



THE REV. KNOW-IT-ALL  
LOOKS AT THE REVISED TRANSLATION OF THE  
ROMAN MASS

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## The Rev. Know-it-all looks at the Revised Translation of the Mass

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### Why change the translation?

Dear Rev. Know it all,

Why must we endure more monkeying around with the Mass? Isn't this just another attempt to roll back the great advances made during the times of the Second Vatican Council? Why can't we just have the Mass in plain ordinary English?

Sincerely,

Verne A. Kiular

Dear Verne,

Perhaps a look back in History might help, a look far back, before the Second Vatican Council, back before the First Vatican Council, back to one of the least known and most misunderstood of Church Councils: Vatican Zero.

Vatican Zero is not accepted as a true Church council because we know so little about it. We have only fragmentary evidence and this is gathered from the remnants of a treatise by St. Euflimsius the Stylite, titled "What are These Goofballs Up to Now?" (In Latin, "*Quaecumque Facient Hi Stulti Nunc?*") Another problem is that this particular gathering was held under no known Church auspices.

It is to be remembered that at the time the Vatican was not the home of the Holy Father. It was the Emperor Nero's favorite race track. Those who question the importance of the council remind us that there seem to have more bookies present at it than theologians. When asked if he planned to send representative to the meeting, Pope Clement responded "*Mercules! Congregare deliris istis? Nunquam!*" (Good heavens! Meet with those loons? Never!)

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The Treatise begins with “*Introivit anas in tabernam...*” this seems to be an attempt at humor which loses more than a little in translation. St. Euflemsius goes on to decry the replacing of the noble Greek language with barbaric Latin tongue. However, Euflemsius comes out solidly in opposition to any return to Aramaic at all as a surrender to the hard core reactionaries of the Jerusalem and Damascus Churches.

Remember that Latin was allowed in the Mass because it was the NEW vernacular. The universal language of commerce was Greek. Greek was used from Germany in the north to Egypt in the south, from Spain and England in the west to India in the east. East of the Jordan, Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and still spoken by modern Assyrians, was better known. It was the vernacular until Christianity caught on in Alexandria, Egypt and in Rome which were Greek speaking cities.

There were more people in Rome who spoke Greek than Latin at the time of Christ. It was an international city whose immigrant population, if one includes slaves, probably exceeded its native population. Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt were also thoroughly Greek cities. The Church used Aramaic in the east and Greek in the west.

As the second and third centuries unfolded, Christianity slowly caught on in the wild west, in Carthage (Tunisia) and Spain, Germany, Italy and Northern France. Southern France around Marseilles was largely Greek speaking. As the empire started to split along a sort of cultural fault line stretching down the coast of the former Yugoslavia, the west including Rome began to speak Latin more commonly and the use of Greek died out in the far west. The Christian East from Syria to India spoke Aramaic, and the Christian heartland, Northern Egypt, Turkey, the Holy Land and Greece continued to speak Greek.

The Islamic conquest of the Christian heartland changed all that. By 750, after beginning in about 630 AD, the missionaries of Islam had conquered the Christian world from Spain to Pakistan leaving only Greece, France and Italy as major Christian lands.

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The Aramaic speaking Church in the east was eclipsed by the Muslim conquest and even the Greek and Latin speaking areas of North Africa and Syria slowly started speaking Arabic, the language of the conquerors. It was not such a stretch for the Christians of the east, because Arabic like Hebrew and Aramaic, is a Semitic language, but the Latin and Greek culture of Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia were wiped out.

The Greek speaking heartland of Christianity slowly fell to the Muslims beginning with the gradual conquest of Turkey beginning around 1000 AD. That meant that the center of the Christian world moved to what had been the far west of the classical world. It was practiced mostly by hulking, unwashed, illiterate barbarians, from whom I happen to be descended.

They didn't get out much, except for the occasional crusade. Most people in Europe of the dark ages never got more than five miles away from home. Each little village had its own dialect. It was unwritten and incomprehensible to those from the next town over. You still see traces of it in Europe. My mother's cousins in Lower Upper Hessa (Yes there really is such a place) get into heated discussions with my father's cousins from about seven miles down the road as to which village speaks a better form of German dialect. To me, both dialects sound like the Swedish chef on a bender. (Note to the humor impaired; the Swedish chef is a puppet character who talks with a vaguely Scandinavian accent) And don't get me started on the Bavarians. No one can understand them. Probably just as well.

Where was I? Oh yes, Latin was the only possible common language in the West. It was spoken by anyone who could read, and by many who couldn't until about 1750! Sir Isaac Newton wrote his best stuff in Latin. It was the only way it could be read by scholars worldwide.

So you see, dear reader, language has its problems. It is always creating incomprehensible dialects. Let's look at simple liturgical phrase, "the Lord be with you". In some places it would be perfectly acceptable to translate this as "Yo, What up dog?"

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Americans, especially those from the Bridgeport area of Chicago, talk funny. I remember a rather tedious Englishman who lectured me every time I asked him to pass the butter. I, having been raised to speak Prince Richard's English don't say "butter." I say "Budder", all the while thinking I am saying "Butter." He would remonstrate with me endlessly saying "but-t-t-t-er." To which I would respond, "That's what I'm saying, you English twit! Now please pass the @\$#! budder!"

Surely if you are a native of the People's Republic of Chicago you have caught yourself using those colorful dialectical phrases, such as "Jeet yet?" (Did you eat yet?) "No, d'jew?" (No, did you?)

Language changes as fast as a pair dice on an Indiana craps table. This is why universal languages appear. It's the only way people who live more than five miles apart can talk to each other. English is the new Latin. It is spoken by about 1.8 billion people world wide. Airplane Pilots have to speak English lest there be chaos in the skies. There are more people in China who speak English than there are in the United States. They may not speak it well, but they manage. Especially if you are in a souvenir shop in Shanghai. If you only speak an obscure language like Flemish or high-middle Bridgeport and, having been shanghaied, find yourself in Shanghai, you are going to have problems. But, if you come from Belgium where the eponymous Flemish language is spoken, you probably speak English better than this author does. So, English is the new Latin.

Now to insult everyone! The die hards who can't stand the Vernacular Mass need to remember that Latin was once the controversial new vernacular. Those who don't want to return to a more precise and universal translation of the Vernacular Mass need to admit that American is increasingly different from English. And Sout' Side English bears little resemblance to either. Stop being so narrow and provincial and learn to speak English, not just American.

So Verne, to answer your question, we are going to translate the Missal into modern English. Finally!

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Peace wit' all yous guys,

Rev. Know-it-all

(Next week we'll look at the actual text and have fun mocking the "dynamic equivalence" school of language translation.)

### Dynamic equivalence? Too dynamic, not equivalent.

Back in the glorious sixties, those heady days after the Second Vatican Council when, at last everything was going to be just wonderful now that the Catholic Church had come to its senses and shaken off the torpor of almost 2,000 years of unbroken tradition, translators of the liturgical and Biblical texts were, in general, students of the Dynamic Equivalence School of language translation. I spent many years at Bathsheba Bible College teaching dead languages to comatose seminarians, and my students were all followers of the Dynamic Equivalence School of language translation because most of them were incapable of translating their way out of a paper bag.

Dynamic equivalence tries to translate the thought of a text, not necessarily its literal meaning. After all, we want to bring the thoughts of the ancients to life, and since they were just folks like us, we should translate their words into modern words and phrases that express their true meaning. Thus, a Latin phrase like "*bene optime*" (literally, well best) should be translated as "groovy." Oh wait, no one says groovy anymore. The dynamically equivalent translation of "*bene optime*" as groovy would have been dynamic and equivalent for about three hours sometime in the autumn of 1967. Now it just sounds ridiculous.

My favorite translation silliness involves the use of the word "to" instead of "at" as in the phrase "to hand" instead of "at hand." "To hand" was all the rage for a while because it sounded vaguely British and thus sophisticated. The problem is that "to" transforms the noun "hand," something with fingers, into a verb, having to do with useful things like duct tape, "Have you any duct tape at hand? Is quite different from "Do you have any duct tape to hand?" The second example leads you to stand there waiting for the person in need of duct tape to finish the sentence. You may well ask. "To hand to whom?" as in "Hand duh' @\$#!@ duct tape to me, you jetrool, so's I can shut up 'dis stool pigeon

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poimenantly!” as one might say in Chicago. (“Jetroot” is a colorful local dialect word implying that someone has the brains of a cucumber.)

