

Item #5 – Titus 2,13 and the Mass

This Item originally appeared as Entry #15 in “James Swetnam’s Close Readings”.

On November 29, 2008, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments sponsored a “Day of Study” on “The Word of God in the Liturgy”. I gave a paper on the translation of Titus 2,13 in the official English version of the embolism which follows the Our Father in the Latin Rite Mass. Inasmuch as it has not been published there is no bibliographical reference to my Bibliography.

Biblical Translations and Their Influence on Prayer: An Example

Based on Titus 2, 13

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Titus 2, 13 seems to be the biblical text underlying the last two clauses of the embolism following the Our Father in the text of the Latin Rite. The present paper will study the official English translation of this liturgical text in the light of the Greek text of Titus 2, 13, indicate its inadequacy in representing the thought of the biblical text, and present a suggestion about an English translation that will convey this thought.¹ This suggested English translation will be presented as the basis for a more profound prayer than that normally possible on the basis of the present English translation.

I. Titus 2, 13 as the Basis for the Latin Text of the Embolism

The final two lines of the embolism of the Latin Rite Mass following the Our Father are as follows:²

*...expectantes beatam spem
et adventum salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi...*

¹ The text for this paper was suggested to me by my colleague, Fr. Paul Mankowski, S.J. For the argumentation I take complete responsibility.

² The entire text of the embolism is as follows: *Libera nos, quaesumus, Domine, ab omnibus malis, / da propitiis pacem in diebus nostris, / ut, ope misericordiae tuae adiuti, / et a peccato simus semper liberi / et ab omni perturbatione securi: / expectantes beatam spem / et adventum salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi* (*Missale Romanum*, Vatican City 2002, editio tertia, p. 598).

The text of the Vulgate of Titus 2, 13 reads as follows:

*... expectantes beatam spem
et adventum gloriae magni Dei et salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi...*³

If one omits the words *gloriae magni Dei et* of the biblical text, the text of the embolism coincides exactly with the text of Titus 2, 13. Hence it is clear that the text from Titus is the basis for the text of the embolism. But the omission needs to be explained.

II. The Greek Text of Titus 2, 13

The Greek text of Titus 2, 13 is as follows:⁴

...προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς
δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ...

By comparing the Latin text of the Vulgate and the Greek text it is clear that the Vulgate mirrors the Greek text faithfully, with a word-by-word correspondence. The words omitted in the embolism correspond to the Greek τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καί. The effect of the omission is not difficult to assess. The Greek text as it stands is ambiguous: it can mean that God is divine and remain non-committal about the divinity of Jesus Christ (i.e., both God and Jesus Christ are referred to), or it can mean that Jesus Christ is divine (i.e., only Jesus Christ is being referred to).⁵ The text of the embolism bypasses the ambiguity of the Greek text by omitting mention of the word “God”. What remains is only a reference to Jesus, with no indication about his

³ *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis Sixti V Pont. Max. iussu recognita et Clementis VIII auctoritate edita*. Editio emendatissima apparatu critico instructa cura et studio Monachorum Abbatiae Pontificiae Sancti Hieronymi in Urbe Ordinis Sancti Benedicti, Turin, Marietti, 1959, p. 1191. The text of the Vetus Latina is the same: *...expectantes beatam spem et adventum gloriae magni dei et salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi...* (H. J. Frede [ed.], *Epistulae ad Titum, Philemonem, Hebraeos* [Vetus Latina, 25/III], Freiburg, Herder, 1983, pp. 907 and 909). This is also the text adopted by the Neo-Vulgata (Nestle–Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984, p. 559).

⁴ Nestle–Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28^a Edition, Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012, p. 653.

⁵ Cf. the judgment of the editors of The New American Bible: “*Of the great God and of our savior Jesus Christ*: another possible translation is ‘of our great God and savior Jesus Christ’” (*Saint Joseph Pocket Edition of the New Testament*, New York, Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1987, p. 838). The text in italics is the text followed by The New American Bible.

divinity or lack thereof: ...*exspectantes beatam spem et adventum salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi*.... Attention is focused on Jesus as “savior”, *salvator*. The omission of these words in the embolism, therefore, and in the resulting official English translation presents no problem.⁶ But the words which remain do.

