

WHICH ARE THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE?

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The author argues that the liturgical practice of the Church strongly supports the view that translated versions of Scripture are as much verbum Domini as untranslated versions. It follows from this that the words of Scripture, the Lord's words to his people, are found fully in every version approved for public reading by an episcopal synod. This view has implications for the Church's exegetical practice; these are briefly indicated.

THE QUESTION OF THIS ESSAY is critical: What, within the constraints and commitments of Catholic theology, are the proper criteria for determining whether a particular sequence of words in some natural language belongs to the canon of Scripture?¹ The answer I give and argue for is that, as things now stand (it has not always been so), a particular word sequence belongs to the canon of Scripture if and only if it is found in a version of Scripture approved by a local episcopal synod for public liturgical reading.²

CLARIFYING THE QUESTION

A text is a sequence of words with an *incipit* and an *explicit*: it is a bounded verbal artifact. The number of texts in the world is certainly

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² I write here as a Catholic and for Catholics, but some of what follows is relevant to Orthodox and Protestant Christians.

uncountable in practice and may, depending on ticklish decisions about individuation, be infinitely large.

One among the world's texts is Scripture. But what are the bounds of that text? Where is it to be found? Which words constitute its *incipit* and which its *explicit*, and what are the sequenced words between the two? This is an important question for Catholics. We think, or tell ourselves we do, that the words of Scripture in their due and proper order, and only those words in that order, are the Lord's direct speech to us, his beloveds; and that these words, therefore, alone among all others, have the authority that properly belongs to divine eloquence. Among texts, only the text that is Scripture, or some part of it, may without reservation be called *verbum Domini*. This is why we stand to hear the Gospel read in church; why we treat with reverence the material (and sometimes virtual) objects in which the words of Scripture are stored; and why we devote so much exegetical and homiletic attention to those words. Given all this, it would seem important to see what can be said about which are the words in question, and what is their sequence, which is to ask, where can the text be found? But, in fact, Catholics have given surprisingly little attention to this question.

We have, of course, given much attention to the question of which books belong to the canon of Scripture, and, correspondingly, which do not. Answers even to that question are not agreed by all Christians; but even were there no such differences, providing a list of text titles in due order, from Genesis to the Apocalypse (a list of 73 books according to standard Catholic enumeration), and designating the members of that list (the canon of Scripture) does not and cannot answer the question of this article. That is because any answer of that kind at once suggests, and provides no immediate means of answering, a further question, namely, which are the word sequences that properly belong to, or constitute, each of those texts? Only when the answer to that is known does the provision of a list of text titles help with my question.³

This point is generalizable: To provide a text title—*Macbeth*, say, or the Gettysburg Address—does not by itself pick out the sequenced words constitutive of that text. For that, something more is needed.

³ The Second Vatican Council's *Dei Verbum* defines *sacra scriptura* as "locutio Dei quatenus divino afflante Spiritu scripto consignatur" (no. 9; in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner [London: Sheed & Ward, 1990] 2:975; hereafter cited as Tanner), which is to say God's utterance as set down in writing under the inspiration of the Spirit. This is no doubt an important truism, but it leaves entirely open the question of whether what is set down in writing in, say, an English version of Scripture belongs to *sacra scriptura* in the same sense as what is set down in writing in Hebrew or Greek versions.

One way of providing, or at least indicating, a text's *incipit* and *explicit* together with the sequence of words that comes between, is to specify a type. In the case of the Gettysburg Address, the type might be the English words spoken by Abraham Lincoln on the afternoon of November 19, 1863, at Gettysburg. In the case of *Macbeth* it might be the English words printed in the First Folio in 1623 under that title, beginning "When shall we three meet again?" and ending "Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone." A type, by specifying the word sequence that constitutes the text in question, provides, ideally, the necessary and sufficient conditions for determining an answer to the question, Which are the words that belong to this text, and what is their sequence? If you know that the words constituting the Gettysburg Address are the ones that Lincoln spoke, then you also know, if not whether this or that phrase or sentence belongs to the Address, at least what it would be for them to belong.

It is possible to define a type, in this sense, even when it is lacking or lost or never existed. The type of the Gettysburg Address, as defined above, is not to hand because, I take it, we have no recording of what Lincoln said. When a text type has been defined and is lacking and a question arises about whether this or that word or phrase or sentence belongs to the text in question, there will ordinarily be speculative attempts to reconstitute it or to imagine what was in it (critical editions are imaginations of this sort; so may dream visions be), and to answer the question by appeal to the imaginatively reconstituted type. But whether or not such reconstitutions are thought successful, the ideal text type still provides criteria, the application of which answers the question of this article.

No text type, however, is ideal in this sense. That is, there will always be particular questions not easily—and sometimes not at all—resolvable by appeal to it. This is as true when the type is to hand, as is, I think, the case with the first folio edition of *Macbeth*, as it is when the type is lacking. Some difficulties are created by translation, whether from one medium to another (spoken to written, written to spoken, written to signed, and so on) or from one language to another (English to French, Hebrew to Latin). If the type of the Gettysburg Address is spoken, and by a particular person at a particular time and place, then is it proper to say that a written record or version of those words contains the same words? Do the French words "Comme il vous plaira" belong, as title, to the text type of *As You Like It*? There are also issues about word individuation, and about the contribution of nonverbal elements (marks of punctuation, for instance, in the case of written texts, or gesture and tone in the case of spoken ones) to the words of the text. Decisions about such matters require attention to delicate questions in textual and translation theory; identifying a type cannot answer these questions.