Herein lies the first problem with dynamic equivalence. Language changes, and American language changes faster than Liz Taylor changed husbands. (Seven husbands, eight marriages. Richard Burton, ever the optimist, married her twice.)

What was “groovy” then is totally lame now. And I have the feeling that “totally lame” is soon to be totally lame. Another fine example of the tendency of American English to change faster than a two-year-old’s britches is found in that beloved old Christmas carol that bids us. “don we now our (festive) apparel... Fa-la-la-la-lah, and mind your own business.” You see, words change meaning. Dynamic equivalence is a useful translation method for about two weeks.

When you are trying to translate a document that is universal and meant to be read for more than two weeks (like the Bible or the Mass), it is necessary to translate what the words actually mean. It may take people a little work to find out what words actually mean, words like “forbear” and “deign.” Scholars think that the unwashed multitude has the brains of a cucumber (c.f. above “jetroot”) and cannot look anything up.

So herein lies the second and greater problem with dynamic equivalence. Because they think you are as stupid as a vegetable, scholars will tell you what the text means. And surprise, it means what they want it to mean! That’s why dynamic equivalence was so popular with my students. When one of them would present me a translation of Cicero’s oration against Cataline that involved three clowns and a mule, they would say that it was a “loose” translation and that they were going for what Cicero actually meant. I am sure that some of my students ended up as liturgical translators.

A whole lot of theological revisionism went on under the guise of dynamic equivalence. A glaring example is found in the Gloria: “You take away the SIN of the world: have mercy on us.” The text should read “You take away the SINS of the world, have mercy on us.” You will notice, not being cucumbers, that the correct translation is SINS (plural) not SIN (singular). Plural, shmural? What’s the difference? Oh, the difference is huge.

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I can remember some theologians waxing eloquent in the glorious sixties about the Cosmic Christ as elucidated (look it up, jetrool) by Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955). Chardin held that humanity is converging toward an Omega point, a "Christ-consciousness" which will result in the Cosmic Christ." Allow me to quote Fr. Chardin, "The world (its value, its infallibility and its goodness) - that, when all is said and done, is the first, the last, and the only thing in which I believe." He believed in that and apparently believed in the Piltdown Man an anthropological hoax that tried to prove the bones of the missing link had been found in England. Fr. Chardin was rather heavily involved in that particular hoax. I hope things worked out for him.

Combine the Cosmic Christ with Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian and you stop believing in the reality of sins. (Rahner's concept of the Anonymous Christian hinted that everybody is a Christian, at least all the nice people. They just don't know it. I suspect that a few Jews Muslims and Buddhists might take issue with that)

Thus we were led to believe that there is clearly sin, but there are no sins. That was the spin put on things by some of my educators. We are all saved because "In Adam all die, and in Christ all are made alive"(1 Corinthians 15:22 ) There is no personal sin or personal responsibility. (Well, maybe Hitler and Stalin and all bank vice presidents.)

Quite a few theological axes were ground under the banner of dynamic equivalence and what we are doing now is making sure that the text is genuinely universal and says what the writers said, not what they supposedly "intended" to say. How do I know what they intended to say? Have I a crystal ball? When someone declares, " that's what the author meant to say." I want to ask said translator, "Oh, did you know him?"

Politically correct language finds a happy home among the followers of the dynamic equivalence school of translation. The assumption is that no good person in the past was a racist or a sexist or any other kind of -ist and definitely not any kind of -phobe. It is always fun to watch people try to explain away the fact that St. George Washington owned 316 persons of African descent at the time of his death and that St. Abraham Lincoln actually said "I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in anyway

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the social and political equality of the white and black races - that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.”( Fourth Debate with Stephen A. Douglas)

A more modern, and to my lights, humorous, example of the idiocy of political correctness is to be found in a very beautiful church in the better part of the Diocese of Frostbite Falls. It was built just when ecumenism was in its first flower and it was important to make our Separated Brethren feel comfortable in a Catholic “worship space.”

To make things easier for Protestants to swallow and to make Catholicism more “biblical” the role of Our Blessed Mother had to be de-emphasized. She needed to discreetly disappear, like some member of the Russian politburo who was suddenly absent among the dignitaries atop Lenin’s tomb, waving at the Mayday parade.

In the sanctuary of the Church there is Christ crucified, Christ, the Sacred Heart, and St. Joseph the Carpenter. Our Blessed Mother was relegated to a hidden side altar, and the rather discouraged looking, small beige image, was hung to one side of the altar, to emphasize the unimportance of Catholic devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. She was demoted from Mother of Church to crazy old aunt who lives in the attic.

That was the political correctness of the times. Thank god, that Marian devotion has come roaring back in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now I look at the sanctuary and, guess what? No women in the sanctuary. This is, of course, a horrendous violation of the political correctitude of our the present era.

Who knows what the next course correction the church will have to take in the never ending quest of theologians to prove that we really are nice people? We are a universal church in both time and space. A universal language, whether it be Latin or Greek or Standard English is important symbolically, though it may sound a bit quaint in its

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vocabulary and phrasing. The liturgy is more than who we are. It is also who we were and who we will become, because “He is the same yesterday today and tomorrow.” (Hebrews 3:18)

Next week: More fun with specific phrases in the “new” text.

### And with your spirit!

The first and most glaring thing you are going to notice in the “new” liturgical text is that the response to the opening dialogue , “the Lord be with you.” (Or something to that effect, is no longer “and also with you.” The congregation will respond (hopefully) “and with your spirit.” Why bother? Isn’t it really the same thing?

IT MOST CERTAINLY IS NOT THE SAME THING! At the very beginning of the Mass, we jump into the deep end of the pool. We live in a world that says what you see is what you get. Materialism, the belief that matter is all that exists, is the reigning philosophy. It was the belief of Marx, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot. It was the belief of Hitler, Eichmann and Himmler. It was the belief that gave permission to the great mass-murderers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is the belief that permits the abortion-genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to continue unabated into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is the belief of most of the couch potatoes who get their world view from reality shows and their only exercise at the shopping mall. Materialism is the belief that people are just things. People are just glorified animals who have opposable thumbs and credit cards. Babies in the womb can be killed because they are just lumps of tissue. What matters is what you own, because if you can’t see it, it ain’t real. And that includes unborn children.

To a world that believes there is no such thing as spirit, that is a non-material reality, the Catholic Church assembled says, “and with your SPIRIT!” Take that, Anaxagoras, Lucretius and Charles Darwin! (Born 500BC, 100BC and 1809AD, respectively. Materialism is not a new idea. )

I have spent about 45 years pondering what the word “spirit” means. In English we speak of soul and spirit, (*anima* and *spiritus* in Latin; *psyche* and *pneuma* in Greek. *Pneuma* is a Greek word whose primary meaning is “a blowing or breathing,” the breath, that which gives life. It gets even more complicated in Hebrew. You’ve got

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*ruach*, which means wind or breath, moving air. Then there's *nephesh*, life's breath, from the root word to breath and *neshoma* which is the soul, the consciousness corresponding to the Greek word *psyche* and the Latin word *anima*. God is "*ruach*" He doesn't have a *nephesh* or *neshoma*. He is "*ruach*."

As I said, I have contemplated these things and have had struggles to understand them for 45 years. I have learned Latin and Greek and Hebrew. If you ask what the word "spirit" really means, I would have to tell you "Beats me." That's how we start the Mass in the Latin rite of the Roman Catholic Church. We run smack-dab into a mystery that is beyond our definitions, but is still at the very heart of our being, of being itself, for that matter. Would it just be simpler to say "and with you also?" Yes it would. It would also be easier to buy a loaf of spongy sandwich bread at the Quickie Mart than it would be to knead the dough, let the yeast rise, fill the house with the perfume of baking bread and to inhale deeply as you break open the loaf still hot from the oven. We live in a world that pretends it loves the fresh baked and the home made, but we settle for the "Lack-of Wonder Bread" everyday, because the other is just too much work.

