

BEYOND THE POLEMICS OF TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES

The Critical Issues Involved in Liturgical Reform & Renewal in the Philippines

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Abstract

The clash of translation principles involved in the translation of official liturgical texts is indicative of an underlying conflict of theologies of divine revelation that, on the one hand, remains largely essentialist and metaphysical, and process-oriented and historical, on the other. This conflict of theologies is symptomatic of an even *deeper* divide involving what constitutes the most effective way toward accomplishing the highest principle of Vatican II liturgical reform — the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy. Emphasizing the dynamic and subjective elements of both liturgical translation principles and sacramental efficacy does not contradict, but rather realizes their deepest possible intent.

Key Words: Liturgy, Sacraments, Dynamic Equivalence, Formal Equivalence, Objective Grace, Subjective Engagement

Conflict of Interpretations

By the time this paper sees print, a new English translation of the third typical edition of the Roman Missal (2002) would have been in

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use in many Catholic churches throughout the Philippines, revising, among others and most significantly, the responses at Mass that people have been accustomed to since the post-conciliar liturgical renewal in the late sixties, which translated the Latin liturgy into the vernacular languages.

This new English translation exemplifies the principle of formal equivalence as mandated by the Instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam* issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2001 requiring that translations remain faithful “in the most exact manner” to the original Latin liturgical texts. Vernacular adaptations must be “sober and discreet.”¹ Inspired by the late Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*,² commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*),³ *Liturgiam Authenticam* took on the late Pontiff’s call for “fidelity to the rites and to the authentic texts of the Liturgy” (VQA, 10), and the preservation of the “substantial unity of the Roman Rite as expressed in the liturgical books” (VQA, 16) making certain that the divinely instituted parts of the liturgy remain unchanged in the course of liturgical adaptation (VQA, 16). Translations of the Roman Missal since 1969, on the other hand, have hitherto used the principle of dynamic or functional equivalence, which interprets the essential and broadest possible meaning of the original text, often at the expense of a more literal rendering of the source language. “All the polemics and reactions for and against the new English translation,” Professor of Sacramental Theology Timoteo Ofrasio explains, “are based on these two principles of translation.”⁴

¹Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Liturgiam Authenticam*: “On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy,” no. 20, available from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html; Internet; accessed 15 June 2012. (Hereafter cited as LA with paragraph number.)

²John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*: On the 25th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Conciliar Constitution “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*” (On The Sacred Liturgy); available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_04121988_vicesimus-quintus-annus_en.html; Internet; accessed 15 June 2012. (Hereafter cited as VQA with paragraph number.)

³See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10 in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, New York: Guild Press, 1966. (Hereafter cited as SC).

⁴Timoteo Jose M. Ofrasio, SJ, “The New Translation of the Roman Missal and Liturgical Renewal,” 30 June 2012, <http://www.lst.edu/academics/landas->

While *Liturgiam Authenticam's* use of the principle of formal equivalence essentially embraces the Liturgical Reform Movement's *Ressourcement*, i.e., a return to the biblical and patristic sources, a new missal that is meant to conform more closely to the Latin texts used for centuries⁵ has understandably evoked fears of a return to the pre-Vatican II liturgy, and "may be interpreted as another example of what is perceived to be a systematic and well-managed dismantling of the vision, theology and ecclesiology of Vatican II during the past years."⁶

The misgivings of some quarters regarding the new translation notwithstanding—calling some changes in the Mass responses awkward, stilted, unnecessary, downright deleterious and misleading,⁷ the Philippine Church has embarked on a year-long preparation for the implementation of the new missal. The initial confusion, if not altogether resistance to these changes, the Church explains, will provide an opportunity for the faithful to deepen their understanding of and devotion to the liturgy. The elegant language of the Latin liturgy will not make God inaccessible, the Church reassures the faithful, but will all the more offer a fitting worship to God using a language that is appropriately formal and solemn.⁸

A new missal that translates the official Latin texts "without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses" can only be inimical to efforts at liturgical inculturation, claim pastors and liturgical experts in the field. Bishop Kevin Dowling of the diocese of Rustenburg, for instance, argues "that instead of making everyone conform to a dead-language text

archives/421-the-new-translation-of-the-roman-missal-and-liturgical-renewal-t-ofrasio-sj; Internet; accessed 30 June 2012.

