NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

A laugh line on liturgical translation

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 16, 2012 NCR Today
Synod of Bishops 2012

Let's face it: a Synod of Bishops, when some 300 prelates and other participants meet for three weeks to advise the pope on some topic, isn't exactly a laugh riot. During the opening phase, one five-minute speech after another is presented, some of it lofty theological rhetoric and some of it heartfelt *cris de coeur* about specific situations.

Little of it, however, is really calculated to tickle ribs.

That made today's presentation by Archbishop Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo of Jakarta, Indonesia, especially memorable, because he drew what one participant later described as "heartfelt laughter" while talking about a matter typically seen as especially ill-suited to comedic effect -- liturgical translation.

Suharyo's basic argument was about the need for flexibility in translation based on cultural differences. He then offered an especially telling case in point from his own neighborhood.

"When the priest addresses the people, '*Dominus vobiscum*', the people are to reply, '*Et cum spiritu tuo*'," he said. (In English, that's "the Lord be with you," followed by "and with your spirit" in the new translation.) Yet, Suharyo said, the word "spirit" as translated into his local language comes out as "*roh,"* which often connotes an evil spirit.

Thus his punch line: A literal translation of " *'et cum spiritu tuo*' means some communities find themselves saying, 'With your evil spirit!' "

Suharyo, 62, went on to make a strong plea for greater "subsidiarity", meaning allowing local churches to make some of these calls for themselves.

"My wish -- I hope that I am not alone -- is that the translation of liturgical texts ought not always to be done literally, rather seriously take into account the diversity of the cultural background," he said. "Could the principle of subsidiarity be applied in the task of translation and even in other areas of the life of the local church?"

Subsidiarity, Suharyo said, is "the spirit of Vatican II."

"In this way, the local church will become more communicative and expressive," he said, "and as a result the faith of the people will be more energized and more relevant to their Catholic lives and engagement both in the Church and in the world."

Source URL (retrieved on *10/08/2015 - 13:28*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/laugh-line-liturgical-translation