It is just too much work to live in a world that is hidden from our eyes, to consider the demands of a God who is woven into every atom and molecule of the tangible world, yet is Himself unseen. It seems foolish to kneel before a God who appeared as an infant and who still appears as a piece of bread. The world of the reality shows and the materialists will laugh at us and tell us to "Get real!"

In the creed there is a phrase that will be changing. "Seen and unseen" will become "visible and invisible." Nothing embodies the obscure point I am trying to make as vividly as this change does. Seen and unseen are quite different. When I hide behind a door, I am unseen. I CAN be seen. It is possible to see me. I am just unseen because I am waiting for you to count to a hundred and say, "Ready or not, hear I come." To be invisible is to be "un-see-able." It cannot be seen. So you see, seen and unseen are quite different from visible and invisible.

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We live, as C.S. Lewis puts it as amphibians, on the border between two worlds, the visible, the world of scientific method, and the invisible world, the world of love and hope and good and evil, of beauty and of truth. Beauty cannot be seen. Things can be seen. And seeing them we may judge them beautiful, because we perceive the invisible quality of beauty.

For the materialist, a sunrise is just the interplay of gases and solar radiation. The materialist who comments on a beautiful sunrise betrays his own philosophy. Of all the proofs for the existence of God, I sometimes think that beauty is the greatest. He is the author of beauty, He is the source of our instinct for beauty, He is beauty itself, breathing and living, filling us and all creation with His Holy Breath. I suspect that for animals, beauty is not an issue.

Things exist to be used, not to be admired. This is obviously true with cats, but perhaps I have offended dog lovers, and I must admit that some of my best friends are dogs. No one greets you with a more sincere affection than a dog. Still, you must admit, that you are the “bringer of treats” and the “thrower of squeaky toys.” All that affection is a good investment on Fido’s part. (Cat’s are a source of wonder to me. They get as much attention as Fido, but seem not really to care about us in the least. I sometimes think cats are space aliens who have hypnotized some unsuspecting earthlings. But I digress.)

A sunrise or a rainbow benefits no one in the material sense, but still we stand in awe of their beauty. That immaterial quality makes life worth living and to me is the surest proof of the Breath that made the universe for Love’s sake. So, the Lord be with you, and with your Spirit, because when all is said and done, that’s what you are!

### *Confiteor and Gloria*

Moving on to the Confession of Sin, or the *confiteor*. (*Confiteor* is a Latin word meaning “I confess.” It is the Latin translation of the Greek word “*homologeō*” which means “I confess, I agree, I say the same thing.” In essence, we are agreeing with God’s judgment that I am a sinner.

Just a word about sin. The Greek word for sin is “*hamartia*.” It means “to miss the target,” and even more basically it means “to fail.” I remember hearing a great light of the television world say that she had never failed, she had just had a lot of learning experiences. Not me. I have failed, flat on my face-down in the mud-my own fault-failed. St. Paul tells us that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) All of us have missed the mark, all of us have fallen short of our God given destiny. Everyone has the sense that we haven’t done what we should, or been the person, the friend, the spouse, the parent, the employee or the boss that we could have, should have been. The question is whose fault is it? We try to pin the blame on circumstances, on our spouse, on the kids, the dog ate my homework, I didn’t get your message, traffic was bad, it’s not my fault, like Adam trying to pin the blame on Eve and Eve trying to pin the blame on the snake. The *Confiteor* deals with the issue.

The current inaccurate translation says, “I have sinned... through my own fault,” the new better translation says, “I have greatly sinned....through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault!” (It is traditional to beat one’s breast at this point, though I imagine it isn’t required.)

Why mention whose fault it is the three times? That has meaning in itself. It is a custom we learned from the Jews, like so much of the good stuff we have, like Jesus and the Bible. When something is repeated three times, it’s a done deal. In Hebrew it’s called

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*Khazakah*. In a synagogue, so I'm told, if you sit in the same spot on *Shabbas* three times in row, that's your seat. If someone else is in your spot when you come in, you look at them and they quietly move. Third time's the charm. That's why we say, "Holy, Holy, Holy," and "Lamb of God, Lamb of God, Lamb of God". It makes things absolute.

This comes from the fact that there is no comparative or superlative in Hebrew. There is no "good, better, best." In order to say "best" you can repeat the adjective, "good-good" or "slow-slow." If you really want to make your point, you say "good-good-good" (*tov, tov, tov*). So it is that in the Latin liturgy we repeat things in threes. "When I say through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault!" I really mean it! The repetition in the original text means something and we are putting it back where it belongs.

On to the *Gloria*!

The Gloria is very different in the newer text. The phrase "and peace to his people on earth," becomes "and on earth peace to people of good will." God loves every human being, not just His people and not all people are His people. The old text seems to assume either that God is exclusive, or that all humanity belong to Him. Once again we have Rahner's anonymous Christian. The old version seems not to take free will into account. The new version emphasizes God's love for all humanity and the sad fact that not all of humanity loves Him back. We are free to accept or reject Him and His grace, an idea that Luther, Calvin and Mohammad deny. (Calvin and Luther were the founders of Protestantism, Mohammad the founder of Islam. Jesus, the founder of Catholicism, believed in God's universal love and in free will.)

"Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father" in the current version becomes "Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son." Again a huge difference! Jesus ISN'T the only Son of the Father. The saints are sons and daughters of the Father, and you and I can become saints. The old version leaves out one of the central ideas of Christianity: ADOPTION! We are all destined to become sons and daughters of God, members of that Family which is God. Though, sadly, many never accept their amazing destiny. Jesus is the

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only son of God by nature, but He became man that we might become God, as St Irenaus of Lyon said it, around 180 AD (Not gods, like the Mormons teach. Being my private personal god would just be too much work as far as I'm concerned.) Once again, the dynamic equivalence people simplified the brains right out the translation.

Next, the current "we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory" becomes "We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory." There's a whole lot more going on in the second, more accurate version. The dynamic equivalent version of "blessing, adoring and glorifying" is condensed into one word: worship. One suspects that they don't want to make such a fuss about God's greatness.

How can a man bless God? I thought God blessed human beings, (and chihuahuas on the feast of St. Francis.) The word in Latin is *benedicere*, "to speak well of" or "to wish well." The Greek word "*eulogein*" means the same thing. The Hebrew word for bless, "*baruch*" is fascinating. It is related to the word for "knee" and seems to imply "coming down." We all know what the dynamic equivalent crowd thinks of kneeling. Don't get me started!

When God blesses us, He lowers Himself for love of us. When we bless God, we bow before His sovereignty and glory. The word glory (*doxa*) in Greek may come from "shining or radiance." It thus meant honor, reputation. It was used to translate the Hebrew word "*Kabod*" which meant heaviness or weight.

(If one is irreverent, which the Rev. Know-it-all would never be, one might think of the Monty Python routine, "Oh Lord, you are so big. Gosh, we're all really impressed down here I can tell you!" Well, guess what? HE REALLY IS SO VERY BIG, AND YOU SHOULD DARN WELL BE IMPRESSED! Those wags at Monty Python may well be in for a bit of a shock as will be some dynamic equivalent types.)

Where was I . Oh yes, the whole list in the more accurate version implies bowing down before the radiance and grandeur of God. In modern American parlance "worship" implies singing inspiring songs at a lively worship service, followed by doughnuts, or

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perhaps coffee in the atrium of the worship center. In the Catholic sense, worship is nothing less than the glory of God manifested in the sacrifice of Calvary, not a well-padded *tuchus* in a well-padded theater chair in a mega church.

What about adore? I would suggest that there is no adoration like the dreamy gaze of two hormone-crazed adolescents staring into one another's eyes on a park bench. To adore, is to fall in love. Unfortunately, we tend to fall in love in darkened restaurants and theaters by a light in which we would not purchase a used suit of clothing. Only God is worthy of adoration, and we would do well to fall in love with Him before we fall in love with some schlub who is probably going to squeeze the tooth-paste tube in the middle and to put on forty or fifty pounds in the two years after the wedding.

Next Week: I am far from done with this rant.

### *The Credo – Begotten and Consubstantial*

When last I wrote I was trying to define worship in understandable terms. God wants us to fall crazy-head-over-heels in love with Him because He is crazy-head-over-heels in love with us. In fact He is so in love with us that He wants to adopt us as his children.