⁵Milovan Katanic, "Roman Missal, Third Edition," 21 August 2011, <http://frmilovan.wordpress.com/2011/08/21/roman-missal-third-edition>; Internet; accessed 28 June 2012.

⁶Bishop Kevin Dowling, "Why the 'Liturgical Anger' is Fair," *The Southern Cross: Southern Africa's Catholic Weekly*, 18 January 2009, <http://www.scross.co.za/2009/01/why-the-liturgical-anger-is-fair>; Internet; accessed 26 June 2012.

⁷See, for instance, Fr John Converset MCCJ's observations in "Harmful Text Changes," *The Southern Cross: Southern Africa's Catholic Weekly*, 24 December 2008, <http://www.scross.co.za/2008/12/harmful-text-changes>; Internet; accessed 24 June 2012.

⁸Fr Ofrasio is of the impression that the current English, Tagalog and Cebuano translations of the Missal were somehow rushed given the pressure to produce a workable translation for vernacular Masses in the aftermath of Vatican II in 1969. As a result, truths of the Faith were neither accurately interpreted nor faithfully translated, but were reduced to "watered down paraphrases and generalizations, ... vague statements and platitudes that do not explicitly express the Catholic faith." Ofrasio, "The New Translation of the Roman Missal and Liturgical Renewal." He sees the new translation as an opportune time to rectify the situation.

we need to allow diversity in cultural and linguistic expressions of faith communities around the world."⁹

For while the more sacral and formal tone of the new English translation might inspire a more solemn and prayerful atmosphere in the liturgy, liturgical inculturation does not simply consist in "giving the equivalent of a word or a phrase without due reference to the people's cultural pattern, history, and experiences of life."¹⁰

While this method of giving equivalents may safeguard doctrinal orthodoxy by remaining faithful to the original authorial intent in any given classical theological or ecclesiastical document, a "method of dynamic equivalence" seems more appropriate and effective (and existentially relevant, no less) since it re-expresses (and hence, reinterprets) a particular doctrinal, liturgical, or theological concept following a particular pattern of thought, speech, expression, and ritual inherent in a specific culture.¹¹

Essence vs. Existence

This clash of translation principles is indicative of an underlying conflict of theologies of divine revelation that, on the one hand, remains largely essentialist and metaphysical, and process-oriented and historical, on the other.

Let me cite at length an earlier article in the *Loyola Schools Review*:¹² 'Religion,' writes Edward Schillebeeckx, 'is above all a saving dialogue between man and the living God... this means that religion is therefore essentially a personal relation of man to God, of person to person; a personal encounter or a personal communing with God.'¹³ Unfortunately, this concept of religion as a saving encounter with the divine has not been always clearly emphasized in Catholic theology. In the study of the sacraments, for instance, what has often resulted is 'a one-sided view that tends to depersonalize the sacramental encounter between God and man, to regard it as nothing more than a cause-effect relationship.'¹⁴ This one-sided view is consistent with what Joseph Martos describes as the tendency among ecclesiastical writers since the Middle Ages to discuss

⁹Dowling, "Why the 'Liturgical Anger' is Fair."

¹⁰See Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacraments, Religiosity, and Catechesis*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992, 38.

¹¹See Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 38-39.

¹²Michael Demetrius H. Asis, "Shifting Paradigms: A Fresh Pedagogical Approach to Understanding the Sacraments," *The Loyola Schools Review* 3 (2004) 33-56.

¹³Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963, 3-4.

¹⁴Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Sacraments: An Encounter with God," *Theology Digest* 7 (Spring 1960) 117.

the ritual sacraments 'not in concrete and experiential terms but primarily in abstract and metaphysical terms.'¹⁵

Schillebeeckx, therefore, introduced a paradigmatic shift in a contemporary understanding of liturgical-sacramental theology that in large measure modified the earlier paradigm 'forged by Scholastic theology and maintained well into this century.'¹⁶ Schillebeeckx spoke of sacraments not in terms of physical objects, or mere instruments of grace, but as personal encounters in worship with the mystery of God in Jesus. 'The sacraments are not things,' Schillebeeckx writes, 'but rather personal living encounters with the glorified Jesus and, in him, with the living God.'¹⁷

