

WHY A NEW TRANSLATION?

Initial Translations of the Liturgy into the Vernacular:

The Second Vatican Council allowed bishops to request the use of the vernacular in their regional territories. Accordingly, many conferences of bishops petitioned the Holy See for permission to use their own regional languages in liturgical celebrations. Once permissions were granted, efforts were made in many parts of the world to translate the Latin texts into the vernacular language of a given country. While the work was undertaken responsibly, there was also great pressure on those translating to finish them quickly so that they could undergo the necessary reviews and be put into the hands of the people.

Quality of Initial Translations:

Because of the haste with which some of these translations were made, they did not always capture the proper nuances of the Latin original. In addition, there were some differences of opinion among translators about whether the translations should give the “sense” of the Latin, while using terms more familiar in the vernacular, or should adhere very closely to the Latin. As a result, the initial translations were of varying quality. Some were excellent, however, there were instances in which the Latin original was inaccurately translated, or translated in a manner that was not clear; other translations offered vernacular versions that were translated accurately, but in a style that was not worthy of the language of the Sacred Liturgy. The recognition of the shortcomings of the initial translations developed slowly. As the Holy See and Bishops’ Conferences with their scholars and professional assistants examined these translations more closely, it became evident that the process of translation had to be reviewed and that, in light of past experience, clearer guidelines for translating had to be developed.

New Norms for the Translation of Liturgical Texts:

In May of 2001, the Holy See issued a new Instruction on the vernacular translation of the liturgy called *Liturgiam Authenticam*, whose title is taken from the first two words of the Instruction in Latin. This document is further known as *The Fifth Instruction for the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council*. The fact that *Liturgiam Authenticam* is the fifth Instruction on the correct implementation of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council makes it clear that this is one among a number of Instructions issued by the Holy See to guide the Church, her bishops and people, as they seek to carry out the Council’s mandates.

Liturgiam Authenticam was initiated as the result of an initiative by Pope John Paul II on the 25th anniversary of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. The Holy Father saw this milestone as an opportune moment to take stock of the liturgical reform after twenty-five years of experience and to make adjustments where necessary. Part of that “stock-taking” was an examination of translations of the liturgy to insure that they convey in the fullest possible sense the meaning of the original Latin texts. In *Liturgiam Authenticum* the efforts are directed toward insuring that translations made from Latin into the vernacular are doctrinally correct, exactly worded, free from the influence of particular ideologies, and marked by qualities which will effectively and worthily transmit the sacred mysteries of salvation and the faith of the Church into prayer, thus giving worthy worship to God the Most High. cf. [LA n.3] *Quality of Language*: In addition to concerns motivated by doctrinal accuracy, the Church is also calling for the use of language which, while safeguarding accuracy, is beautiful, majestic and compelling, reflecting the best quality of language a given vernacular can provide.