This brings us to the next casual mistake in the American translation of the text. In the poorly translated text we have “Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father”. Jesus isn’t the only Son of God. He may be the only begotten Son of God, but you and I are sons and daughters of God by adoption. This isn’t just a theological nicety. It is the heart of the Christian faith.

[St. Irenaeus of Lyon](#), writing in 180AD explains this in his book “Against Heresies”. He says that: “...the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself. Therefore, we are returning to the more accurate translation which reads, “Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son.”

I’ve already explained the nonsense about [Teilhard de Chardin](#), [Karl Rahner](#) and sin versus sins, so we’ll just move on to the Creed.

“We believe in one God” becomes “I believe in one God.” “Well, isn’t just that a little self-centered? After all Jesus taught us to say Our Father, not my Father!” There you go again, with your Sesame Street, everything is beautiful in its own way psycho-babble again! Before you can say “We” you have to say “I.” Dare I say it this way? You have to join the club. You are free to join or not join. We is a dangerous word sometimes. History is full of people who say “we” when they mean “I” Political correctness is the “we” of the current age. “We all believe this, don’t we?” The phrase “We, the people”

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has been bandied about at the guillotine by Robespierre, by Hitler at the gas chamber, by Stalin at the gulag, and by the Brothers Castro and their friend Che Guevara at the Isla de Pinos. Don't you agree comrade?

The word for believe, faith and belief is the Greek root word *pist* - which means trust, and not simply an educated guess, as in the hopeful phrase, "I believe the Cubs will win the pennant this year." We are not just a blind herd, thinking politically-correct things, engaging in group-think, our eyes firmly fixed on the tail of the cow in front of us assuming that the presidential cow in the lead has some clue as to where he is going.

I trust God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not because my mother trusted, not because my father or my friends trusted, but because I trust. And because I trust in God, I join the fellowship of those who are learning what it is to be one of His children. I say "I believe" that I might say "Our Father." A parent loves each of his children uniquely and personally. He loves his children and therefore loves his family.

Next, the Father in whom I trust, the Father who is "Ours" is the "Creator of heaven and earth," not just its Maker. To create is to bring something into existence. When we create a work of art, we reflect the creativity of God. We don't make art. We create it. Everything else we make. I can't create a lime, but I can make you a really good daiquiri, if you provide me with fresh limes, sugar and rum. (Really! I got a great recipe on a secret trip to Cuba a few years back. It was legal. Visas and everything. The priesthood really is a very exciting way of life.) You get my drift. Give me the ingredients and a good blender and we're in business. I make. God creates.

Next, you'll notice that Jesus is "born of the Father before all ages" not just "eternally begotten of the Father." Further on we read that he is "consubstantial with the Father, not just "one in being." These are among the central reasons for which the [Council of Nicea](#) was called and the Creed first written.

There was an Egyptian priest named [Arius](#), (250-236AD) who couldn't swallow the idea

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that Jesus, a man, was somehow the same substance as God the Father. He just couldn't believe that God was three-in-one, a solidarity, not a solitude. He would go down to the docks and teach the sailors sea chanties with heretical words, thus spreading his ideas throughout the world. He spread bad ideas with catchy tunes, not unlike some writers of hymns today.

Arianism, the belief that Jesus is not quite divine in the way the Father is divine, is like a shingles virus in the body of the Church. It keeps popping up long after the original infection. There is a lot of Arianism among us today, and it is as seductive as ever.

The word consubstantial means more than just one in being. Consubstantial means that they are the same kind of being. They share a reality that is perfect. He was born of the Father before all ages. He exists outside of Creation, not just at its beginning. The word consubstantial was hammered out over centuries, and the dynamic equivocaters thought they could improve on the great filter of history. After all, it was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.

And no, I didn't bring back any cigars!

Next week: Will this guy never get tired of this stuff?

PS I was recently asked how much the thirty silver pieces that were Judas fee for betraying Jesus are worth in today's currency. It is not easy to make the comparison, but it probably would be about \$15,000. It is also thought to represent the price of a slave, a human life.

On another note, the Governor in Illinois was recently accorded the honor of presenting the leadership award at the banquet of Personal PAC. Personal PAC is a bi-partisan political action committee dedicated to electing pro-choice candidates to state and local office in Illinois. The pious state official, Pat Quinn did it because he thought it was, in his words "the proper, Christian thing to do" that is, to present an abortion-rights group's

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leadership award.

On yet another note, governor Quinn received \$500,000 in cash and in-kind services to his 2010 campaign from Personal PAC. That would come to well over 33,000 pieces of silver. Just goes to show that some people drive a harder bargain than others.

### The *Credo* – Incarnation

Continuing with the Creed, “By the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary” becomes “By the Holy Spirit, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary.” So what’s the difference between born and incarnate? Aren’t you following the news these days? Jesus didn’t become man on the day he was born, (man being the usual inclusive word for human). He became man the moment he was conceived in the Virgin-Mother’s womb. You’re human from the moment of conception, not from the moment you’re born. The same was true of our incarnate Lord Jesus.

There was a curious heresy called [docetism](#), which held that God would never take on flesh. It would diminish Him. Instead He appeared among us a kind of ghost or apparition that left no footprints and cast no shadow. He may have been born, but was not ever truly flesh and blood. This idea was held by [gnostics](#) (gnostic comes from, the Greek word meaning knowledge). The gnostics claimed to have a secret knowledge of Christ given only to special people, The best simple definition of gnosticism, I’ve ever heard is that one is saved by theology, usually one’s own private theology.

Ignatius of Antioch wrote about the gnostics in his letter to the Smyrnaeans (100-110AD) “They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not hold the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Savior, Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.”

Interesting. That means a disciple of St. Peter who had become a Christian perhaps 50 or 60 AD and was bishop of Antioch by 67 AD believed that the Eucharist was flesh and blood. That puts literal belief in the Real Presence back to at least 20 years after the Resurrection. Of course, I would put it at a few days before the Resurrection, namely

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the first Holy Thursday. But in the letter of St. Ignatius, we have documentary evidence outside the Bible for the belief in the Real Presence.

Where was I? Oh Yes. Gnostics.

To say that Jesus is born is quite different from saying that he was incarnate. Ideas are said to be born. To be incarnate is to be flesh and blood. It is to say that a man was truly God and that God was truly man. It is to say that nine months before the first Christmas, the Infinite and all Powerful Creator of the universe became flesh and blood in the shrine of the Virgin's womb. God became what progressive moderns call an unimportant blob of tissue, that can be legally and easily disposed of, if found to be in any way an inconvenience. God became flesh and dwelt amongst us. If you can believe in the Incarnation, you can believe in the Resurrection. You can even believe in Transubstantiation and the Real Presence. It is His incarnation that cause wonderment, not simply His birth. Not only was it flesh that God became, but in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, He suffered the fate of all humanity. He truly died. Those same people who denied that Christ came in the flesh denied that He died a true death in the flesh. These range from Muslims who believe that Barabbas was substituted for Our Lord Jesus on the cross and that Jesus was taken away to heaven to await the final judgment.

(By the way, Barabbas is called a "*lestes*" or "bandit" in the Greek text of the New Testament. Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, uses that word to mean revolutionary. Barabbas was probably a revolutionary guerilla and seems to have been later re-arrested by the Romans and eventually did suffer execution). Then we have the loons that espouse the swoon theory that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross, but was revived by His disciples after He had been taken down from the cross.

We Catholics have believed from the first days that He was really human and really died. That He really rose from the dead in real flesh and that He remains with us in the flesh by His Real Presence, which is why in addition we are changing the words "He suffered, died and was buried" back to the more accurate "He suffered death and was

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buried.” He didn’t just suffer and die. He suffered death, which is the great leveler and the great question. Why do we live only to die? It is the fear that clouds all of human life. He didn’t avoid it. He embraced it. He was fully human. The gnostics and the skeptics can’t bring themselves to believe in a God so humble that He would endure the absolute weakness of death.

They say “Absurd!” We say, “What wondrous love is this, oh my soul!”

Next week: “This guy isn’t even half way through!”