It is not sufficient, therefore, to interpret sacraments as automatically 'receiving' the grace promised, flowing as it were from mere valid administration and reception, which was the case in the previous approach. This preoccupation with how a sacrament is validly administered and received, while notable for its over-all clarity and its affirmation of how a sacrament objectively communicates the divine presence, tends to ignore the experiential, subjective dimensions of the sacrament, i.e., the disposition of faith needed to make that sacrament not only objectively valid, but also truly existentially meaningful and effective. The error of later scholasticism, Martos notes, is 'the assumption that sacraments always and everywhere, in each concrete instance, make present what they represent...'¹⁸ This error is certainly understandable today, given the essentialist, objective, and metaphysical language common at that time.¹⁹ However, it is simply not true that as long as the minimum requirements for validity were satisfied, the sacraments were considered to be effective, and could be performed in exactly the same way over and over again."²⁰ Isn't this perhaps the central frame of mind underlying all official Church hermeneutics — that divine revelation is essentially changeless and immutable, and that the original texts that precisely articulate this divine movement in history "... insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses...?

A Tale of Two Catechisms

The disagreement as to what translation principle constitutes the approach most faithful to divine revelation is symptomatic of an even

¹⁵Joseph Martos, "Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later," *Ministry & Liturgy* 29, 2 (March 2002) 9.

¹⁶See Peter E. Fink, *Worship: Praying the Sacraments*, Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1991, 140.

¹⁷Schillebeeckx, "The Sacraments: An Encounter with God," 119.

¹⁸Joseph Martos, "Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later," *Ministry & Liturgy* 29, 3 (April 2002) 10.

¹⁹Joseph Martos, "Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later," 10.

²⁰Joseph Martos, "Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later," 10.

deeper conflict involving what constitutes the most effective way toward accomplishing the highest principle of Vatican II liturgical reform — the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the liturgy (SC, 10).

What follows is an examination of how these two approaches to liturgical renewal — in theology, pedagogy and practice — play out in two of the most authoritative ecclesiastical documents — the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*²¹ (universally) and the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*²² (locally). Two questions can be raised thus: 1) In view of evaluating the actual effectivity and pastoral fruitfulness of how liturgical instruction has been carried out in the past, how has the traditional theological paradigm influenced the current understanding and practice of the liturgy and sacraments? 2) How do we compare the CCC's strengths and limitations with the more experiential and integral approach of the national catechism?

There are many general and specific issues pertaining to liturgy and worship in the universal catechism, the first published draft of the CCC, that merit close attention. Commentators have observed, for instance, that over-all the CCC's treatment of the liturgy was more eastern than western, as though it was written in Constantinople than in Rome. Catholics brought up in the Western tradition might find this section confusing. The treatment of the seven sacraments and their historical development reverts to Tridentine theology rather than the more participatory thrust of Vatican II. The meal aspect of the Eucharist, for example, is not mentioned at all. Also, the treatment of liturgical signs and symbols takes a more cognitive rather than performative approach.²³

In its final edition, the CCC discusses liturgical catechesis in Part Two, "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery." This section contains two parts: "The Sacramental Economy" and "The Seven Sacraments." Preceding these two sections is a brief, albeit rich, introduction on the meaning of liturgy. This introduction on the liturgy reflects the liturgical reform of Vatican II which places the

²¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; reprint, Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994. (Hereafter, as CCC with paragraph number.)

²²Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE), *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, new ed., enl., Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997, 1522. (Hereafter cited as CFC with paragraph number.)

²³See Peter E. Fink, "The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism," in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, ed. Thomas J. Reese, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990, 95-108 and David N. Power, "The Sacraments in the Catechism," in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 109-25.

sacraments squarely in the context of the Church's liturgical life.²⁴ While this second part of the universal catechism can be rightfully praised for its content, its separation from Part Four on "Christian Prayer" is deemed pedagogically unsound. If the liturgy is the *official prayer* of the Church, it is an error to separate Catholic prayer from the liturgy (SC, 7). Given the predisposition of many Filipino Catholics toward privatistic and ritualistic faith practice, this separation of sacramental content from prayer unfortunately reinforces the inability of many Catholics to identify and experience the sacraments as prayer realities *in themselves* that are necessarily ecclesial by their very nature.