III. The Official English Translation of the Latin Text of the Embolism

The words of the official English translation of the end of the embolism are as follows:⁷

...as we wait in joyful hope
for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It is clear that this English translation differs notably from the original Latin of the Roman Missal. The Latin has two direct objects of the word “awaiting” (*exspectantes*): “hope” (*spem*) and “arrival” (*adventum*). The approved English version has chosen to take into account the aversion of English usage to making the noun “hope” the object of a verb meaning “await”. Thus, instead of the translation “awaiting blessed hope”, the English has “we wait in joyful hope”. The phrase “the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ” (*adventum Salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi*) thus becomes the only object of what is being awaited, and the other direct object is transformed into a prepositional phrase describing the manner of waiting.

At first sight the difference is minor. It seems to make little difference if the official English version makes “hope” the manner of waiting (“as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ”). And, in the context of contemporary English usage, it might seem to be only a *lis de verbis*. But once the question is transposed into the thought world of the New Testament the importance of the adaptation becomes clear. For “hope” in the New Testament is a firm conviction based

⁶ It goes without saying that the Mass is based on belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

⁷ The English of the entire embolism is as follows: “Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, / and grant us peace in our day. / In your mercy keep us free from sin / and protect us from all anxiety / as we wait in joyful hope / for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ”. The English text used in this article is found in *The Sunday Missal*. Texts approved for use in England & Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Africa. Collins, London, 1985, twelfth printing of the revised edition, p. 49.

on what God has already done and not a vague mixing of longing and uncertainty which the idiomatic English adaptation suggests.⁸ This New Testament thought world underlies the thinking represented by the text of Titus 2, 13 and would accordingly seem to be the thinking behind the text of the Latin Mass. A indication of how powerful this use of “hope” can be in the New Testament is found at 1 Timothy 1, 1: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our savior and of Christ Jesus our hope...”⁹

Given, then, that the double objects of the Latin original of the embolism should be retained (...*expectantes beatam spem et adventum salvatoris nostri Iesu Christi*...), it remains to be seen how the two objects are to be understood in relation to each other. Here again the Greek origin of the Latin texts of the embolism and of the Vulgate can be consulted with profit: ...προσδεχόμενοι τὴν μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα καὶ ἐπιφάνειαν τῆς δόξης τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.... It should be noted that there is only one article for both objects: the τὴν before μακαρίαν ἐλπίδα is not repeated before ἐπιφάνειαν. This suggests that it functions to link the two objects together, which in turn suggests that it is best interpreted as an explanatory or “epexegetical” genitive.¹⁰ Thus The New American Bible has this English translation: ...as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our savior Jesus Christ...¹¹

Thus the Greek καί is translated by a comma so that the English version gives the

⁸ “In the NT generally it [sc., ἐλπίς, “hope”] is a firm conviction concerning what will happen in the future based on knowledge or experience of what God has already done or is doing.... In this theological context it is thus a much more positive term than secular ‘hope’ which conveys the nuances of longing and uncertainty whether the longing will be fulfilled (Acts 27.20). Biblical hope is a function of faith in God, and consequently he himself (or Christ, 1 Tim 1.1) is the object of hope (1 Tim 4.10; 5.5; Acts 24.15; Eph 2.12; Col 1.27) in strong contrast to such uncertain bases as wealth (1 Tim 6.17). ... The word can also be used by metonymy for the object of hope (Tit 2.13; Col 1.5). That object is eternal life (Tit 3.7; cf. Barnabas 1.4; Hermas, *Sim.* 9.26.2)” (I. H. Marshall in collaboration with P. H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], Edinburgh, 1999, p. 124).

⁹ Translation of The New American Bible. The translation mirrors faithfully the ἐλπίς of the Greek text and the *spes* of the Vulgate.

¹⁰ “The second object of the participle is added without repetition of the article; hence it is probable that we have an epexegetic addition, ‘a hope that consists in the revelation of the glory’ (Marshall–Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 274). Cf. M. Zerwick, *Graecitas biblica* (Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 92), Romae, 1966, editio quinta aucta et emendata, §§45-46 (pp. 16-17).

¹¹ “2, 13: The blessed hope, the appearance: literally, ‘the blessed hope and appearance,’ but the use of a single article in Greek strongly suggests an epexegetical, i.e., explanatory sense” (*Saint Joseph Pocket Edition of the New Testament*, p. 838).

explanatory sense of the original.