The enterprise of finding or defining a text type is criterial. That is, a text type provides criteria for judgments about whether, and the extent to which, other particular texts—this or that online version of *Macbeth*; this or that theatrical performance of the Gettysburg Address; this or that Swahili version of the Book of Psalms—are tokens of the type. A text type is criterial for its tokens in much the same sense that the standard meter in Paris is criterial for meter length in particular objects.⁴ That is, it, and it alone, provides the criteria for judgments about the length (in meters) of this or that particular thing; and there are no standards external to it for assessing its length, because its length defines what it is to be a meter long. So also, *mutatis mutandis*, for the scriptural text type—if there is one.

If this article's question is answered by appeal to a scriptural text type, then it follows, as is usual in cases of such appeal, that there will often be no clear answer to the question of whether some token candidate should be admitted as bearing tokenhood. Particular texts will be found to participate with greater or lesser intimacy in the type, and none will be identical with it—just as no actual meter rule is identical in length with the standard meter in Paris, each deviating from that standard in different ways, and some doing so in such a way as to yield no clear answer to the question, is this a meter in length?

Such unclarity may be clarified by legislative act. Perhaps there is, in Paris, a bureaucratic body whose purpose it is to rule on cases—to specify, that is, with or without justification, that this or that object is a meter in length. And perhaps there is, or could be, an ecclesial equivalent, a Roman dicastery or local episcopal synod, whose task is to provide or refuse an imprimatur to candidates for scriptural tokenhood. This legislative route toward answering the question of whether this or that printed volume (or manuscript, or recording, or bytefile) is a token of the scriptural text corpus may, but need not be, combined with appeal to a text type; if it is not, it might proceed by bare legislative act, and in that case the body charged with making decisions about such things will typically communicate its decision without justification or explanation, much as the baseball umpire communicates his decision about whether that pitch was a ball or a strike without appeal to criteria. The bare legislative act, on this model, is itself criterial; in the extreme case—to pursue the baseball example—there is no definition of ball or strike to which the umpire's ruling is supposed to hew; there is simply the ruling, the act of providing that

⁴ See the discussion of the standard meter in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, 4th rev. ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) §50, at 28–29.

constitutes the ballhood or strikehood of the pitch. And so, *mutatis mutandis*, were this method to be followed for decisions about where the text of Scripture is to be found and, thus, about whether some word sequence belongs or does not belong to that text.

We have, then, two families of approach to answering the question of this article. The first is to identify a text type, and, having done so, to use it as criterion for determining whether particular texts are or are not (or are to some more-or-less definable degree) tokens thereof. The second is to legislate tokenhood: to specify by legislative act the tokenhood of this or that text. One or another of these tactics—or both at once, to varying degrees and in varying proportions—is always implicit in Catholic decisions about whether this or that text is a token of the scriptural text type, and, therefore, whether this or that sequence of words belongs to the textual corpus of Scripture. And it is hard to see what other mode of approach there could be to the question of which are the words of Scripture.

The formalities of this article's question should now be clearer, as should those of the modes of answering it. I turn now to the provision of an answer to it.

THE LITURGICAL SCENE AND THE READING OF SCRIPTURE⁵

The Church's most characteristic act is worship. Worship, in turn, is most essentially doxology, the giving of glory to the Lord by means of praise, penitence, and thanksgiving woven together into a seamless garment and harmonized into a musical love offering. When the Church worships, it is, because its members are Christ's members, and it, therefore, is Christ's body, the sacramental sublimity of the Lord's presence to the world. In its doxological gift returned to the Lord, the nature and meaning of the Lord's gifts to the world become most fully evident. The Lord's kiss is, in worship, returned lip to lip and tongue to tongue, passionately, as it is given.⁶

⁵ Informing this section are the comments on the liturgy as the privileged setting for the Church's reception of the *verbum Domini* made by Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini* nos. 52–71. This text is Benedict's postsynodal apostolic exhortation, promulgated on September 30, 2010, following upon the twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome (2008), under the theme, "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." I have used the English text published in *Origins* 40 (2010) 417–55, together with the section numbers there given.

⁶ Following the Song of Songs, I take the Lord's kiss to be something both given to and appropriately sought by his people; and I take the text of the Song to be both a representation of that idea and an instance of it. The kiss is an especially appropriate image for considering the gift of Scripture: reading it aloud (and that is the primary means by which it is proclaimed; reading it silently and writing it down are derivative) requires an opening of the mouth, as does the kiss of passion.

The Church's doxology is variegated and internally complex. At its center, as both source and summit, is the consecration, distribution, and reception of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Everything else the Church does doxologically prepares for and finds its fulfillment in that beautiful and unbloody sacrifice. This is true of the elements of the mass that precede and follow the consecration and reception (gathering, penance, proclamation, confession, intercession, sending); it is true, too, of the other modes in which the Church acts doxologically, such as the liturgy of the hours, by means of which the hours of the day are sacrificially consecrated; or the sacrament of reconciliation, by means of which sins are sacrificially forgiven; or the sacrament of marriage, in which the intimacy between Christ and the Church is recapitulated and imaged; or the funeral rite, in which the deceased's baptism into Christ's body is recapitulated as a sign of her now-fuller participation in that body. Each of these doxologies, whether an element of the liturgy of the mass proper, or of a rite external to the mass, originates from and points to the fundamental and essential gift, which is that of the Lord's self, recapitulated in the Eucharist.