The CFC locates its exposition on the sacraments within an introductory chapter on "Catholic Prayer and Worship." This arrangement demonstrates how the ritual sacraments themselves constitute the ecclesial prayer of the Church in various forms and manifest the Church's official worship of God in Christ through the Spirit. Moreover, these CFC chapters on prayer, worship, and sacraments come immediately after the chapters on the "Holy Spirit" and the "Church" respectively to clearly bring out the threefold action of the Holy Spirit who: 1) incorporates the faithful into the Church; 2) vivifies their sacramental life; and 3) prepares them in the present for the eternal life to come.²⁵

Vehicles of Grace or Encounters of Faith?

The *most crucial* issue has to do with how "sacrament" should be defined. The CCC gives this definition:

The sacraments are symbolic actions instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which the divine life is bestowed upon us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and confer the graces appropriate to each sacrament. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the right attitude and in the right spirit (CCC, 1131).

This definition admirably recalls the relationship between the necessity of celebrating the sacraments with the "right attitude," on the one hand, and worship, on the other, that is articulated in Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*:²⁶ liturgy presupposes faith, on

²⁴Catherine Dooley, "Liturgical Catechesis According to the Catechism," in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 89.

²⁵Joseph L. Roche, "Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC&CFC," in *A Companion to CFC*, 1:98. Cf. LG, 7. The Holy Spirit gives life, unifies, and moves the whole body, compared to the soul's functions in the human body.

²⁶See Fink, "The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism," 96.

the one hand, and expresses, nourishes, and deepens it, on the other.²⁷ Some sacramental theologians, however, observe that the CCC's definition of "sacrament" makes the *life of grace, and its efficacious bestowal on the life of the individual, paradigmatic* of any understanding of "sacrament."²⁸ Fink explains that this is due in large part to the universal catechism's failure to emphasize the centrality of the Church as sacrament, an ecclesiological principle given a central place in Vatican II.²⁹ Fink writes:

The church as sacrament does appear in the catechism, but almost in passing and without the same centrality. The catechism prefers to use the term in regard to the economy of salvation as it unfolds in the time of the church... The sacraments emerge in this treatment without their fundamental rooting in the church as sacrament; they become vehicles of grace available in and through the ministry of the church rather than acts of public worship "performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus, that is, by the Head and his members" (SC, no. 7).³⁰

Fink finds this obvious shift away from the inclusive language of Vatican II disturbing since the Council spoke of the whole church as the primary agent in sacramental worship and thus emphasized the essential ecclesial dimension of Christian worship. To speak of the laity merely as recipients of sacraments is a regression from Vatican II's more participatory liturgical and ecclesial vision,³¹ which foresees the Church--in both its liturgical worship and service to society--as a participant, not a mere spectator, in the ongoing disclosure of the divine presence in history.

Prominent ecclesiologist Avery Dulles notes the same inadequate treatment of the Church as sacrament by the catechism.³² Therefore, the ecclesial and paschal foundations of the sacraments, so strongly asserted in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, do not sufficiently ground the liturgy and sacraments.

In the specific situation in the Philippines, however, the *CFC* concedes that this idea of the Church as "sacrament" may sound alien to many Filipino Catholics. The obvious reason is that people have been accustomed to thinking of "sacrament" in terms of the seven ritual sacraments such as baptism, confession, the Mass, etc. (*CFC*,

²⁷SC, 59. It should be noted, however, that the CCC definition of "sacrament" *does not explicitly mention faith*.

²⁸See Power, "The Sacraments in the Catechism," 111.

²⁹See SC, 5. Cf. LG, 1 and GS, 42.

³⁰See Fink, "The Liturgy and the Eucharist in the Catechism," 98.

³¹Fink, "The Liturgy and the Eucharist in the Catechism," 98.

³²Avery Dulles, "The Church in the Catechism," in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 84-92.

1367). The pedagogical value of speaking of the Church as “sacrament,” at least in the Philippines, may not be too obvious.