How this works out in the Latin translation of the Greek is problematic. The retention of the double object is probably best explained by the use of *et* in its basic sense of “joining likes”.¹² Both “hope” (*spes*) and “arrival” (*adventum*) refer to Jesus Christ. The first, by consecrated New Testament usage (cf. 1 Timothy 1, 1); the second, by metonymy for Christ himself under the formality of judge. The Christians await the unique object of their hope, the judge Jesus Christ.

Given this meaning for the Greek, the Vulgate, and the Latin embolism based on the Vulgate, the currently approved official English translation would seem to be deficient: it fails to convey the fullness of the original Greek text on which it is based. As such it fails to provide the basis for the fullness of participation in the liturgy which those responsible for the liturgical text envisioned.

IV. A Suggested English Translation of the Latin Text of the Embolism

In the light of the discussion given above the following English translation of the embolism suggests itself:

...as we await blessed hope—the arrival of our Savior Jesus Christ...

This translation, obviously, is not in accord with contemporary English usage which shuns using “hope” as a direct object of “await”. Hence explanation is needed. But the need for such explanation is really an opportunity in disguise for some in-depth catechizing.¹³ The need to explain what is meant gives the chance to open up the New Testament world of hope: how Israel lived in hope based on God’s comportment in history on their behalf in the past,¹⁴ and how the Christians continued this attitude but

¹² Cf. B. L. Gildersleeve – G. Lodge, *Gildersleeve’s Latin Grammar*, Wauconda, Illinois, Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2000 [Reprint of the 1895, Third edition, Macmillan & Co., Fifteenth Reprint], §475 (p. 300).

¹³ Titus 2, 13 is found in a section imparting catechesis: Titus 2, 1 – 3, 15 is devoted to teaching the Christian life.

¹⁴ “The NT concept of hope is essentially determined by the OT” (R. Bultmann, “ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζω”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1964, II, p. 530).

centered it on Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Inasmuch as God has acted in favor of Jesus Christ by raising him from the dead, so he will act for the Christians who put their trust in him.

This catechesis in depth based on the Bible has the power to transform the prayer of the believer into a more profound union with God based on a divinely-inspired text of Scripture. Even the word “blessed” (*beatam*) in the translation suggested above (in place of the present “joyful”) can contribute its share of profundity, for it is linked in the mind of the early Christians with the action of divine providence in their regard.¹⁶ Such prayer, when based on such a fundamental New Testament aspect of the interior life of the first Christians, can serve as a guide for the path toward eternal life, as a stimulus for refusing to place one’s ultimate values in the things of this world.¹⁷

In brief: much depends on how the text of the Latin Mass is understood, much depends on how this understanding is conveyed in the translation, and much depends on how the translation is explained in catechesis.

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It will be interesting to see what the new official English translation has for the embolism. Here is the new official translation of the embolism for the United States:

Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil,

¹⁵ “...Christian hope rests on the divine act of salvation accomplished in Christ, and, since this is eschatological, hope itself is an eschatological blessing, i.e., now is the time when we may have confidence” (R. Bultmann, “ἐλπίς, ἐλπίζω”, p. 532).

¹⁶ Cf. Titus 2,14. The word *beatam* corresponds to the Greek μακάριος of Titus 2,13. It amplifies the profoundly theological connotation of *spem*. “In the NT the word [sc., μακάριος] is used of God only in the P[auline]E[pistles] (1 Tim 1.11; 6.15), but it is frequently used of persons who are the objects of God’s favor. Such people are happy or count themselves fortunate on the basis of favourable circumstances (e.g. Acts 26.2), usually on account of some divine action or gift” (Marshall–Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 273).

¹⁷ “Life in the present world is ... lived in the context of a hope which reaches out beyond it to the new world when the Saviour is fully revealed in glory (cf. 1 Cor 1.7; Jude 21; 1 Pet 1.13); the renouncing of worldliness is thus not asceticism for its own sake but is an aspect of the path to a greater joy than the world can offer” (Marshall–Towner, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 272).

graciously grant peace in our days,
that, by the help of your mercy,
we may be always free from sin
and safe from all distress,
as we await the blessed hope
and the coming of our savior, Jesus Christ.

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