In a sense, everything the Church does is doxological—this is true of its corporal works of mercy, its teaching, its advocacy, its building, and so on. But these modes of action are not doxological by their own principle or order. No, they are doxological because and to the extent that they are derived from and participate in the paradigmatic and fundamental doxological act already sketched. In the order of being, everything the Church does as Church is done as an act of Christ's body, and that body is constituted, first and last, by the gift of death and resurrection. The actions of a body so constituted are second order, derivative—which is not to say unimportant or optional. In the order of knowing or understanding, attention to the body's second-order actions (works of mercy and so forth) can yield only a partial and inadequate understanding of what it is—rather as if an observer were to try to comprehend what a married couple is by attending to its shopping habits. Attending to what the body does when it is most fully and characteristically itself yields a fuller understanding.

There is an associated rule of thought with respect to norms. It is that what the Church does in a particular extraliturgical sphere is normed by what it does liturgically. For instance, when the Church teaches the world—as when the pope speaks *urbi et orbi*—its act of so doing is normed by its doxological reception and recapitulation of the teaching of Jesus. And when the Church performs works of mercy, its performance of them is normed by the works of mercy it has received from Jesus. A liturgical paradigm of the performance of works of mercy is the foot washing on Holy Thursday in commemorative recapitulation of Jesus' washing

of the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. It will rarely be easy to discern either what the liturgically given norms are, or how they should be applied to the Church's extraliturgical action. But that practical difficulty does not at all call into question the normative principle, which is that the Church should understand its performance of extraliturgical action (action at a greater or lesser distance from the fundamental doxology) in terms of the relation such action bears to its liturgical archetype; and should, to the extent that it can, order its performance of such action to that liturgical archetype.

There is a further rule of thought. Questions about what something is or where something is to be found are also, wherever possible, to be approached and normed by what is done liturgically. The liturgy provides no norms for many questions of this sort, of course: there is no liturgical help to be had in discovering where the text of the Gettysburg Address is to be found, or what counts as an authoritative text of the baseball rule book. But with respect to the question of this article, the liturgy provides some fundamental and nonnegotiable norms. They may be derived quite easily by attending to the particulars of how Scripture is used in the *ordo Missae*.

Immediately upon ending the first and second readings from Scripture that belong to the Liturgy of the Word within the Order of Mass for Sundays, the lector says, when the celebration is in English, "The word of the Lord." The rubric says that this is done to indicate the end of the lection, and this is certainly one of its functions. The formula is also, however, a comment on the status and significance of what has just been read, as is evident from the congregation's response that follows: "Thanks be to God." The lector, in calling what she has just read the word of the Lord, is, among other things, making a claim about it. Much might be said about what the claim amounts to, for each of its two key words, "word" and "Lord," carries with it an immense weight of meaning. "Word" is one of the epithets applied to the second Person of the blessed Trinity, and "Lord" is, among other things, the standard English rendering of the tetragrammaton, the four-lettered unsayable name of God. Calling the lections "the word of the Lord" is, therefore, far from simple, and I will not attend to most of its implications.⁷

What does interest me is that the words proclaimed, whether from Old Testament or New, are marked liturgically with complete straightforwardness and lack of ambiguity as spoken by the Lord to his people. Those words are, that is, *verbum Domini*. The exact words of the lections, in whatever language is used in that particular celebration (English, Spanish,

⁷ On some of the layers of meaning contained in the expressions *verbum Domini* and *verbum Dei*, see Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* nos. 7–8.

Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Chinese, and so on), are, without reservation, flagged to be heard by the people and treated by the homilist as exactly what the Lord says to his people here, today, now. Here is our liturgically given norm: No answer to the question of what the words of Scripture are that contradicts this norm or falsifies it or calls it into question should be seriously entertained by Catholics. Any answer to that question must, that is, be compatible with (and ought to clarify) the Church's liturgical practice of designating texts in many languages *verbum Domini*.

What, in more detail, does the Church's practice with respect to this matter mean?

On its face it means, in an English-language mass, that the very English words that constitute the scriptural lections are themselves the Lord's words and thus themselves the bearers of the property indicated by the lector's concluding formula. This is the view I adopt in what follows. It is more immediately consonant with what is done liturgically than are its competitors. One such competitor, perhaps the most prominent and popular, is that the English scriptural words read in an English-language mass are called the Lord's words because they are translations of some other words that are more fundamentally, more originally, more authoritatively, or more really, the Lord's words. If the view I adopt is the right one, then the question of whether the words liturgically read and marked as the Lord's are translations of other words is irrelevant to their status as the Lord's words. They may indeed be translations, or not. But that they are, or are not, is not what makes them the Lord's words; they are that for some other reason.

Were the competing view I here canvass correct, then to call our English lections *verbum Domini* would be to call them so by courtesy, in much the same way that we might say of the words found in Dryden's rendering of the *Aeneid* that they are Vergil's, even though Vergil wrote none of them and would have recognized none. On this view, we say something essentially different when we call an untranslated scriptural lection—one in Hebrew or Aramaic or Greek—the word of the Lord than we do when we say the same of a translated one, whether in English, or Spanish, or some other language.