The CCC’s understanding of “sacrament” illustrates a shift away from the ecclesial dimension of the liturgy that was so strongly emphasized in Vatican II. Peter Fink continues:

Stress is given to the reception of sacraments rather than to their enactment by the church in assembly. Stress is also given to the church as the place where sacraments are celebrated rather than to the people who celebrate. What seems to dominate is an older image of sacraments as “vehicles of grace” entrusted to the church rather than as actions of people that express and manifest the nature of the true church.³³

In a radical departure, however, from the 1917 Code of Canon Law which listed the sacraments under the heading of “*de rebus* (on things),” the CCC describes the sacraments as ever-living, life-giving “powers that come forth” from the Body of Christ, actions of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church, and “masterworks of God” in the new covenant (CCC, 1116). This biblical approach, notes Regis A. Duffy, “... offers a much richer context for appreciating the theological and historical development of [the] sacraments...”³⁴ Moreover, the 1983 Revised Code of Canon Law, offers a definition of sacraments that is more consistent with the liturgical reform of Vatican II. Canon 840 defines the sacraments as actions of Christ and of the Church that signify and express both faith and worship. They not only bring about human sanctification, but also contribute effectively to achieving ecclesial unity. It is significant that the Revised Code uses the term “celebration” instead of “administration/reception” in the “performance” of the sacraments.³⁵ It retains the language of sacraments as means of grace according to the former Code even as it equally emphasizes them as ecclesial celebrations of worship.³⁶ Both the individual and ecclesial aspects of sacraments are affirmed.

³³Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 100. Cf. SC, 2.

³⁴Regis A. Duffy, “The Sacramental Economy,” in *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ed. Michael J. Walsh, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 234. The CCC’s treatment of each of the sacraments in terms of what it is called, who celebrates it, how it is celebrated, who receives it, and so on, may be considered an equivalent of so-called “matter/form definitions.”

³⁵Some great works of art, classics, or texts, for instance, disclose their meaning only in their performance. Only by bringing them into play can these great works express ever-new meanings and facilitate self-discovery. Nicholas Lash, “Performing the Scriptures: Interpretation through Living,” *Furrow* 33, 8 (August 1982) 470-71.

³⁶Wilfredo C. Paguio, *Notes on Sacraments and Sacramentals According to the Revised Code of Canon Law*, ed. Nestor Rebong, Johnny Zulueta, Ma. Erlinda Cabillin, Pasay: Saint Paul Publications, 1991, 1:17.

Nominalism Leads to Minimalism

In its exposition of the different sacraments, the CCC generally follows a pattern where it answers very basic questions such as: What is celebrated? Who celebrates and who receives? How, When, and Where is a particular sacrament celebrated? While this approach has the great advantage of clarity, it "can tend toward a certain nominalism, relative to people's mind-set today."³⁷ This *nominalism*, in turn, reinforces a certain outlook of *minimalism* with regard to understanding the moral demands of the Catholic Faith. A great number of Filipino Catholics, for example, participate in the Eucharist as mere spectators to fulfil a mere religious obligation or to simply avoid mortal sin (CFC, 1671-72). Avoiding serious sin by as small a margin as can be safely managed seems to be a major, if not, the only religious concern of many Filipino Catholics, especially among the youth.

The commentators on the universal catechism cited in this work do not make this observation regarding this procedure, except to simply identify it as the general format taken by the universal catechism for the treatment of each sacrament.³⁸

The CFC refrains from approaching the issue from a purely academic standpoint and does not enter into a debate as to whether an instrumentalist understanding of "sacrament" should be taken. Rather, the CFC simply proposes a substantial modification of the traditional formula defining the sacraments: sensible signs, instituted by Christ, to give grace.³⁹ The sacraments, then, are "saving symbolic acts or visible signs arising from the ministry of Christ and continued in, by and for the Church, which, when received in faith, fashion us into likeness to Christ in his Paschal Mystery, through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰

³⁷Roche, "Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC&CFC," 98-99.

³⁸Power, however, notes that this procedure, together with the catechism's efforts at addressing contemporary issues, is pursued within the classical scholastic framework. He laments that this may very well be a lost opportunity for developing a truly contemporary mystagogy, that is, the church practice that based sacramental instruction on their celebration. See Power, "The Sacraments in the Catechism," *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 114. Cf. Catherine Dooley, "Liturgical Catechesis: Mystagogy, Marriage or Misnomer?" *Worship* 66, 5 (September 1992) 386-97.