### The Credo – The Third Day

*WARNING: This is even more obscure than most of this crackpot's ideas!!! There is probably no reputable scholar that has ever written the following and it is pure speculation on the part of Rev. Know-it-all. Still, it's kind of interesting if you can wade through it. Remember to take everything the Rev. Know-it-all says with a grain of salt.*

“On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures,” will now be read as “and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” This may seem a trifling difference, but there's more to it than meets the eye. First of all, the latter translation is the way it's written in Latin. That's also the way it's written in Greek the language in which the Nicene Creed was first written. Now don't lose me here. This is an obscure point. The fact that Jesus rose from the dead is not the whole point of the phrase, “He rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

The third day is not just incidental. Three is a huge concept in Hebrew *gematria*. (*Gematria* is the symbolic meaning attached to numbers) When three appears in the text, it symbolizes divinity. For example, the three heavenly visitors who told Abraham about Sara's impending pregnancy. (Gen.18:1-8) Jesus had said that He would rise on the third day. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up... He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this... and they believed the Scriptures and the word which Jesus had spoken.” (John 2:19-22) The disciples seem to think that there was something important about not only His rising, but His rising on the third day. Consequently, the first Christians maintained that Jesus had not only risen from the dead, but that He had risen on the third day. That fact must have been pretty important to land in the Creed.

The point is this: Jews maintain that there is nothing in the Torah about a divine

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messiah rising from the dead. In the words of my dear friend, Rabbi Yehudah ben Yiddshkeit, “The Messiah isn’t supposed to be divine and doesn’t rise from the dead. He’s a man. He’s born, he re-establishes the temple, he establishes justice and world peace and then he dies. We still can’t eat shrimp!” So is my friend the rabbi right? Is there no mention of the resurrection in the Torah, the first 5 books of the Bible? This was a huge problem for the first Christians.

The letter to the Hebrews deals with the problem in the following way. “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” (Hebrews 11:9) Now, get ready for really obscure. The Letter to the Hebrews claims that Abraham’s belief in the resurrection is found in Genesis 22:3-5. “And Abraham rose early in the morning... and took two of his servants with him, and Isaac his son... and went to the place of which God had told him. ON THE THIRD DAY Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place far off. Abraham said to his servants, “Wait here... and I and the boy will go further. We will worship, and come back to you.”

In other words, Abraham trusted God so completely that he reasoned even if God would require the death of Isaac, He would restore him to life by raising him from the dead. People often are appalled that God would require such a test of loyalty and that Abraham would submit to it. The Letter to the Hebrews points out that it was Abraham’s trust in God and hope of resurrection that allowed him to take such a risk. If God required the sacrifice, God would return Isaac to his father by means of resurrection. Abraham says to his servants, “WE will come back,” not “I will come back.” In this text of Scripture, at least as far as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews is concerned, this “WE” instead of “I” is proof that Abraham believed in the resurrection.

Isaac was a type for the Messiah and his “figurative resurrection” occurred on THE THIRD DAY. Resurrection is not a fulfillment of Scripture, not a development, but a fact that is written into the story of Isaac. The phrase, “the third day”, would be a clear indication that the Scriptures had mentioned resurrection, if only indirectly. If the Torah says that Father Abraham believed in the resurrection with a faith strong enough to risk

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slaughtering Isaac, then there is resurrection! And if Isaac is a type for the messiah, then resurrection is a messianic expectation. You and I might not think like this, but it seems that Jesus and His disciples did, and that is why resurrection on the third day was important enough to be included in the Creed. It refuted the refutations of Jesus' messiah-hood at a time when those refutations were much discussed, and troublesome to many.

The Greek and Latin texts, of which the newer version of the Creed is a more accurate translation, grammatically emphasize that this importance of the "third day-ness". It is a kind of Biblical footnote. This emphasis, I suspect is directed toward Rabbinic Pharisees who were vigorously trying to refute Jesus' messianic claims. At the time of the Nicene Council, a great philosophical, theological battle raged among Jews, Christians and Pagans (by this I mean followers of the old Roman religion). The loyalty of many people whom today we would probably call Jewish Christians was at stake, and they were not an inconsiderable part of the Christian community and the Roman Empire.

The Nicene creed was written squarely in the midst of that battle. The first version of the Creed was produced by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The final version was produced by the First Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. Between these two councils, there was a serious attempt by one of the Roman emperors to roll back the growth of the Catholic Church.

Julian, known to history as the "apostate," ruled from 361 to 363. He passionately hated the Christianity that his uncle Constantine the Great had legalized in 313 AD. It is to be remembered that the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed two centuries before by the Roman Emperors Vespasian and his son Titus in 70 AD, and that the Roman Emperor had once and for all ended sacrifices on the temple mount in 132 AD. The Christians saw this as fulfillment of Jesus' words "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Church claimed to be the true temple, the messianic temple made of living stones. "You are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple." (1Peter 2:5) As part of his campaign to prove that Christianity was not the fulfillment of

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the religion of Israel, Julian tried to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. His attempt failed spectacularly. Here's a quote from a personal friend of Julian's Ammianus Marcellinus:

“Julian thought to rebuild at an extravagant expense the proud Temple once at Jerusalem... (but), when fearful balls of fire, breaking out near the foundations, continued their attacks, the workmen, after repeated scorching, could approach no more and he gave up the attempt.”

Sounds like a bad kung fu movie: explosions but no car-chases.

So the phrasing of the line in the Creed “*kai anastanta te trite hemera kata tas Graphas,*” or if you prefer Latin “*et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas*” is best rendered in English as “and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” You may be unimpressed, but remember all that junk you threw out of the attic when grandma died? Now don't you wish you'd thought about it every time you watch Antiques Road Show?

Maybe we shouldn't be so anxious to toss stuff just because it's old. Even when milk gets old we call it cheese.

### An aside about Creeds

Before I continue with my fulminations about translation, I must make a correction. A few weeks ago I spoke of “God the creator of heaven and earth” That, as I am sure you noticed, comes from the Apostles’ Creed, or “*Symbolum Apsotolorum*”. I suspect that the use of the word “creator” in Latin is of greater antiquity than the word “maker”, which is used in the Nicene Creed. Perhaps this is an opportune moment to explain why we have two Creeds, and when one is to be used instead of the other and so on.

First, let us look at the Hebrew word “*barah*”, always a fun thing to do. It is used only in reference to God. Only God creates in the fullest sense of the word. Latin has two words “creator” and “*factor*” that is creator and maker respectively. Greek has only one word that will have to do for both creator and maker “*poietes*” from the verb “*poieten*,” meaning to do, cause, make and so on. In English, we get the word poetry, and not much else from it. Go figure. There were translation problems the day after the Council of Nicaea I imagine. So, in the Apostles’ Creed we have “creator.” In the Nicene Creed we have “maker”.

Note: an important point mentioned above which is the proper name of both creeds, the Apostolic Symbol and the Nicene Symbol.

PAY ATTENTION! YOU CAN IMPRESS PEOPLE AT COCKTAIL PARTIES WITH THIS STUFF. IT WILL MAKE YOU SEEM MUCH SMARTER THAN YOU REALLY ARE! BELIEVE ME. I KNOW.

The Nicene Creed is called the *Symbolum Nicaenum* in Latin and “*Symbolon tes Pisteos*” in Greek. The Roman Christians called it the “Nicene Symbol” while the Greeks of the 4th century called it the “Symbol of the faith”. I suspect this is because the Latins already had a “symbol” the Symbol of the Apostles. (Why does he keep calling the

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Creed a symbol? It's getting a little irritating.) I am using the word symbol because that's exactly what it is!

In modern English a symbol is some obscure representation of another thing, like a single perfect rose symbolizing a young man's devotion to his sweetheart. (It usually symbolizes that he is in big trouble for having said or done something stupid.)

This is not what the Greco/Latin word *symbolon*/*symbolum* meant. A symbol was literally a thing thrown together. It often referred to two pieces of a coin broken between contracting parties, like those schlocky heart necklaces that come together to form one whole heart. (These are worn by the same irritating couples who wear matching outfits.)

A *symbolon* was a token of recognition. In ancient Athens, it was an identification token for jurors in the assembly, which in Greek is *ekklesia*, the same word used for Church. Thus, the *symbolon* which we call the Creed, is our admission ticket to the Church. It is the device by which fellow Christians recognize one another.