I take it to be fairly clear that this view cannot be the right one. If, as lector, I read before the assembly something from the New Testament in English and conclude by calling what I have read the word of the Lord, I am not, in saying this, crossing my fingers and meaning (something like), well, no, that is not really the word of the Lord because, to read you that, I would have had to read you the words found in the latest critical edition of the Greek New Testament (or, on a different view, the words found in the *Nova Vulgata*), and so what you have just heard is the best that we English speakers can do, the closest we are going to get to the Lord's

words. It is true that I sometimes hear homilies that comport well with, and perhaps even seem to advocate, just such a view. But I take it that the entire impetus and form of the order of the mass speaks against any such position. It must be the case that English and Spanish and Korean and Swahili lections are every bit as much *verbum Domini* as Greek or Hebrew or Latin ones; we really do mean it when we say, liturgically, that they are.⁸

The view that the Lord speaks to his people directly only in Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek, and that translations of what he has said are scriptural only in the sense that Dryden's *Aeneid* is Vergilian, does, however, raise an important question, even though it contradicts the Church's liturgical practice. How can a translated lection—or a translated version of Scripture—be every bit as much the word of the Lord as what it translates? And what does an answer to that question yield for our question of where the words of Scripture are to be found?

THE CATHOLIC PRACTICE OF SCRIPTURAL TRANSLATION

Catholics have, since the beginning, shown a promiscuous proclivity for translation, whether of the words of Jesus Christ spoken (probably) in Aramaic between his birth and his ascension, or of the words of Scripture composed in any of the three scriptural languages, or of other works by Catholic writers.⁹ To Catholics, translation has not seemed to be a problem, which is certainly not to say that Catholics have not argued about how best to do it, and even about what it is. There are, so far as I know, no Catholic laments from the first millennium of Catholic history over the fact that we have almost none of the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, but, rather, only renderings of those words into other languages; and the enterprise of translation of almost everything of significance to Catholics began at once and continued apace in many directions at once. The idea that any particular natural language is of peculiar sacred significance for the instruction and exhortation of Catholics for the development of the Church's understanding of the *depositum fidei* with which it has been gifted, or for the preservation and transmission of the canon of Scripture (once the lineaments of that canon were definitively clear), is largely alien to Christianity, whether Catholic,

⁸ It is a standard element of magisterial teaching to say, or imply, that what is proclaimed in English (et al.) during the liturgy of the Word is, without remainder or reservation, *verbum Domini*. For example: "Various peoples are still waiting for the word of God to be proclaimed in their own language" (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* no. 4).

⁹ On the Catholic (and Protestant) proclivity for translation and some of its theological meanings, see Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2009), esp. chaps. 1–2.

Protestant, or Orthodox. It does occasionally surface, for particular local and occasional reasons; but it is not part of the grammar of Catholic thought, as the passion for translation amply testifies. For Catholics, no single set of words in one natural language constitutes or can constitute the canon of Scripture.

There are at least three causes of this promiscuous translation lust, each intimate with the other two, and together forming a single fabric.

One, deep in the tradition's grammar, is that translation is a response to the linguistic chaos introduced at Babel. That we speak, read, and write mutually incomprehensible languages is an instance of the damage produced by the Fall. It is to be lamented and, to the extent possible, healed. Translation is salve to this wound, a move toward heavenly existence in which there will be no linguistic barriers, and perhaps no language at all.¹⁰ Translation is not the only possible salve; it would also be possible to attempt the reduction of linguistic diversity to unity by affirming the true languagehood of only one language (Hebrew, perhaps; or Greek; or Latin) and translating, if at all, only into that language, not out of it. But this is not a possible Catholic view. The Lord prefers none among the particular languages used by us; and all our languages are on a par with respect to their intimacy with *locutio divina*. Pentecost shows the grammar of the Catholic position: those who hear the preaching of the apostles do not gain the ability to understand it in the language in which it was spoken; rather, each hears it and understands it in her own language. Babel is recapitulated and proleptically overcome by Pentecost, and this is fundamental to the Catholic translation charter. We do not need to hear Jesus in Aramaic. We need to hear him in our multitude of mother tongues.¹¹

Second, there is an evangelical concern. Catholics have always been evangelical in the sense that we have been driven by the dominical commission to baptize the nations, and have generally seen that this cannot be undertaken without preaching the incarnate Word by means of the words

¹⁰ On the possibility that there will be no language in heaven see Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 22.29; *De genesi ad litteram* 1.9.15; *De musica* 6.13.41; and *De genesi adversus manichaeos* 2.4.5–2.4.6. For a secular eschatology of translation that should be of considerable importance to theologians thinking about the topic, see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard University, 1996) 253–64, at 258–63. Written in German in 1921, Benjamin's essay was first published in 1923.

¹¹ A philosophical gloss on this theological point is the claim that translatability is a criterion of languagehood. On this see Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (1974; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) 183–98 and the vast literature spawned by that essay. Thinking about language and translation by way of attention to the Babel-Pentecost connection implies just such a view.

of Scripture. This in turn requires the translation of Scripture. It is no part of the Christian gospel to require Greek or Hebrew of those who embrace it.¹²

Third, we have always had, though with different emphases at different times, an interest in what has come to be called inculturation. Essential though the cultural particularity of Israel is to the gospel, and with it the intellectual heritage of the Greco-Roman world, these particularities—it is characteristic of Catholics to say—can and must be rooted in alien fields in order to grow there, and they will and should be transformed and enriched by being so.¹³

Interest in scriptural translation, coupled with the view that if there is a privilege possessed by scriptural versions in the language of their composition, it is certainly not of fundamental significance, makes Catholic Christianity unusual. Orthodox Jews do not think this; for them, Hebrew is of constitutive importance, and to read the Tanakh in another language, in a translation, is always an accommodation.¹⁴ Most Muslims have even stronger views about the status of the Arabic text of the Qur'an. For them, the idea that there can be a non-Arabic text of the Qur'an is oxymoronic, and a translation of the Qur'an is, ipso facto, not the Qur'an. And for a Brahmanical Hindu, the Sanskrit syllables of the Veda are what provide the order and maintenance of the cosmos, and the act of rendering them into another language belongs somewhere on the gamut of useless to dangerous. Only Buddhists match Catholics in their zeal for translation and in the passion of their judgment that no natural language has sacred or unsurpassable significance, not even the language used by Gautama Sakyamuni.