³⁹Roche, "Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC&CFC," 98.

⁴⁰CFC, 1531. The 1994 draft of the CFC uses the word "celebrated" instead of "received" in relation to faith. This makes the earlier edition's descriptive definition of "sacrament" considerably superior to the final 1997 official version due to the emphasis it gives on the active personal engagement, rather than passive "receiving,"

Signs or Symbols?

Stressing the notion of sacraments as “saving symbolic actions” helps address the common misconception that God’s presence is confined to the material and mechanical elements of any sacramental rite, isolated from their proper relationship with other elements such as words, gestures, and actions. What truly “sanctifies” us is *not the mechanical administration* of the material elements themselves (water, oil), but the *active engagement* of these in faith, within the total symbolic action of the sacramental rite (CFC, 1523). Sacramental effectivity, therefore, is not only contingent on faith, but on a “faithful” imagination. A more symbolic approach to, and knowledge of, the sacraments can enable us to go beyond the purely mechanical and material aspects of the rituals, and see the truly saving divine realities that the sacramental symbols are trying to communicate. Hence, the sacraments are not mere signs that mechanically point to some invisible reality but symbols that not only point to, but embody that reality in the actual performance and celebration of the sacraments through the power of God’s Spirit.

Rightly understood as “symbolic actions,” then, the ritual sacraments are signs that objectively effect a spiritual reality (the presence of God, in this case) by signifying it. The sacraments *do in fact objectively, i.e., in and of themselves, communicate grace*, the Risen Christ’s presence in the Spirit, communion with the Church, etc., but whether these spiritual realities *do in fact become subjectively effective* depends on the level of committed faith involvement one brings to the sacramental celebrations. Only a personally appropriated faith can be an existentially relevant faith.

The CFC’s pattern of exposition, therefore, while presenting the essential information about the ritual sacraments, is in view of achieving a more realistic but dynamic, dialogical and personal understanding of the sacraments, and of their importance in living out the Christian Faith.⁴¹ This is in keeping with the fundamental religious education principle of *existential relevance*, that is, what is presented is more than simply factual information, as shown by its intrinsic objective of motivating and relating to the actual life situation of the intended audience. This approach may be a concrete step in improving Catholic religion courses that have often been criticized for being

necessary in any valid and effective sacramental celebration. See ECCCE, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994, 1220.

⁴¹Roche, “Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC&CFC,” 99.

much too focused on memorized head knowledge while failing to inspire students to live out the Gospel more faithfully in their lives.

Every Step of the Way

The CCC generally uses the analogy of human growth as a broad framework for understanding the sacraments, after the example of St Thomas Aquinas. The *Baltimore Catechism* uses such a framework. Both catechisms present the parallel between certain aspects of human life and sacramental life, i.e., birth-baptism; coming of age-confirmation; the need for nourishment-eucharist; the need for healing-penance/anointing; taking on crucial social responsibilities-marriage and orders. This analogy between the seven sacraments and significant stages of human life is traced to St Thomas Aquinas who taught that “spiritual life has a certain conformity with the life of the body: just as other corporeal things have a certain likeness to things spiritual.”⁴²

The purpose of the CCC arrangement is to show how all the sacraments form an organic whole in which each sacrament has its own constitutive, vital place.⁴³ The sacraments are divided into sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, eucharist); sacraments of healing (penance and anointing of the sick); and sacraments at the service of communion (marriage and holy orders). The sacraments, therefore, generally correspond to and touch the many significant levels of human life and development.

A number of professional liturgists and sacramental theologians, however, have expressed their misgivings about this CCC arrangement. Dooley, for example, argues:

The Catechism states that there are other ways of ordering the sacraments than this threefold division and affirms that the “eucharist, the sacrament of sacraments, holds an unique place in this whole and all other sacraments are ordered to it as their end” (CCC, no. 1211). Yet the only place in which there is a full treatment of the eucharist is in the section on the sacraments of initiation. In the light of the whole of Book Two, the analogy of human growth as an organizing framework stunts the organic approach to the sacraments as ecclesial sacraments, actions of the church, “the sacrament of Christ’s action, at work through the mission of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, no. 1118), and gives the impression that the sacraments are all equal. The New Testament is clear that baptism and eucharist are fundamental to the whole sacramental system and that the other sacraments draw their meaning from their relationship to baptism and eucharist. Using

⁴²Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, 65, 1.