I was taught, back at the Casa Santa Animalia, my college seminary, that in the early Church, anyone could come to the first part of the Mass, the part composed of the readings, sermon and opening prayers, but that at a certain point, a porter, a sort of ordained bouncer, would make sure that only baptized Christians in good standing were in the congregation. This moment is memorialized in the Eastern Church by the words "The doors, the doors. In wisdom let us be attentive!" The non-Christians, the Catechumens and the Penitents were ushered out by the porter. The doors were closed, a sign of peace was exchanged and the Mass continued.

It was at this point that the Creed was finally placed in the Eastern Liturgy sometime around 400 AD. We in the West didn't use the Nicene Creed at Mass until around 1100. We had our own Creed that was older than the Nicene Creed: the Apostles Creed, and it wasn't necessarily used at Mass.

No one is quite sure where the Apostles Creed comes from. There is an old story that each of the Twelve Apostles added a verse to the Apostles' Creed, hence the name.

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Perhaps this is the case. No one knows for sure. It is certainly very ancient and is thought to have been part of the Baptismal Liturgy of the Roman Church and still was even when I was a boy. I remember the terrible anxiety of godparents preparing for Baptism. They had to recite the Apostles' Creed from memory. Now the priest just asks some questions and the godparents answer "I do" or "Whatever" or "Huh?" We don't want to tax the overburdened modern brain by actually having anyone study what they claim to believe.

So that is why we have two Creeds in the West, the Nicene being more complex. The Apostles Creed is most appropriately used during the Lenten and the Easter season when we are thinking about and recommitting ourselves to our own Baptism. I suspect that sometimes it is used because it is a lot shorter than the Nicene. Perhaps soon we'll have call in confessions and drive through communions. Ah, progress!

One more brief reflection on the Apostles Creed: "He descended into hell" this phrase certainly does alarm a lot of people. The use of the word hell is part of an unfortunate translation of a word in the Latin phrase, "*descendit ad inferos.*" This literally means "He descended to those below." It seems to refer to a text from 1Peter3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah."

How's that for obscure? The first Christians believed that, because of the justice and mercy of God, Jesus descended to the realm of the dead in order to give a chance for salvation to those who had not had the opportunity to enter a covenant with God. This realm of the dead is not what we mean by the eternal fire prepared for the "devil and his angels." (Matt 25:41)

Don't fret. It is interesting that the Bible does give us an example of post-mortem salvation. It is reasonable to assume that God in His justice and mercy makes the offer

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of Salvation to all people at some point. As St. Faustina reported, the Lord had told her in one of her visions that “At the hour of death I am my own apostle.”

God’s got it covered. Be calm!

Next week: Back to the new text!

### The Apostles' Creed and the *Sanctus*

The Apostles Creed, of which I have already written about, has only a couple of changes.

“He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit” becomes “who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.” People conceive. The Holy Spirit is a person not a force.

I remember hearing of a Pentecostal pastor whose ministry had stagnated. He was praying and, as I often do, began to pray the prayer of St. Peter. (That means he fell asleep.) He had a dream in which he was taken up to the throne of God, and there he said to God the Father, “I have the experience of the Holy Spirit! Why isn't my ministry growing?”

Furious, the Father rose from His throne grabbed the minister by his collar and shook him, saying “My Holy Spirit isn't an experience. He's a Person. Treat Him like one!”

The minister awoke terrified, and from that day he started to treat the Holy Spirit like a Person, addressing Him, honoring Him, thanking Him and above all listening to Him. His ministry and congregation grew to the point that he was the pastor of the largest single congregation (not denomination) in the world.

The Holy Spirit isn't a power. He's a person!

Next comes a line that I have already explained in part. “He descended to the dead.” becomes “He descended into hell.” The word “hell” is reinstated. Just a reminder that the Catholic Church still believes that there is a hell, and there is a chance that you and I and those we love most dearly just might end up there if we refuse the salvation offered to us in Christ.

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In the Preface Dialogue “It is right to give him thanks and praise” becomes “It is right and just” (to give Him thanks.) I suspect that this is just a matter of more accurate translation, but in the *Sanctus* the “Holy, Holy” there is a far more significant word change. “Lord God of power and might.” becomes “Lord God of hosts.” Hosts is a military term. It means armies.

The first part of the *Sanctus* is the same as the *Kidusha*, or “sanctification”, part of the “*Amidah*” the “standing prayer” used at least three times a day in Jewish prayer. The *Kidusha* is a quote, more or less from Isaiah 6:3. The *Amidah*, or “standing prayer” still said in synagogues, developed soon after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD at the same time that the Catholic liturgy was developing.

Thus, the *Sanctus* takes us back to the last moment when the two traditions were intertwined, quite possibly to the very life time of the Apostles. God is called “*Adonai Tz'vaot*” or “Lord of *Sabaoth*” *Sabaoth* here clearly refers to the angelic armies of God.

This is huge. God is not just the Lord of power and might. He is Lord of a power and might that we can only imagine, endless hosts of conscious beings who travel between our dimension and their own. In the “Screwtape Letters” C.S.Lewis has the devil calling us “amphibians.” We are like frogs on the edge of a pond living in water but venturing onto land. We live in two dimensions in this multi-dimensional universe. We live in the dimension of matter and we live in the invisible world of angels. And in that invisible world of angels there is a war raging. God is the God of Armies. This one word reminds us that there is a spiritual realm in which we participate at every moment of every day whether we know it or not. Further, there is an army out to destroy us and there is an army out to defend us. Ephesians 6:12 says “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” All this in one little word, “hosts!”

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PS News Flash:

The Vatican has recently issued a very rare form of document called a "*Motu Inapropio*." The document titled "*Vertigens et Celebrans*" mandates that churches, wherever possible, put the altar on a revolving platform, thus satisfying those who want to see the celebrants face and those who are sick of looking at the old goat. The relative speeds of the revolving altar should vary according to the respective length of the canon used. For the shorter canons, it is suggested that older clergy be strapped into a bar stool behind the altar to avoid injury. This should satisfy everyone.

### It's a Mystery

We are coming into the home stretch. You will notice that “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith is now just “the mystery of faith.” And there is one whole Memorial Acclamation missing!

Perhaps this is an opportune moment to discuss the idea of “mystery.” In modern English, mystery is, according to Webster (the dictionary, not the short, strange comedian from television) 1) a religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand, and 2) something not understood or beyond understanding, a piece of fiction dealing usually with the solution of a mysterious crime. 3) secretive quality or character as in “the mystery of her smile.”

When I was a little boy of six years, every time the beleaguered nun would try to explain a great truth of the faith, our fresh little faces would register all the understanding of medium sized blocks of wood. She would end the lesson by saying “It’s a mystery!” By this she meant “Trust me you little cretins. It’s an important truth of the faith but no one, including me, understands it.” After the Vatican Council, that particular nun ran off with the circus (as it were) and eventually ended up working in a juvenile detention center, having found her niche.

In ancient Greek (you knew this was coming, didn’t you?) the word is “*mysterion*.” It means a secret, or a secret ritual. It has to do with the word “mys,” a thing whispered. Webster also mentions that a mystery can refer to “a secret religious rite believed (as in Eleusinian and Mithraic cults) to impart enduring bliss to the initiate.”

In the ancient world, the public religion was a pretty silly affair. There were gods who chased around with mortals, had great wars and were sometimes part animal, but the

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public officials kept the gods happy with sacrifices and used the gods to insure the status quo. The gods were immoral by our standards and morality, in most cases, had nothing to do with religion. In fact, if you offered the right sacrifice and said the right incantation, the gods might just help you lie, cheat, steal, murder and seduce your neighbor's wife. After all, they were adept at it themselves. It is questionable how many of the well educated believed that such beings existed.

Philosophers like Socrates were occasionally executed for publicly saying the whole thing was a bunch of hooey, and other philosophers tried to mythologize the gods saying they were symbolic of philosophical truths. Others, like Lucretius, were materialist atheists who said that what you see is what you get. In this climate the essential religious questions were not getting answered, questions like "What happens when we die?" and "What's the purpose of life, anyway?" and "Where did all this stuff come from?" and "Why is there evil and sadness?" And the really big one: "If god or the gods are so perfect, why is the world they created such a wreck?"