But a proclivity for scriptural translation is not the only relevant matter here. Catholics have, also since the beginning, shown a great interest in and concern for the lexical, syntactic, and tropological particularities of

¹² It is also true that Catholic Christians have at some periods been more interested in scriptural translation than at others. There was intense interest in and practice of such translation during the first five centuries, and again for the half-millennium leading up to the present. It is now an utterly standard part of the Catholic magisterial teaching on Scripture to advocate its translation. See, for a recent example, Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* no. 115.

¹³ On this see, among many other instances, Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, esp. no. 20, but throughout.

¹⁴ That this may not always have been so for Jews is suggested by the existence of the Septuagint. Adrian Schenker, for instance, argues that translation of the Torah was understood by some Jews as fulfillment of the prophetic words of Deuteronomy 4:6–8, according to which the nations of the world will hear and understand and admire the words of the Torah. See Schenker, "Wurde die Tora wegen ihrer einzigarten Weisheit auf Griechisch übersetzt?" (*Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54 [2007] 327–47).

the text of Scripture. Patristic exegesis, whether performed upon Greek or Latin or Syriac or Coptic scriptural texts, attends to such things as word echoes, repetitions of syntactical patterns, word derivations, and imagery threads. These are matters largely proper to a particular natural language; they do not easily cross the boundary of translation from one language to another, and never do so without remainder. Typically, patterns of any of these kinds (and many others) evident in the canon of Scripture in one natural language, say, Latin, are not matched by similar patterns evident in the canon of Scripture in another natural language. If, for instance, you study the range of uses of *religio* and derivatives in Jerome's Latin version of the New Testament and draw exegetical conclusions based on your study, you will find that when you turn to the Greek New Testament, the patterns you found in the Vulgate are largely not evident. That is because Jerome did not attempt a trot, but a translation: he did not always render a particular Greek word or family of such by one and the same Latin word; and he certainly did not attempt to make the syntax of his Latin transparent to Greek syntactical patterns. It is also the case, and necessarily so, that the semantic ocean on which *religio* floats is different in many respects from that which floats the various Greek words that Jerome chose to render with that Latin word. It follows at once that exegesis based on such matters will often illuminate the canon of Scripture in only one natural language. And since premodern exegesis (and, now, much poststructuralist exegesis) does take these things seriously, a good deal of what is offered by such exegetes does not transfer easily or at all across linguistic boundaries.

Catholics, then, translate Scripture eagerly and often, and treat the lexical and syntactic and tropological particularities of the translations they make as if they had significance equal in weight to the lexical (and so on) particularities of what is translated. How may these two activities be held together? It will not do to say that, for example, an English rendering of the Greek New Testament presents to its readers what the Greek means—that their semantic content is identical, or even intimate. Were this the case (which it is not, or not in any straightforward sense; there are difficult issues in translation theory here),¹⁵ it might account for Catholic

¹⁵ For recent contributions to this flourishing area of writing and thinking, see Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 2010), a perceptive work by an important practitioner of literary translation; Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories* (New York: Routledge, 2010), for a survey of the current state of theoretical play in translation studies; and Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), which is an extended argument for reconfiguration of the subordination relation between original and translation that should be of considerable interest to Catholic theologians of translation.

interest in translation *simpliciter*: if Catholics thought they could make available to someone whose linguistic competence is limited to English what the Greek of the New Testament or the Hebrew of the Old Testament says, and if they thought it important to do so, then this would go a long way toward explaining their desire to translate. But it would not explain their attention to the lexical (and so on) particularities of their translations, for those, inevitably, are not present in a translation just as they are in what is translated.¹⁶ The desire to give to inhabitants of English what was already given to inhabitants of Greek—and, *mutatis mutandis*, for translation in general—cannot, therefore, explain what Catholic practice with respect to these matters has been and largely remains.

A THEORETICAL SOLUTION

What then can explain the features of Catholic translation practice noted and at the same time do justice to the primacy of the liturgical scene for answering the question of where the words of Scripture are to be found? A theoretical solution is both necessary and possible, and it needs a lexicon. What follows is just such a lexicon, the terms of which are defined largely stipulatively.

The canon of Scripture, for Catholics, typically has its content specified by listing 73 individual book titles,¹⁷ but not by mention of any particular natural language. This is a type definition. As type, the canon is unavailable; it becomes available only in natural-language tokens, that is, when these books are available for reading in a natural language or languages. Tokens of the canon come in two kinds.

First, there are canon tokens, which I call *versions*. Each version of the canon is a complete text of the 73 books in some one (or several) natural languages, a text that has received ecclesial approval (typically, now, by a local episcopal synod) for public liturgical reading. Such approval may be local, as with the approval of the New American Bible by the Catholic bishops of the United States; or it may be universal, as with the *Nova Vulgata*.¹⁸ Every version is a version exactly of what the Lord says to his people, a particular linguistic kiss imprinted upon the

¹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his otherwise important *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge University, 1995), adopts something like the translation-for-meaning view and does not seem to see that it does not account for Christian exegetical practice.