⁴³Dooley, “Liturgical Catechesis According to the Catechism,” 88.

the analogy of human growth counters the rich description of the common elements of sacraments in paragraphs 1113 to 1130 of the CCC.⁴⁴

Power speculates that the CCC's sacramental system that is based on the analogy with human development "is deemed to afford adequate intelligibility and justification for the number seven and a way of explaining the effects of each sacrament in particular."⁴⁵

Aidan Kavanagh, for his part, raises some very strong objections to this CCC ordering of the sacraments, insisting on the primacy of Baptism and Eucharist over the other sacraments. Otherwise, pastoral practice loses intelligibility and degenerates into the confusing sequence of baptism, penance, first communion, religious instruction, and confirmation. Not only is such an ordering pastorally counterproductive, worse, it is also "unrecognizable in the tradition, in the reforms, or in both the 1917 and the revised 1983 Codes of Canon Law."⁴⁶

The expert opinions of these liturgists and theologians notwithstanding, while theoretically sound, *seemingly fail to recognize the actual manner by which most Catholics imbibe and live out the teachings of their Faith.*⁴⁷ The sacraments' analogy with human growth is drawn from pastoral practice. What is weak is the theorizing on "pure nature" of Baptism and Eucharist, that no one has exercised in real faith life. The context of today's Filipino Catholic, i.e., a worship life centred on popular piety and a passive, often uncritical, "reception" of the sacraments (celebrated gradually according to the natural process of human growth), all the more calls for a liturgical catechesis that relates closely to the natural maturing process of human life and personal deepening. This form of liturgical instruction would likewise have to address the need to effectively explain the existential meaning of the many signs, symbols, rites and rituals that characterize much of the Filipino Catholic's worship-sacramental life.

While today's liturgical renewal focuses on the centrality of the Eucharist among the seven sacraments, a more effective liturgical catechesis would seem to suggest a treatment of the Eucharist that places it in the centre, after Baptism and Confirmation,⁴⁸ and before the sacraments of healing and vocation. This arrangement provides an

⁴⁴Dooley, "Liturgical Catechesis According to the Catechism," 88-89.

⁴⁵Power, "The Sacraments in the Catechism," 110.

⁴⁶See Aidan Kavanagh, "Theological Principles for Sacramental Catechesis," *The Living Light* 23 (June 1987) 317.

⁴⁷Roche, "Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC & CFC," 99.

⁴⁸There are good reasons for confirming around the age of discretion, or even postponing it further to young adulthood. Adolescents begin to move away from childhood and toward a more personally chosen Faith. CFC, 1634.

opportunity to have the Eucharist gradually introduced to Christian initiates, and have them, in turn, gradually initiated into the Eucharist, all according to the normal pattern of human growth and maturity in faith.

In Sum

In brief, the traditional paradigm of liturgical instruction has always presented a more mechanical and objectified view of the sacraments that, while valuable for its clarity, encourages a purely cognitive knowledge of these rituals, thereby ignoring the concrete subjective situation of those who celebrate them.

Grace as “Thing,” Grace as “Presence”

In the very language of articulation, embodiment, and celebration, the sacraments become symbolic encounters with grace, not as “thing,” but as “love-presence” of God in Christ. But this objective transcendent reality of the divine presence can be “real” only when it in fact touches the concrete lives of those who celebrate the sacraments. This sacramental encounter can be truly transforming and intensifying only when it is able to transform and intensify something already there in the first place, namely, the initial responsive faith commitment that people bring to the sacramental celebrations. Otherwise, the relevance of the sacraments — and the grace that is always “objectively received” — will always elude the experience of many a worshipping Filipino Catholic.