Enter the mystery religions, which claimed to have a secret revelation (usually some weird speculation by some odd guru who claimed to have had the revelation). The mystery religions tried to answer these questions with a kind of philosophy dressed up in ritual; they developed a complicated theology that people were gradually let in on and those people who were initiated into the secrets of the group swore a solemn oath never to reveal what they had heard. It was all very cozy and gave the initiates a feeling that they knew something no one else knew and that they were somehow better and part of the "in crowd" philosophically. Sounds a little like the Freemasons or Star Trek fans.

Enter Christianity, which as I have already explained, didn't let everybody in to the Mass. It isn't that they were trying to keep it all secret. They were an evangelistic religion. They wanted everyone to hear what they had to say. Jesus told them "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the rooftops!" (Matt. 10:27) The theological content was no more secret than that of Judaism.

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The rituals were secret for very practical reasons. The first Christians didn't want their most cherished beliefs held up to derision, and they didn't want everyone knowing who the Christians were. Everybody knew who the clergy and leaders were, but the rank and file Christian had a certain anonymity. That's because Christianity was illegal and every once in a while, the Romans would decide to exterminate the Church. Best not to let everyone know your name and address.

This element of secrecy led the ancients to believe that Christianity was just another wacky mystery religion. Not so! Members of mystery religions didn't produce a lot of martyrs and they had nothing against putting a pinch of incense on the sacrificial fire in front of the emperor's statue. (The emperors were considered gods, that is until the army killed the divine emperor and got a new divine, immortal emperor.)

A good way to understand the Christian meaning of "mystery" is to understand the so-called mysteries of the Rosary. In the events of the life of our Lord and His blessed Mother, we see the invisible realities of heaven made visible. There's nothing much to understand something like the second Joyful Mystery, "Our blessed Mother visits St. Elizabeth." We see something more. John the Baptist in his mother's room acknowledges the Messiah in the Blessed Mother's womb, something unseen, yet wonderfully near and human. Christianity was a mystery religion that didn't hide the nature of its secrets, but revealed them to anyone who was interested. Jesus said to the disciples that ""The mystery of the kingdom of God has been given to you." (Mark 4:11) And what is the mystery, the secret of the kingdom?

Once Jesus said, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." (Matt. 11:11) As a Catholic, I believe that by my baptism I am born into the kingdom of God. In what possible way am I greater than John the Baptist? Simple! I know something that John didn't know. John didn't remain in this world long enough to see the cross! That's

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the mystery, the secret of the kingdom that has been given to me and you, if you will have it: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son!"

The greatness of God was hidden in the meekness of Christ, hidden in the baby in Mary's arms, hidden in the carpenter of Nazareth, hidden in the crucified rabbi from Galilee, hidden in what looks like bread and wine held up by the priest. All the love that ever was, all the truth that ever was, all the power that ever was became vulnerable in Jesus of Nazareth and is placed in the care of sinners like me in the form of a wafer of bread and a sip of wine. The invisible becomes visible, the infinite can be embraced God can be held in the palm of your hand!!! This is the secret of the kingdom of God, and it can only be received by trust in Him, and of course, trust is what faith really means.

After the Holy Spirit, the very breath of God, transforms bread and wine into the flesh and blood of God, the priest says "The Mystery of Faith!" We were saying, "Let us proclaim the mystery of faith." Now we are going to say what the text originally said, simply "the Mystery of Faith." We are not proclaiming it. We are defining it. In other words, if Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God, all the questions the gnostics and the ancient mystery cultists asked are answered in Him. The Christian gospel is that you can get to know the Creator of the universe by getting to know a Jewish carpenter who died 2000 years ago, but who came back from the dead and is accessible in the form of bread and wine we have just seen. The memorial acclamation defines the mystery. Mass, if entered into with trust, can answer all the questions we ask because Jesus is still the visible image of the invisible God. I see Him every time I hold up the consecrated host at Mass. What wondrous love is this, oh my soul?

PS

We old fellows were absolutely mystified by this introduction into the Mass. It was added after the council was well over and no one explained why, if I recall the times, it probably had something to do with the ecumenism of the time. The Lutherans, Methodists and Episcopalians all have the memorial acclamations right after the words

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of the Last Supper in their communion services. In fact, the first acclamation “Christ has died, etc. was lifted pretty directly from the Episcopalians. It was only part of the liturgy in America and, not being part of the Church universal, it has disappeared altogether. (Though one hears that Rome is thinking about it.)

### ***Domine non sum dignus* and Behold!**

The only major change in the responses left to talk about is the response, “*Domine, non sum dignus...*” (Lord I am not worthy) This is a direct quote from the New Testament: (Matt.8:8 ) “The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.’”

We have gone back to the centurion’s exact words instead of the words of some dynamically equivalent translator, because the picture of the humble centurion is an integral part of the Mass, an integral part of the Christian life. Centurions were the commanders of one hundred soldiers. They were the backbone of the Roman army. No one minded losing a general or two, good riddance! They were usually incompetent aristocrats. Centurions were another matter. They were indispensable.

I’m sure you’ve heard the story. The slave boy of a Roman centurion had fallen ill. The centurion knew all about Jesus. After all, he was in charge of the garrison in Capernaum, the town where Jesus was staying with Peter, Peter’s wife and her mother. The centurion also knew that no orthodox Jew would enter the home of a Roman. An observant Jew wouldn’t risk seeing the pagan idols which the Romans kept in their homes. It was forbidden even to look at such things and Jesus was, after all, a Rabbi.

A centurion, the backbone of the army of the conquerors of the western world, a centurion, the pride of his unit, the power of Rome in the flesh, a centurion, feared and possibly despised by the conquered people of Capernaum and the district, a centurion bowed before the Jewish rabbi with the rough carpenter’s hands and said “LORD.”

The Romans were masters of all the world. A crowned king was not allowed to enter the “*pomerium*” the sacred boundary of the city of Rome, because the poorest Roman

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citizen was better than the greatest king. Romans made and un-made kings. This man, the pride of the proudest, bowed low and said “LORD” to the Jewish peasant. Aware of the danger to Jesus’ reputation, this man, forgetting his high station, said “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

We are quoting that unnamed Roman every time we say “Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof.” I wonder what he would have thought to know that 2,000 years later, long after the Roman forum had crumbled to ruins, long after the names of emperors and senators and the great of the world were forgotten, an age when men had learned to fly, had walked on the moon and communicated over thousands of miles as if by magic, I wonder what he would have thought to know that his words to the Galilean rabbi would be remembered and repeated by billions of people. I wonder.

We then say that my “soul shall be healed” instead of “I shall be healed.” What’s the difference? Simply this: the soul is a specific dimension of the self, and it’s the dimension that most needs healing. When Mary, pregnant and unmarried was fleeing for her life, she went bidden by an angel to see her cousin Elizabeth in Ain Karim near Jerusalem.

Elizabeth had been acquainted with shame all her life. She, the wife of a *cohen*, a priest, had never born a child and the stupidity of the age deemed such a woman cursed by God. In her old age she had conceived and her gossipy neighbors decided that God must have lifted her shame. Mary went to her, the one relative who might understand. Mary said “my soul (*psyche*) magnifies (*megalunei*) the Lord and my spirit (*pneuma*) rejoices in God my savior.”

The soul, the *psyche*, is that part of the self that is self aware, the locus of the emotional and intellectual faculties of the human person. That’s what magnifies the Lord in our blessed Mother’s song of praise. Inside you, you have a magnifying glass. If you magnify the problem, the problem gets larger. If you magnify the Lord, the problem

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melts away before the faithfulness, love and power of God. It's up to you. Will you focus on the problem, or on God's power to save?

If all we can see are life's difficulties, then it is our soul that needs healing. We need to be able to see the truth that God is in all and above all, that grace has brought us safe this far and grace will lead us home. Jesus says, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt.6:22,23)

The soul is the eye of the inner man. Garbage in, as they say, garbage out! It is the sickness of the soul that needs healing even more than the sickness of the body. If our soul is blind to the love of God, we can't begin to see and to receive the miracles of His love. "Speak but the word and my soul shall be healed"

There is one more word to mention. It's another Bible quote, this time from St. John the Baptist "This is the Lamb of God" is changed to the more accurate "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29) This is what John said to his disciples when he saw Jesus. In effect, he was saying "Stop following me. This is the guy who you should be following and studying."