¹⁷ For the list, see, *inter alia*, Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 2.8.13; Trent, session 4, decree 1, in Tanner 2:663–64.

¹⁸ For the status of the *Nova Vulgata* and its use in the preparation of vernacular translations of scriptural and liturgical texts, see *Liturgiam authenticam* (2001), esp. nos. 24, 37–46; this is the Congregation on Divine Worship's fifth instruction on the proper implementation of Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum concilium*.

people's lips in order that those lips may be thereby formed to speak those words back to the Lord. Some versions are untranslated in whole or in part (the only complete untranslated version would have some parts in Hebrew, some in Aramaic, and some in Greek); while some are translated in whole or in part. All, however, are versions, each related with identical intimacy to the Lord, their first and last speaker/*auctor*, and each therefore is properly called *verbum Domini*, without reservation. Each is *vox Domini*, when spoken, and *scriptum Domini*, when written. In each and every one the Lord speaks (or writes) with equal directness and with precisely the same degree of immediacy.

Second, there are canon tokens best called *renderings*. A rendering is without ecclesial approval for public liturgical reading, and this constitutes the central distinction between renderings and versions. In English, the 1611 text of the King James Bible is, for Catholics, a (partial) rendering of the canon, as is the 1980s New International Version. A complete rendering of the canon in English, for Catholics in the United States, is the second (2006) edition of the Revised Standard Version (Catholic edition); that is a rendering because it is not approved for public liturgical reading. In Greek, the 1975 reprint of the second (1958) edition of the British and Foreign Bible Society's *Kaine Diatheke* (the now-dated rendering I used as an undergraduate and which is now before me on my desk) is a (partial) rendering of the canon, though a complete one of the New Testament—this is so for Catholics in the United States, and, I suspect, everywhere else too; though I suppose it is possible that this text is approved for public liturgical reading by the bishops in Greece, and if so, it would there be a version rather than a rendering. And so on. Renderings are *verbum Domini* by analogical participation, not *stricto sensu*. If the version is a liturgical kiss on the people's lips, the rendering is an air kiss.

It follows from these definitions that renderings can become versions, and versions can become renderings: these changes occur as the liturgical practice of the Church changes. It follows, too, that what is a rendering in one part of the world at a time may be a version in another part of the world at that same time or at another. The boundaries between renderings and versions are both spatially and temporally fluid.

According to this lexicon, the canon of Scripture is fully available for Catholics in any complete version. And the right answer to the question of which are the words that conjointly constitute the set of scriptural words—the question of which are the words of Scripture, which is the governing question of this essay—is, perhaps counter-intuitively, that these words are all and only those found in the versions. The canon of Scripture subsists fully in every such version, and the words of every

version are, therefore, properly and identically scriptural words.¹⁹ This is a very large set of words; it includes, at the moment, words in at least 600 languages.

This position, and I think only it, does full justice to the three principal constraints noted upon Catholic thinking about the question of Scripture's text. I mean the primacy of Scripture's liturgical use, the enthusiasm for translating Scripture (for producing renderings that may also be versions), and the tendency to give close exegetical and homiletic attention to the lexical, syntactic, and tropological particularities of all versions (and often of renderings too), whether translated or not. If, and only if, the text of Scripture is fully and without reservation available in the words of all versions, can Catholic scriptural practice be made full sense of. Both versions and renderings may be translated or untranslated. Catholics, I am suggesting, ought not think that an untranslated version is any more or less the word of the Lord than a chronologically subsequent translated version. This theoretical solution is compatible with the claim that untranslated versions have a significance in the life of the Church that translated versions lack (and vice versa, of course); but it is not compatible with the view that translated versions are, just because they are translations, less intimate with what the Lord says to his people than untranslated versions. Neither is it compatible with the view that semantically significant variations among the versions—for example, and notoriously, the *prima facie*

¹⁹ This formulation applies *Lumen gentium's* phrase *subsistit in*, which in that text relates the *ecclesia Christi* to the *ecclesia catholica* (no. 8; in Tanner 2:854), to the relation between a version (as defined) and *verbum Domini*. I draw here, gratefully, upon the work of Adrian Schenker, "L'Écriture Sainte subsiste en plusieurs formes canoniques simultanées," in *L'Interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001) 178–86. His work first suggested to me the use of this trope for this question. Schenker does think it a matter of principle that the canon not have a single textual form; the Septuagint, for instance, he takes to be "pleinement et authentiquement Écriture Sainte" (185); and he thinks the same of the Masoretic Text, even though they are, of course, not identical while yet being in some sense the same text. He does not, however, make the argument I offer in this article, and would reject it because he thinks that when the Church has qualified people who can treat and interpret the Hebrew and Greek texts, as is the case for the Catholic Church now, then modern versions cannot be said to have the same canonical dignity as LXX or MT. Schenker pays no attention to the liturgical context for scriptural proclamation, which goes a long way toward explaining why he would (wrongly) reject the argument here offered. Nonetheless, his work is of great value for the question of this essay. See also Schenker's "Die Heilige Schrift subsistiert gleichzeitig in mehreren kanonischen Formen," in *Studien zu Propheten und Religionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003) 192–200, substantially a German version of the French essay discussed above (but perhaps the German version was written first).

semantic conflict between Romans 5:12 in the Vulgate and the same verse in the Greek New Testament, as to the means by which sin has been transmitted—should always be resolved or smoothed over by adopting the meaning of the untranslated version and rejecting that of any version that conflicts with it. Rather, the meanings of all versions taken together constitute the meaning of the canon of Scripture; and apparent semantic conflicts among the versions should be considered an opportunity for exegesis rather than a problem for it, just as is the case for *prima facie* conflicts of meaning within a particular version.