Catholics learn their faith within a specific cultural milieu, through particular individuals, in their particular cultural context, and hand that faith down through means available in their own cultural environment.⁴⁹ Hence, “there is no such thing as ‘pure doctrine,’ communicated outside of any context, through sources and means untouched by any culture.”⁵⁰ Otherwise, the experience of reality may alienate many individuals from the very God who wishes to encounter them in the very concrete circumstances of their humanity. The challenge to liturgical education is to teach people effectively that sacraments celebrate the saving presence of the Triune God that they in their human condition already bear, leading them to a fuller understanding of what they in their lives already believe.⁵¹

⁴⁹Joseph L. Roche, “The ‘Reality Principle’ in *CFC*’s Communicating the Faith,” in *A Companion to CFC*, 1:142.

⁵⁰Joseph L. Roche, “The ‘Reality Principle’ in *CFC*’s Communicating the Faith.”

⁵¹Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995, 2.

Reconstruction or Mediation?

Whether it be about which translation principle faithfully interprets and translates an official liturgical text, or about sacraments as mere vehicles of grace or dynamic ritual encounters with God, or whether the faithful become mere recipients of that grace or active participants in the sacramental encounter, we are faced with a larger, fundamental and critical question: Is the Church a “static, essentially unchanging reality, by divine decree and guidance immune to process?”⁵² Is the meaning of its many doctrinal truths, moral code, or liturgical expressions rigidly fixed, accessible only by way of literal translation, whose original intent can be divined only by way of faithful historical reconstruction?

When we speak of sacred tradition and sacred scripture as one sacred deposit of the word of God (DV, 10) for instance, do we more or less see tradition simply as “container” of divine revelation, and the Church as mere custodian of sorts, mainly safeguarding the word of God from interpretative adulterations? And so, when we begin to talk about the sacraments — the liturgy that celebrates them and the liturgical texts that articulate the truths therein — are these rituals mere receptacles that simply hold and contain an unchanging divine essence?

Human understanding, it is said, is not so much a matter of reconstruction as it is a process of mediation.⁵³ To understand the liturgy in both its textual and ritual forms, then, means not to view it in some “purely objective,” detached fashion but to precisely experience it as an ongoing, living, dynamic event. After all, isn’t *leitourgia* the “work of the people?”⁵⁴

This means that we should do well not to overcome the temporal gulf that separates past (in its original, historical context) from present but to see both as essentially constituting a single process. That distance is precisely the ground that makes any kind of understanding possible at all.

Not to Destroy, But to Fulfil

The principle of dynamic equivalence does not contradict the original liturgical translations and forms, but fulfils and perfects

⁵²See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Oak Grove: Winston Press, 1981, 609.

⁵³Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1989, 2nd revised ed., 290.

⁵⁴Mary Collins, “Liturgy,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987; reprint, Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1991, 592.

them, bringing to fruition their original intent, even at the expense of what appear to be faithful, literal translations. It keeps alive in the hearts and minds of those who are not contemporaneous with the original and ancient Christian sources and rites, the Christ-event that is remembered and re-enacted in liturgy in ways and means that give a dynamic and intelligible expression to the Gospel within one's unique language, thought patterns, and cultural experience.

Shifting the focus on the subjective elements of the sacraments do not deny the grace that is in fact received, but makes the spiritual reality they objectively communicate *personally real*. It is because sacraments unveil their spiritual realities in the very "performance," not the mere reception, in the very active engagement of human faith with the divine Self-disclosure, and not the mere routine administration of these sacred rites. Ecclesiologist Joseph Komonchak writes:

There are, it is true, objective representations of what the gospel is in the bible, the tradition, the liturgy, customs, and institutions of Christianity; and the possibility for unity amid all the diversity of the churches rests on a common acknowledgment of their authority. But the unity of the Church is realized effectively only when these objective representations of the gospel are personally appropriated by concrete groups of men and women as they go about the always concrete task of making sense of their lives. The gospel is not a principle of the Church in the abstract, but only as interpreted and appropriated in concrete and existential problematics...⁵⁵

The discovery of meaning, however, is "never finished; it is in fact an infinite process."⁵⁶ The world is always mediated by meaning. To discover the divine presence in Christ that is encountered in the liturgy is to always see it in new ways, to experience it in new forms, disclosing and re-discovering ever new meanings within the ground of the Church's own ongoing and living tradition.

⁵⁵See Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church is a Communion," *Liturgy* 3 (1983) 7-11.

⁵⁶Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 298.