What's the difference? What's so different about "Behold" and "This is?" Once again, there is a world of difference. No one says "behold" anymore. That's the problem. We might say "look." But "to behold" is different from "to look." "To look" is to see and turn away, assuming that you've seen all there is to see in that brief moment of looking. To behold is to fix one's gaze until the whole reality has been taken in. We moderns get tired of waiting ten seconds for our computers to boot up. Faster! Faster! Hurry! There's not a lot of beholding going on in the world we live in and our lives slip away unnoticed. Our children grow up, our health fails, our friends move away or die. We grow old and die, barely having taken the time to live. We have to hurry and be on time for the

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next....? Behold! The unchanging God appears before you in the form of a piece of bread. Behold!

Have you ever been in love? Perhaps you have married the love of your heart. Perhaps once, when you were young and first married, on a clear and moonlit night, the moonbeams filled the room where you two lay asleep, and you awoke to see the gentle light play on her hair as it lay against the pillow, her shoulders softly moving with each breath. You stared and drank in the beauty of love. You beheld the beloved. You stared knowing that a lifetime was not enough to see her completely, to take in her beauty, to marvel at the gift of God that lay next to you in the moonlight. Behold!

The Jewish high priest would remove the bread that had been in the temple before the holy of holies and hold it up before the assembly gathered in the temple precincts and says "Behold, God's love for you!" And so, at Mass, I hold up the Bread of Heaven, the person of Jesus incarnate in the appearance of bread and wine. I invite you to "Behold the Beloved!"

When I was little, heaven seemed so boring. The nuns would try to tell us hyperactive six-year-olds about the "beatific vision" We would get to stare at God forever! Boy, did that sound boring. Now that I am an old man, and understand that the most beautiful thing in the world is to stare at one with whom you are totally in love, the words mean everything to me, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, 'blessed' (not just contented, amused and "happy") are those who are called to His supper!"

Behold!

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### Some final thoughts

So there you have it, Verne, a blow by blow attempt at explaining the meanings behind the changes of the congregational responses in the Mass. There is not time to go through all the changes, but the change in the parts the priest says are everywhere. It feels like I am saying a different Mass than I have said since I was ordained getting nigh unto forty years ago. It is maddening. I am an old dog expected to learn new tricks. I have to keep my eyes glued to the Missal.

The words aren't even the hardest part of the whole exercise. It is the grammatical structure that makes one crazy. It is a Latin structure not an American-English structure. Latin uses periodic sentences which have a dependent clause after a dependent clause that make no sense until you get to the final clause or phrase.

An example: "When the barbarians stormed the gates, the gates being tightly locked, the king, who being at table, which was set for a feast, told them to make an appointment with his secretary." Dis ain't duh way we talk on duh sout' side of Chicahhgo. I am very partial to the Chicago version of American English, especially the evocative and poetic way it is spoken on the south side.

The Latinized periodic sentences of the new translation seem foreign and removed from everyday life. At times, they even seem like the bad translations handed to me over twenty five years of giving Latin exams, and still worse, they remind me of the horrible translation I handed into to my professors in a past century.

"So then Rev. Know-it-all, you are opposed to the change?"

On the contrary! I think the whole thing is long overdue, but Heaven has its timing.

First of all, the language used in the newest Missal is the common language, not the local language. According to Wikipedia, there are 375 million people in the world who

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speak English as their native language. There are almost two billion who speak English, to some degree as a second language, making English the most widely spoken language in the world. The vast majority of these people are clueless when they hear Americans speaking English.

I will never forget meeting some American cousins in the kitchen of the ancestral tavern in lower, upper-Hessia. (There actually is such a place.) We were coincidentally visiting the old country at the same time and were feasting on Germanic microwave pizza. Yum. We lapsed into American, and the German cousins, who had learned Oxford English, were completely dumbfounded when I asked a fellow American to hit me with a piece of pizza. The Germans present had no idea why I would want to be struck with a wedge of hot, gooey cheese and tomato sauce. Of course I was requesting a piece of pizza, using the colorful, Las Vegas idiom, “to hit” as in to give me another card at the blackjack table -- not that the Rev. Know-it-all is an aficionado of games of chance.

We, Americans seem to think that we are at the cutting edge of everything. During the halcyon days of the Second Vatican Council, we believed that America was the land created by God to enlighten all those backward countries in Europe. We had stormed in to save them in the Second World War, as every good American boy knows, never mind the sacrifices of the English (almost 400,000 military deaths) the Poles (250,000) and even the Russians( 7-8 million), so we would storm in to save them theologically, and liturgically in the Council. Guess what? Things have changed. There are about 70 million Catholics in the United States. Perhaps 30 or 40, million of them speak Spanish. That means the English only speaking Catholics of the United States are a tiny group of perhaps 30 or 40 million, who tend to participate in Mass and the life of the Church when they feel like it. About half of them, 15 to 20 million, attend Mass regularly.

In Africa there are 140,000,000 (One hundred and forty million) Catholic. There are between 4 and 15 million Catholic in China. The Catholics of Africa talk to one another in English, not in American. The same is true in large measure of the Philippines. In the Philippines, there about 170 different languages spoken. Tagalog is spoken by only 22

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million as a native language. English is the language preferred for professions and for many textbooks. My point is this: Spanish, French, Portuguese and English are the languages of the vast majority of Catholics and the English used is not necessarily American English. We Americans have no idea how odd our English is. Sometimes, it is so informal as to be incomprehensible.

English-speaking America which prided itself on being the Catholic vanguard, is fast becoming a backwater of graying, irritated progressives who think the high point of Catholic culture was the age of Aquarius back in the glorious sixties. The “new translation” is a reminder to the young liberals now that they are seventy and eighty years old, that there is no such thing as an American Church. There is a Catholic Church in America. The English speaking Catholic clergy of this country must decide; will they be part of a Universal Church or will they continue to pretend that they are the arbiters of all things truly Catholic?

The Mass has never been said in the local language. It has always been said in a sacred language, a common language, not a local language. Aramaic, the first language of the Mass was the common speech of people from the Jordan Valley to India and beyond. Koine Greek was not the classical Greek of the schools of Athens, nor the patois of Alexandria or up-country Turkey. Koine Greek was the common Greek of the Mediterranean world. The Latin of the Mass was not the Latin of Iberia that was evolving into Spanish, nor the Latin of Tuscany that was evolving into Italian. It was the Latin of the empire that was spoken in law courts, not kitchens. So it is with the English of the Mass it is a common English, not the English that we butcher in our everyday lives. It is a *lingua sacra*, a *lashon kodesh* as different from our daily speech as the Hebrew of the synagogue is different from the Israeli shouted on the streets of Tel Aviv. It is understandable, though that may take a little effort, but it isn't quite the way we talk.

There is one more interesting aspect of the change. It is a matter of justice. “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matt 7:2) The law of measuring is an incontrovertible principle of the

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Kingdom of God. It would be easier to break the laws of physics than the principles of the Kingdom. What goes around comes around. I will probably never be able to say Mass without working at it a little bit, with having a book in front of me, without having to think about it. I will never be able to “wing it” again and to think about what I am going to do after Mass or what I need to get done today. As a celebrant, I will have to pay close attention to what I am saying and doing. Offering the Holy sacrifice of the Mass will never again be as comfortable as an old pair of shoes. It will always be a bit foreign to me and to the all of us older priests. What goes around comes around.

I think back on my old pastor, Monsignor O’Brien. When he was up in years, everything changed. He obeyed, I suspect grudgingly, but he obeyed. The liturgy that he had learned in his childhood, for which he served as an altar boy which he had studied in Rome during the First World War by the light of an oil lamp, the liturgy that he had celebrated for almost fifty years of priesthood was gone over night. It was strictly forbidden to continue to say the Mass of a thousand years without specific permission. It is a matter of great wonder and even humor to me that apparently there are some aging liberals who are planning to ask the Holy Father for an indult, permission that is, to continue to say the Mass as it was until a month ago. These same progressives who fought the indult to say the Tridentine Mass now want an indult for themselves. The mind boggles!

Remember, what goes around comes around, whether you call yourself a liberal or a conservative. Both are bound by the principles of the kingdom of God. If this whole thing proves anything, it proves that the word of the Lord endures forever. “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”