So much, in brief and abstract form, for the theoretical solution to the question of this article. It is a solution in that it appeals to the legislative acts of episcopal synods; and it is a solution that resolutely avoids appeal to an extant or imagined text type.

Is the solution here suggested compatible with the trajectory of magisterial teaching about these matters?

THE MAGISTERIAL TRAJECTORY

In 1943, Pius XII issued an encyclical letter under the title *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, in which he reviewed earlier papal teaching about the nature of Scripture and how it should be interpreted and read by Catholics, and discussed then-recent advances in textual and historical knowledge relevant to scriptural interpretation.²⁰ His purpose was to clarify the Church's mind on these matters and to make some recommendations. Relevant to our question is his advocacy, following Jerome and Augustine, of *veterum linguarum studium* and a return *ad textus primigenios* (no. 14, Tanner 2:306). This *textus primigenius*, Pius goes on to write, has *maiolem auctoritatem* and *maius pondus* than any *conversio*, any translation, whether ancient or modern; and that is because it was written by the inspired author himself (*ab ipso sacro auctore conscriptus*) (no. 16, Tanner 2:307).

Four centuries earlier, the Church in council at Trent had written: “the old Vulgate edition, tested (*probata*) by the Church in long use over much time, should be retained as authentic (*pro authentica habeatur*) in public reading, debate, preaching, and exposition.”²¹ In the terms of this article,

²⁰ I have benefited here from the work done by Kevin Raedy, a recent graduate of Duke Divinity School, on the implications of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum* for the status of the Vulgate's text in Catholic thought. See his 2010 Th.M. thesis, “The Relationship between Scripture and Theology.” For the text of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, I have used the Latin as given in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 35 (1943) 297–325. Section numbers are not provided in the AAS text; I give them in parentheses in my text for ease of reference, followed by page number of the AAS text.

²¹ Trent, session 4, decree 2. I cite and translate the Latin from Tanner 2:664.

the Vulgate was, at the time of Trent, a translated version of the canon because no part of the canon of Scripture was composed in Latin.²² The council's words, therefore, stand in some *prima facie* tension with Pius XII's claim that the texts that came first, those that were written down by their authors,²³ have more *pondus*, more *auctoritas*, than any translation. How may this tension be resolved?

Pius proceeds to deal with it, as any Catholic thinker would, by making a distinction between two kinds of authenticity or, as he also says, two kinds of authority. There is, he says, critical authenticity (*authentia critica*); and there is juridical authenticity (*authentia iuridica*). The former belongs to the original texts in the original languages, and the latter belongs to the Vulgate because of its long use in the Church. With Trent, Pius affirms that the Vulgate may be deployed without danger of error in disputation, reading, and public discourse (no. 21, p. 309).

I read Pius's distinction between critical and juridical authority as establishing the grammar of a properly Catholic position on the authority of translated canon tokens (whether versions or renderings) without specifying everything that flows from such a grammar. According to the grammar of the position Pius provides, two points must be made: (1) A translated canon token may (and in the case of the Vulgate does) possess full authority as the word of the Lord for the Church's liturgical, homiletical, catechetical, and doctrine-developing purposes; that is, it may be—to use my language—a version rather than a (mere) rendering. (2) An untranslated canon token, one that remains in the language of its composition, possesses authority greater than that of any translated version for the purposes of critical scholarship. Those purposes might include, though are certainly not limited to: reconstruction of the intentions of the author (if there was one); understanding the relation of the text to others contemporaneous with it, or nearly so; understanding the process of composition or compilation, and the sources used in that process. Both—that is, the translated and the untranslated token, with their respective weights—are essential to the Church's life. And the two kinds of authority are distinct, while related. Abandoning either (1) or (2), whether by subsuming one into the other or by erasing one or the other, would be to move outside the grammar of a Catholic position on

²² The Vulgate counts as a (universal) version rather than a rendering because it is (at least implicitly) authorized for public liturgical reading everywhere, even though such reading is rarely performed. This designation is implied by the regulations governing the celebration of the preconiliar (extraordinary) form of the mass given by Benedict XVI's *motu proprio* in his 2007 Apostolic Letter *Summorum pontificum*.

²³ Few, if any, of the texts of Scripture had an autograph as that term is ordinarily understood; Pius's term *conscrip-tus* is best interpreted in a relaxed sense.

this matter. What remains in the sphere of speculative thought is the attempt to specify in more detail the relations between the authority of translated canon tokens and the authority of the untranslated ones, or, in other words, the relations between critical scholarship and preaching, teaching, and the formation of doctrine. That is not the topic of this article.²⁴

Subsequent magisterial teaching on the authority of the versions does not much develop Pius XII's position. Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) has only a single paragraph (no. 22) on questions related to scriptural translations. These are said to be made so that all the faithful might have easy access to Scripture. This already implies that a translated version is indeed an instance of Scripture, and by the time we reach no. 25, this is made explicit: translated versions are indeed (instances of) the sacred text—in the language used here, they are canon tokens every bit as much as are untranslated versions and renderings.²⁵

The work of the Pontifical Biblical Commission since Vatican II does not much advance the question, though in the 1993 document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, there is the following suggestive (and entirely accurate) claim: “translating the Bible is already a work of exegesis.”²⁶ A translation is, then, the product of an exegetical act. From this can be derived the conclusion that what is read and expounded in the Church's public worship is the product of an exegetical act on the part of the Church; and if what is preached and proclaimed is *Verbum Domini*, then the word of the Lord is itself capable of being read and heard as the product of an exegetical act.

