering around such words. All of which is to say that the direction in LA 57 that a vernacular text is to follow the Latin original as closely as possible is inherently fraught with difficulties for anyone dealing with English. It is not a value-free enterprise, and the linguistic associations cannot be undone and should not be ignored. This is a consideration to which I will return in a later example.

The great advantage of the encounter with classical languages, of course, is that their grammatical structures helped to make sense of English. Because English has a case system that survives only in a few pronouns, has lost nearly all its grammatical gender, and minimally conjugates its verbs, it gained all sorts of clarifying order when perceived through the lens of Greek or Latin. But, as Msgr. Harbert has pointed out, the flexibility of verbal arrangement in the classical languages could not be imposed on English, which inexorably assigns meaning according to word order; so it does make a difference where “kindly” appears in the sentence. Occasionally we can get by with inversion but that strategy has its limits (e.g. “with inversion we can get by” will work, but “with inversion we by can get” does not). Such limitations are particularly galling when compared with Latin, which by placing a word in an initial or terminal position has the capacity to give an emphasis to it that seldom can be replicated in idiomatic English.

From these very general considerations of the complexity of the vernacular language into which the *MR* must be translated, I want to move on to a consideration of the revised rites. Msgr. Harbert has given us examples of “The Missal’s Image of God,” primarily drawn from orations that have not yet been published, but I would like to focus on the images of God that emerge both explicitly and implicitly from the four Eucharistic liturgies that have been available for some time.^v Because they will be the most-repeated parts of the new rites, they are likely to exert the greatest influence in the lives of worshippers and therefore need to be examined carefully.

We begin with the treatment of the full Trinity, because that is where the rite itself begins. Except for what may be sung as the Entrance Chant, the very first words uttered or heard are those of the priest: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (OM 1), and a Trinitarian formula drawn from a Pauline epistle is the first of the alternative sentences with which the priest then greets the people: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, / and the love of God, / and the communion of the Holy Spirit / be with you all” (OM 2).^{vi} So the naming of the Trinity is expanded into an affirmation of the attributes and activities of the Three Persons. This Trinitarian momentum is rather surprisingly brought to a halt by the Penitential Act, where all three formulas end with an absolution invoking only “almighty God” (OM 4, 5, 6). Explicit mention of the Three Persons returns in the conclusion of the *Gloria in excelsis* (OM 8) and in the appointed Collect (OM 9). No further audible proclamation regarding the Trinity is made until the one of the creeds is recited (OM 18, 19). Although the Three Persons of the Trinity are acclaimed in the *Per ipsum* at the Elevation (OM 98, 106, 114, 123) in all four Eucharistic Prayers, only Prayers III (OM 108, 113) and IV (OM 117, 122) incorporate references to all Three Persons before that. The Trinity is not invoked again until the concluding blessing (OM 141, 143). In short, the Triune Godhead is assumed in all four Eucharistic Prayers but receives more explicit attention in Prayers III and IV.

Isolating references to the First Person of the Trinity is somewhat less straightforward in the revised translation than in the current one, but for good reason. As Msgr. Harbert has noted, *Dominus* is translated “Lord” rather than “Father,” with the attendant ambiguity that occurs frequently in Christian scriptures regarding the First and Second Persons. Even so, it is possible to identify a range of attributes and epithets in the

Introductory Rites alone: “God our Father” (OM 2), “almighty God” (OM 4), “the Lord our God” (OM 4), “the Father” (OM 6), “Lord God, heavenly King...almighty Father” (OM 8).

When we come to the Creeds, both of which affirm God as the origin of all things, the slight variation between “maker of heaven and earth” in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (OM 18) and “Creator of heaven and earth” in the Apostles’ Creed (OM 19) has sometimes been blown out of proportion. It has been asserted that “maker” (translating *factorem*) implies a Deity who assembled the universe from pre-existing parts rather than creating everything *ex nihilo*.^{vii} What such a view fails to recognize is that “maker” is a now-archaic English term for “poet,” as in William Dunbar’s memorable early-sixteenth century catalog of dead poets known as the “Lament for the Makers.” So, rightly understood, “maker” preserves the double sense of the creed’s original Greek ποιητῆς ἡν, which in itself is resonant with recollection of creation by the active and effective word of God.

