

The new Mass translation: More than just words

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COLUMN

Check out Dominican Fr. Paul Philibert's article in this week's issue of *America* magazine to learn why the new translation of the Roman Missal is catching flack for more than just bad grammar and antiquated English.

Philibert makes the case, respectfully but forcefully, that altering the words of consecration of the cup from "It will be shed for you and for all" to "It will be shed for you and for many" is a significant shift in emphasis from the accepted theological notion that Jesus died to save all people, not just a select number, however defined.

In an attempt to preserve as the correct interpretation of the Latin original "pro multis," the new translation stumbles badly over a key doctrinal assertion regarding the universal nature of Christ's redemptive sacrifice.

Whether introducing this linguistic ambiguity into the heart of the Eucharistic prayer is an unfortunate mistake (clearly contradicted by the Catholic Catechism) or a deliberate attempt to insinuate greater exclusivity into Catholic teaching, it will be with us for a generation or two if the new Missal comes on line in every parish in the English-speaking world this year.

We will stumble forward together during Sunday Mass, our "with your Spirit" and "under my roof" changes in familiar responses paling next to this one-word alteration of creedal clarity about whether this Mass is for all or just a select many.

If the change was deliberate -- part of a larger strategy by those who dream of a smaller, purer church, a holy remnant of just those faithful who now find fatal relativism and cafeteria tray morality in any attempt to welcome sinners and seekers of all kinds to the divine Mystery -- then we are on our way to a house so divided that any celebration of the Eucharist as the source of our unity will be impossible.

At least one bishop has been quoted as saying he does not want Marty Haugen's ubiquitous hymn "All Are Welcome" sung at any confirmation he presides at because "all are not welcome." We all might long for the church of the already perfect, but in this world I have never felt confident enough to sort people out in this way.

I do not recognize the Catholic church in such language. Like the publican in Jesus' parable, I sit in the section of pews designated for those who live by mercy. I go to Communion not as a reward for my virtue or orthodoxy but because I am starved for an unconditional love that helps me be good. Up till now, there has always been room in the church for me, for us, for all.

There may still be time to change this.

It is tantalizing to imagine that some Catholic bishops are bothered deeply that Rome and some of their brother bishops believe that the only way to stop what they think is a runaway train is to derail it.

It is even more emboldening to think that many pastors, the workhorse clergy who have been told to harness up and pull this new Missal into compliance, might sit down on the road and say, "Wait a minute, this doesn't make sense."

Seattle's Msgr. Mike Ryan had the courage to suggest this: "Stop the presses; let's talk some more."

The German bishops, Pope Benedict's own local clergy, told Rome "No" over this same issue of all or many.

The Germans know a lot about how to start a reformation, just as Americans know a bit about revolution. Does anyone -- except the holy remnant crowd -- really want either in today's fractured church?

What we do want is a family table where, after we talk, agree or disagree about words and ideas, everyone is welcome to Christ's gift of reconciling love.

As I welcome the uncertainties and possibilities of 2011, I long for this Eucharist and for this church.

[Pat Marrin is editor of *Celebration*, NCR's worship resource.]

Editor's Note: For readers interested in the full implications of the debate over language in the liturgy, *Celebration* published a series of columns by Gabe Huck on this topic titled "Words We Need to Hear." Click [here](#) [1] to open a PDF file collection of Huck's columns.

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