²⁴ Pius XII goes on to make comments, especially in nos. 17 and 19 of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, that suggest a trajectory for considering in more detail the relation between the two kinds of authority he discriminates. Pursuing this would require explicit address to the relations between critical scholarship and the homiletic and doctrine-forming practices (inter alia) of the Church, and that in turn would require at least another article. The position I entertain here is not intended to call into question the work that historically oriented scholars have done and are doing on this or that version of Scripture, nor to reject the importance of such work for the Church's understanding of Scripture. I intend it only to call into question certain construals of the significance of such work, construals, especially, that imply the uselessness or inappropriateness of exegetical work that takes seriously the verbal particularities of translated canon tokens. I set out no positive construal of the significance of historical-critical work on untranslated canon tokens, which is not to say that I take the development of such a construal to be unimportant.

²⁵ *Dei Verbum* nos. 22–25, in Tanner 2:979–80.

²⁶ These words are from the text's conclusion. I have consulted the English version found at http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp-FullText.htm (accessed June 19, 2011). Compare *Verbum Domini* no. 115.

CONCLUSION

These incomplete and compressed observations are meant to provide a liturgically centered construal of what ought to count, for Catholics, as a canon token that can properly be called *verbum Domini*, and be so treated. It is meant also to account for the features of Catholic practice with respect to the translation and exegesis of the canon of Scripture noted above: a promiscuous urge to translate, and a deep interest in the (often) natural-language-specific lexical, syntactical, and rhetorical properties of particular canon tokens. These features can be held together—indeed they require one another—if every version of Scripture is fully and properly *verbum Domini*.²⁷

One important implication of this view is that the Church needs to attend exegetically and commentarily as much to translated canon tokens (and preferably to versions) as to untranslated ones. Only if it does, and does not regard untranslated canon tokens as authoritative in some wider sense than that suggested by a moderate construal of Pius XII's words, will the luxuriant lexical loveliness of the Lord's scriptural kisses be returned to him with as much passion as they were given. It is interesting, and in my judgment regrettable, that almost all Catholic exegetical and commentarial work on Scripture for the last 40 years has taken as its object of investigation untranslated texts—that is, texts in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. This is slowly beginning to change. There is evidence of new interest in the Septuagint, for example, and not merely for the light it sheds on Hebrew versions;²⁸ and the rediscovery, during the last two or three decades, of the history of exegesis as a proper part of work on the canon of Scripture is beginning to bring with it interest of a properly exegetical kind in the text of translated versions of Scripture.²⁹ If the Church is to attend fully to its scriptural inheritance, a position like the one argued for here will need to be taken seriously and should affect the ecclesial practice of scriptural exegesis.

The speculative position briefly developed above does not, so far as I can see, contradict or stand in tension with the magisterial teaching whose

²⁷ I intend a resonance here with Walter Benjamin's view that "all suprahistorical kinship between languages consists in this: that in every one of them as a whole, one and the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is achievable not by any single language, but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another" ("Task of the Translator" 257).

²⁸ See, e.g., Albert Pietersma and Benjamin C. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University, 2007).

²⁹ But this is a very slow process. In working on a commentary on the *Nova Vulgata* text of the Song of Songs these past three years (published by Brazos Press in June 2011), I could discover no Catholic commentary based on that version, and few since 1950 on anything but the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text.

trajectory has just been sketched. It affirms, as that trajectory also does, the following claims: that scriptural translations serve the Church's teaching and preaching needs as well as originals; that translations are essential to the life of the Church; and that attention to originals, in the limited sense of versions (or renderings) that are not translations, can provide answers to questions that attention to versions (or renderings) that are translations cannot provide—and, of course, vice versa.

The position argued for in this article does go beyond the magisterial position on the distinction between, and the distinctiveness of, translated and untranslated canon tokens in a number of ways, however, and it is important to signal these. The first is that, so far as the categorization of a canon token as *verbum Domini* goes, the question of whether it is translated is irrelevant. The second is that it is proper to the work of the Church in developing and extending its understanding of what the Lord says to provide translations of the canon, each of which is potentially—and actually if it becomes a version—a canon token as full and as authoritative as that present in the untranslated versions. The third is that exegetical work on those translated versions (or renderings) is as important for the Church's growth in intimacy with what the Lord says to it as exegetical work on untranslated versions (or renderings). This is to say that the verbal particularities—patterns of imagery, lexical and syntactic peculiarities, intratextual resonances, and so on—of translated versions and renderings have as much weight as do those of untranslated versions and renderings. This view, I have suggested, is implied by the Church's constant exegetical practice. Fourth, and last, the inevitable *prima facie* tensions and contradictions among versions and renderings serve as exegetical opportunity for the Church, in just the same way as do those found within a particular version or rendering. This is because, according to the speculative position here sketched, the verbal content of the canon has become large: it includes words in many hundreds of languages, and this makes the Church's exegetical task both vastly more demanding and vastly more interesting than it would be were an unnuanced primacy to be given to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek versions of Scripture.

It is characteristic of speculative positions in theology that they are often wrong, and that their rightness or wrongness becomes apparent only over time, usually a span that stretches far beyond the life here below of those who propose them. That is true of this one, too. I offer it as a contribution to the Church's thinking about how best to engage the canon of Scripture, the *verbum Domini* that informs, verbally, its life in a way that no other words can.