If this might be an example of the sort of catechesis LA 29 anticipates,^{viii} another one appears at the beginning of the Sanctus (OM 31, 83, 99, 107, 116). As Msgr. Harbert has noted, the revised reading is “Lord God of hosts” in place of the current “Lord God of power and might.” This may well be a more literal rendering of *Sabaoth*, but I fear that it communicates less to most hearers today.^{ix} The meaning of “host” as army or multitude is a small secondary cluster of definitions in current dictionaries, much overshadowed by the primary associations with persons and actions connected with hospitality. This situation is in many ways comparable to the problem of modern readers who find the word “fond” in Shakespeare and think it means “affectionate,” when it actually means “foolish.” The use of a word that has strong erroneous associations may be more distracting than helpful. Given that *Sabaoth* remains untranslated in *MR*,^x I think it might well be preserved as a holy and mysterious name for God, as LA 23 directs that for “words taken from other ancient languages ...consideration should be given to preserving the same words in the new vernacular translation.” This approach might well contribute to the enhanced aura of transcendence that LA 27 (cf. 47) foresees as a result of the revised rites.

Although the English language contains the cognate “omnipotent,” I think it is commendable and appropriate that in the revised Creeds and elsewhere the translators continue to employ the longstanding English equivalent “almighty” for the Latin *omnipotens*. It is gratifying that they have not been unduly swayed by the directions of LA 9, 20, 21 to adopt a more Latinate diction. One place, however, where I think they might have been more attentive to the related patterns in the Latin comes at the conclusion of the *Per ipsum* as it appears in all four Eucharistic Prayers (OM 98, 106, 114, 123). The phrase *Deo Patri omnipoténti, in unitáte Spíritus Sancti, omnis honor et glória per ómnia saecula saeculórum* is held together by a tripartite skeleton of derivatives from *omnis*. The revised formula echoes the first two elements of this pattern (“to you, O God, almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, is all honor and glory”) but it then lapses into the customary *saecula saeculórum* formula (“forever and ever”). Both the verbal integrity and the rhetorical crescendo of the passage would be better represented—and would be a more fitting accompaniment to the Elevation—if the usual concluding idiom had been replaced by “through all ages and forever.”

The constraints of time and space permit detailed attention to only two further instances of language concerning the First Person of Trinity. First, I find it quite odd, given the evident scrupulousness in other matters, that in the Second and Fourth Eucharistic Prayers the vocative *Pater sancte* is regularly translated as “Father most holy” [emphasis added] (OM 99, 116, 117[twice], 119). Such an unnecessary superlative has the unfortunate effect of moving God farther away at precisely the point in the liturgy when God’s nearness is most desired. Second, it needs to be recognized that providing the *Pater noster* only in archaic language has the linguistic effect of making that moment the most sacred part of the entire liturgy. According to the principle that liturgists know as Baumstark’s Law, there is an instinctive human impulse to equate the antique with the holy.^{xi} The presence of this immutable nugget of Elizabethan diction communicates subliminally that it must be revered more than any other passage in the rite. I understand the pastoral wisdom of retaining this familiar formulation already known by heart; removing it entirely would doubtless result in a cataclysmic backlash. But the absence of an alternative contemporary language version leaves the faithful with locutions like “trespasses” and “lead us not into temptation,” which scholars recognize as

potentially misleading wordings of this prayer so central to the life of the Church, and it skews the linguistic shape of the liturgy.

Turning now to language about the Second Person of the Trinity, it might be helpful to return to “Lord” for a moment in order to consider how the nuances of the term vary when applied to God the Father and to God the Son. When addressed to the First Person, this title is more concerned with sovereignty, and when applied to the Second Person is more concerned with allegiance. There is a very real sense in which we need always to hear that primitive creedal affirmation, “Jesus is Lord!” (1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11) echoing through our use of this title for the Second Person. At the same time it will help if we can also be aware of the etymology of our English word. “Lord” derives from the Old English *hláf-weard*, literally, the “loaf-ward/guardian/keeper/provider.” How profoundly true this becomes for us in the One who is the Bread of Life!

Anyone who has studied LA carefully will know that it contains some contradictory instructions. At one point it stipulates that the vernacular is to follow the Latin as closely as possible (LA 20), and elsewhere it rightly distinguishes between the denotations of language and the connotations of language (LA 52). The Institution Narrative of the Roman Canon provides some striking examples where these two considerations collide, with implications about the liturgy’s portrayal of Christ. Although the twice-occurring phrase “his holy and venerable hands” (OM 89, 90) employs an obvious English cognate of the Latin *venerábiles*, the root sense of “worthy of respect” has been almost entirely eclipsed in current English usage by the connotation “of advanced age,” resulting in what some may visualize as the rather bizarre image of Jesus as a young man with old hands. To assume that sufficient catechesis (LA 29) will eliminate this discordant perception seems to me both unwisely naïve and unnecessarily pedantic. The intention of the Latin could be faithfully expressed as “his holy and august hands” without bringing denotation and connotation into conflict. The second occurrence of this phrase is rendered all the more problematical by its proximity to “this precious chalice” (OM 90), translating *hunc praeclárum cálicem*.^{xii} Those of you who heard Bishop Trautman speak here three years ago will know that this is a phrase that particularly troubles him,^{xiii} and I think he is correct in identifying it as something that could be improved. The root *clarus* meaning “clear” or “bright” is here combined with

