

A key to reading the motu proprio “Magnum principium”

The new Motu Proprio *Magnum principium* has altered the formulation of some norms of the *Codex iuris canonici* regarding the translation of liturgical books into modern languages.

Pope Francis has introduced some modifications to the text of canon 838 in this Motu Proprio, dated 3 September 2017 and entering into force from 1st October 2017. The reason for these changes is explained in the papal text itself, which recalls and explicates the principles which underlie translations of the Latin typical editions as well as the delicacy required by those who undertake such work. Because the Liturgy is the prayer of the Church it is regulated by ecclesial authority.

Given the importance of this work, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had already considered the question of the roles of both the Apostolic See and the Episcopal Conferences in this regard (cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, nn.36, 40 & 36). In effect the great task of providing for liturgical translations was guided by norms and by specific Instructions from the competent Dicastery, in particular *Comme le prévoit* (25 January 1969) and then, after the *Codex iuris canonici* of 1983, by *Liturgiam authenticam* (28 March 2001), both published at different stages with the goal of responding to concrete problems which had become evident over the course of time and which had arisen as a result of the complex work that is involved in the translation of liturgical texts. The material relating to the whole field of inculturation was, on the other hand, regulated by the Instruction *Varietates legitimae* (25 January 1994).

Taking into account the experience of these years, the Pope writes that now “it seemed opportune that some principles handed on since the time of the Council should be more clearly reaffirmed and put into practice”. Thus, taking account of the experience during the course of these years and with an eye to the future based on the liturgical constitution of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the Pope intends to clarify the current discipline by introducing some changes to canon 838 of the *Codex iuris canonici*.

The object of the changes is to define better the roles of the Apostolic See and the Conferences of Bishops in respect to their proper competencies which are different yet remain complementary. They are called to work in a spirit of dialogue regarding the translation of the typical Latin books as well as for any eventual adaptations that could touch on rites and texts. All of this is at the service of the Liturgical Prayer of the People of God.

In particular, in the new formulation of the said canon, there is a more adequate distinction, as far as the role of the Apostolic See is concerned, between the scope of the *recognitio* and that of the *confirmatio* in respect of what belongs to the Episcopal Conferences, taking account of their pastoral and doctrinal responsibility as well as the limits to their actions.

The *recognitio*, mentioned in canon 838 §2, implies the process of recognising on the part of the Apostolic See legitimate liturgical adaptations, including those that are “more radical” (*Sacrosanctum concilium* 40), which the Episcopal Conferences can establish and approve for their territories within defined limits. In the encounter between liturgy and culture the Apostolic See is called to *recognoscere*, that is, to review and evaluate such adaptations in order to safeguard the substantial unity of the Roman Rite: the references for this material are *Sacrosanctum concilium* nn. 39-40; and its application, when indicated in the liturgical books and elsewhere, is regulated by the Instruction *Varietates legitimae*.

The *confirmatio* – terminology already adopted in the motu proprio *Sacram Liturgiam* n. IX (25 January 1964) – pertains instead to the translations of liturgical texts which, on the basis of *Sacrosanctum concilium* (n.36, §4), are within the competency of the Episcopal Conferences to prepare and approve; canon 838 §3 clarifies that the translations must be completed *fideliter* according to the original texts, thus acknowledging the principal preoccupation of the Instruction *Liturgiam authenticam*. Indeed, recalling the right, and the grave responsibility of translation entrusted to the Episcopal Conferences, the motu proprio also points out that the Conferences “must ensure and establish that, while the character of each language is safeguarded, the sense of the original text should be rendered fully and faithfully”.

The *confirmatio* of the Apostolic See is therefore not to be considered as an alternative intervention in the process of translation, but rather as an authoritative act by which the competent Dicastery ratifies the approval of the bishops. Obviously, this presupposes a positive evaluation of the fidelity and congruence of the texts produced in respect to the typical editions on which the unity of the Rite is founded, and, above all, taking account of the texts of greatest importance, in particular the Sacramental formulae, the Eucharistic Prayers, the prayers of Ordination, the Order of Mass and so on.

Naturally, this modification to the *Codex iuris canonici* entails an adjustment to the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor bonus* n.64 §3, as well as to the norms surrounding translations. This means, for example, that it will be necessary to readjust some numbers of the *Institutio generalis missalis Romani* and of the *Praenotanda* of the liturgical books. The Instruction *Liturgiam authenticam* itself, which is to be appreciated for the attention it brings to bear on this complicated work and its implications, must be interpreted in the light of the new formulation of canon 838 when it speaks about seeking the *recognitio*. Finally, the motu proprio provides that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments will also “modify its own *Regolamento* on the basis of the new discipline and help the Episcopal Conferences to fulfil their task”.

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