



The Church's language must be not only universal but also immutable. Modern languages are liable to change, and no single one of them is superior to the others in authority. Thus if the truths of the Catholic Church were entrusted to an unspecified number of them, the meaning of these truths, varied as they are, would not be mani-

fested to everyone with sufficient clarity and precision. There would, moreover, be no language which could serve as a common and constant norm by which to gauge the exact meaning of other renderings. But Latin is indeed such a language. It is set and unchanging. It has long since ceased to be affected by those alterations in the meaning of words which are the normal result of daily, popular use...

Finally, the Catholic Church has a dignity far surpassing that of every merely human society, for it was founded by Christ the Lord. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the language it uses should be noble, majestic, and non-vernacular.

In addition, the Latin language "can be called truly catholic." It has been consecrated through constant use by the Apostolic See, the mother and teacher of all Churches, and must be esteemed "a treasure ... of incomparable worth." ...

The employment of Latin has recently been contested in many quarters, and many are asking what the mind of the Apostolic See is in this matter. We have therefore decided to issue the timely directives contained in this document, so as to ensure that the ancient and uninterrupted use of Latin be maintained and, where necessary, restored.

Pope St. John XXIII

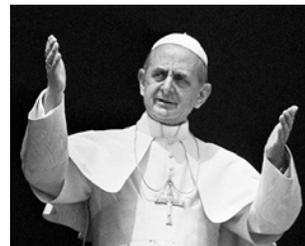


There should be a constant sign which expresses the mystery also by means of human language. That is to say, Latin is a sacred language demanded by the Second Vatican Council in celebration of every holy Mass, and in each place a part of the Eucharistic prayer should always be said in Latin.

✠ *Athanasius Schneider*

Auxiliary Bishop of Saint Mary of Astana, Kazakhstan

We learn that discordant practices have been introduced into the sacred liturgy... For while some are very faithful to the Latin language, others wish to use the vernacular... Indeed, some even insist that Latin should be wholly suppressed. We must acknowledge that We have been somewhat disturbed and saddened by these requests. One may well wonder what the origin is of this new way of thinking and this sudden dislike for the past; one may well wonder why these things have been fostered.



Pope Paul VI

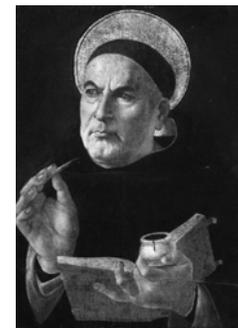


The language in which the sacraments are administered is not a matter of divine law. Yet, for many reasons it has seemed to the Church, and to the Holy Spirit who rules her, that they should not be administered in the vernacular, un-

less perhaps by necessity. For the majesty of divine worship requires a language what is more weighty and venerable than those which are in common use, if this is possible. Just as in administering the sacraments we use another building, other vestments and other vessels than those in common, daily use, so in just the same way, it seems, we should use another tongue. We do not say that Latin is holier or even weightier than other languages, if we consider bare words, but rather that the very fact of its being not in common use makes it weightier and more venerable.

St. Robert Bellarmine

One may note that in the liturgy of the Mass, which represents the Passion, some things are said in Greek, such as *Kyrie, eleison*, some in Hebrew, such as *Alleluia, Saboth* and *Amen*; and some in Latin, as is obvious. This is done because the inscription on Christ's cross was written in these three languages.



St. Thomas Aquinas

The soul is distracted from that which is sung by a chant if it is employed for the purpose of giving pleasure [only]. But if the singer chant for the sake of devotion, he pays more attention to what he says, both because he lingers more thereon, and because, as Augustine remarks (*Confess. x, 33*), "each affection of our spirit, according to its variety, has its own appropriate measure in the voice, and singing, by some hidden correspondence wherewith it is stirred." The same applies to the hearers, for even if some of them understand not what is being sung, yet they understand *why* it is sung, namely, for God's glory—and this is enough to arouse their devotion.

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Latin language has always been held in very high esteem by the Catholic Church and by the Roman Pontiffs. They have assiduously encouraged the knowledge and dissemination of



Latin, adopting it as the Church's language, capable of passing on the Gospel message throughout the world...In addition, precisely in order to highlight the Church's universal character, the liturgical books of the Roman Rite...are written in this language in their authentic form.

Pope Benedict XVI (2012)



We must get the right balance between the vernacular languages and the use of Latin in the liturgy. The Council never intended to insinuate that the

Roman rite be celebrated *exclusively* in the vernacular. But it did intend to allow its increased use, particularly for the readings.

Today it should be possible, especially with modern means of printing, to facilitate comprehension by all when Latin is used, perhaps for the liturgy of the Eucharist...

✠ *Robert Cardinal Sarah*



With regard to the use of Latin in the liturgy it must be stressed that what the Council decreed was that "the use of the Latin language is to be preserved in the Latin

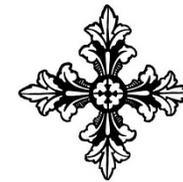
rites" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 36). It allowed the use of the vernacular in the following areas:

the readings and directives and some of the prayers and chants...With regard to Gregorian chant too the Council was circumspect in that, while opening up to "other kinds of sacred music, especially polyphony," it stated that the Church "acknowledged" Gregorian chant as being proper to the Roman liturgy and that it "should be given pride of place in liturgical services" (n. 116). This limited concession of the Council allowing the use of the vernacular in the liturgy was rather adventurously extended by the reformers, in that Latin almost totally vanished from the scene and became the best-loved orphan in the Church.

✠ *Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith*,
Archbishop of Colombo

Indeed, Latin has, so to speak, two conjoined effects: it brings the mystery to light, at the same time that it veils its unbearable splendor. It is like an arrow pointing toward the ineffable, which throws it into relief, which brings it to light without staining it; it is also a veil that allows the human mind to perceive it without being stunned, a veil that also makes it possible to avoid touching the precious treasure with bare hands. The introduction of Latin in certain parts of the liturgy, in particular those most fraught with mystery, such as the Eucharistic Prayer, would therefore make it possible to reinforce in priests and in the faithful the sense of mystery, the sense of divine transcendence.

✠ *Marc Aillet, Bishop of Bayonne*



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about

Latin in the Liturgy