the intensifying prefix *prae-*, resulting in an adjective meaning “very bright” or “very light,” perhaps even “resplendent.” While “precious” has the advantage of retaining some of the sound of the original, it conveys almost nothing of the visual sense and introduces the unhelpful alternative senses of “precious” (as the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists them): “expressing irritation, dislike, contempt, or bemusement” or “characterizing something that is over-refined in language, dress, or manners.” Here again, connotation gets in the way of denotation. Given that this same Latin adjective is translated two paragraphs later as “glorious” (OM 92), I think this would be a more desirable term to use here, and doing so would allow the English liturgy to convey some of the verbal echoes that resound through the Latin while avoiding some of the negative associations that an overly Latinate vocabulary has in English.

An important means of evaluating how the Second Person of the Trinity is dealt with in the Eucharistic liturgies emerges from a consideration of how the life and ministry of Jesus Christ are described. Only in the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer (OM 117) are there references to anything other than his Incarnation, Birth, Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.^{xiv} Although these silences are somewhat mitigated by *de tempore* provisions in prefaces and final orations, the cumulative effect is to ignore aspects of the incarnate life of the Second Person that might foster in worshippers a fuller appreciation of the mystery celebrated in the Mass.

As is often the case, the Third Person of the Trinity is the most neglected in the Eucharistic Liturgies, frequently being passed over in silence. This oversight begins as early as the second alternative greeting (OM 2), which mentions only the first two Persons of the Trinity. Although it is a direct quotation from a number of Pauline letters,^{xv} it is not really equal to either the Trinitarian first option or the unitary third option.

The much fuller treatment that the Holy Spirit receives in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (OM 19) is one of many reasons to be glad that it is the one regularly appointed. There is ample material here for fruitful catechesis: why is the Spirit called Lord? How does the Spirit give life? Why is the Spirit adored and glorified? How has the Spirit spoken through the prophets? And then the truly brave can go back and grapple with the *filioque*! Even though the Apostles’ Creed (OM 20) states

only a belief in the Spirit without enumerating attributes or activities, both creeds juxtapose Spirit and “holy catholic Church,” offering yet another topic for fruitful catechesis.

After this oasis of attention, the Eucharistic Prayers are remarkably lacking in mentions of the Third Person. There is, for example, no actual *epiclesis* in Eucharistic Prayer I, where the Holy Spirit is regularly mentioned only in the concluding *Per ipsum* (OM 98), as it is in all other Eucharistic Prayers (OM 106,114,123).

In Eucharistic Prayer II, there is a proper *epiclesis* expressed in quite lovely imagery, though I think the revised wording is unnecessarily stilted: “Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, / by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall” (OM 101). Turning the metaphor of the Latin into a simile in English weakens what LA 57 calls its “straightforward, concise, and compact manner of expression.” I suggest that with no loss of clarity these lines could be rendered as: “Therefore we pray you to make these gifts holy / with the dew of your Spirit.” Eucharistic Prayer II also shows a more vigorous pneumatology by including a prayer that “partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ, / we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit” (OM 105). This attention to the unitive work of the Holy Spirit is a significant attribute of this Eucharistic Prayer.

In Eucharistic Prayer III in addition to the Trinitarian passage mentioned earlier, there is a related *epiclesis* that Msgr. Harbert has already quoted. While I applaud the reincorporation of *dignéris* as “graciously” here, and although the passage reads well enough to the eye, I detect some problems for those who are only hearing it. First, it seems to me unnecessary to use “humbly implore” here, given that the same idiom *súpplices deprecámur* is translated as “humbly we pray” (OM 105) in Eucharistic Prayer II. Eliminating “implore” would also mitigate the singsong quality of this line, which currently stands as “Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you.” Then follows a colon at the end of the line, which I think it is particularly difficult for the priest to articulate. A more natural transitive reading would be: “Therefore we humbly pray you, O Lord, / graciously to make holy, by that same Spirit, / these gifts we have brought to you to be consecrated.” Eucharistic Prayer III also emphasizes the unitive work of the Third Person by praying “that we, who are nourished / by the Body and Blood of your Son / and filled with his Holy Spirit, / may become one body, one spirit in Christ” (OM 113).

In Eucharistic Prayer IV the agency of the Third Person in Incarnation is reiterated in language very similar to that of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed: “incarnate of the Holy Spirit / and born of the Virgin Mary” (OM 117). Furthermore, there is an important passage describing the post-Resurrection gift of the Spirit, whom Christ “sent...from you, Father, / as the first fruits for those who believe, / so that, bringing to perfection his work in the world, / he might sanctify creation to the full” (OM 117). This passage is immediately followed by an *epiclesis* invoking “this same Holy Spirit” (OM 118). As was the case with language about the Trinity, the Third Person is assumed in all four Eucharistic Prayers but receives more explicit attention in Prayers III and IV.

To this rapid survey of the images of God that emerge from the language of the revised English rites, I would like to add one brief theological coda. This is not a question about the explicit translation but rather an uneasiness with its implicit tone resulting from the stipulation in LA 50c that the terms used for “liturgical ministers, vessels, furnishings, and vesture” are not to be those “pertaining to everyday life and usage” but are to come from a vocabulary with “sacral character.” Consequently, in all but one instance, the revised rites render *calix* as “chalice” where the current ones have “cup.”^{xvi} I can fully appreciate the impulse to lend dignity to the language of the liturgy, but I am concerned about the attendant implication that God works only in situations removed from ordinary existence. It seems to me that it the language of the liturgy ought to avail itself of every opportunity to affirm that God can make the common holy, can redeem that which seems least promising, can turn persecutors into proclaimers, can transform what seems worthless into something beyond price. These, I believe, are the images of God the world both wants and needs.

ⁱ Accessed online at <http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/st.htm>.

ⁱⁱ *Liturgiam Authenticam: On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the books of the Roman Liturgy* (Rome, 2001), as quoted in Peter Jeffrey, *Translating Tradition: A Chant Historian Reads Liturgiam Authenticam* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2006), pp. 123-165. Hereafter cited as TT.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the Preface to his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), Watts wrote: “Some of the Beauties of Poesy are neglected, and some willfully defac’d: I have thrown out the Lines that were too sonorous, and have given an Allay to the Verse, lest a more exalted Turn of Thought or Language should darken or disturb the Devotion of the weakest Souls” (Selma Bishop, *Isaac Watts Hymns and Spiritual Songs 1707-1748: A Study in Early Eighteenth Century Language Changes* [London: The Faith Press, 1962], p. liv).

^{iv} In the hymn “O Thou Who Camest from Above,” stanza 2, line 2. The editors of the 1904 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* fit the words “ever-bright, undying” in the same space, and that emendation has been followed in several hymnals.

^v *Order of the Mass* (hereafter OM) as posted at <http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal/resources.shtml>

^{vi} Given the stipulation of LA 40, it is curious that the revision of the final phrase would move from an exact quotation of the biblical translation approved for use in the United States (i.e., the *New American Bible*) to that of a non-approved translation (i.e. the *New Revised Standard Version*) used in most other churches.

^{vii} See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 1972), pp. 372-374.

^{viii} It is curious to note, however, that the entire assumption that catechesis will be necessary in order for the liturgy to be understood contradicts *Varietates legitimæ* 35 (quoting *Sacrosanctum Consilium* 34): “Rites also need ‘to be adapted to the capacity of the faithful and that there should not be a need for numerous explanations for them to be understood.’” This contradiction is especially notable, given that LA 8 and 22 specifically claims not to interfere with any of the provisions of the 1994 document.

^{ix} N.B. the stipulation of LA 44 that “any expression be avoided which is confusing or ambiguous when heard, such that the hearer would fail to grasp its meaning.”

^x As Jeffrey notes, TT, pp. 29-30.

^{xi} In formulating this dictum Baumstark was primarily concerned with the preservation of older material as a mark of more sacred seasons, but a similar principle can be detected among the linguistic layers within a single rite. See Anton Baumstark, *Comparative*

Liturgy, rev. Bernard Botte, OSB, trans. F. L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., Ltd., 1958), pp. 27-30.

^{xii} This phrase may have found its way into the Roman Canon because of longstanding Eucharistic applications of Ps. 22/23. See Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), pp. 94-95.

^{xiii} Donald W. Trautman, “The Relationship of the Active Participation of the Assembly to Liturgical Translations” [transcript of lecture at Saint John’s School of Theology·Seminary, Collegeville, MN, March 27, 2006], pp. 15-16.

^{xiv} It should also be noted that Christ’s life and ministry are implied by the vocatives of the second alternative for the Penitential Act (OM 6).

^{xv} The annotated edition of OM prepared by Msgr. Harbert cites Rom 1:7, and lists a number of related passages: 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; Phlm 3.

^{xvi} The one exception is the second form of the Mystery of Faith, which retains “Cup” and remains much as it is in the current version (OM 91). Trautman notes (pp. 15-16) that “chalice” is not the language of any current or older translation of the biblical account.