

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

Current translation: "...on earth peace to people of good will."

Previous translation: "...peace to his people on earth."

Latin translation: "...in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis."

I admit that the current translation is the better literal translation of the Latin.

I also contend that the previous translation of this one verse from the Gloria prayed at Mass is more faithful to the Christian God than the current translation forced on us in 2012.

The obvious difference in the wording of this key, liturgical prayer is that the previous translation is more inclusive than our current version. It is one thing to pray for all people on earth. It is very different to pray only for people of good will.

It gets very confusing when we ask about these people of good will and contrast them with the presumed people of bad will. Who are these good will people? Are they people who think well of everyone else, especially you and me? How about people who think well of their own race but think badly of other races? What if you wish your family well but, to be honest, you basically prefer that some bad things would happen to your neighbor across the street? If you're generally positive about most people but your on-going conflict with your brother turns into animosity, are you still a person of good will?

You get the point: the line between people of good will and people of bad will is flexible and flimsy.

The problem, of course, is that Jesus wished well of everyone, regardless of good will, including those who killed him. His harshest words were for the Pharisees but even there he left the door open for reconciliation. His whole life, death and resurrection were about forgiveness and acceptance, good will not required. Not even his apostles had consistent good will.

The relationship between God and each of us is mysterious and unique. No doubt, our faith, attitude and good will fold into that relationship. But to exclude people of bad will from our prayer implies that God has no relationship or love for them, which contradicts

the God Jesus revealed. In other words, Jesus/God loves them but we can't pray for them.

Does that make sense?

Limiting our Gloria prayer to people of good will undermines the more basic message of Jesus as universal Savior. Praying only for people of good will erases the core challenge of "...love your enemies..." (Mt 5:44), "...turn the other cheek..." (Lk 6:29), "...forgive us our sins AS we forgive others..." (Mt 6:12). To eliminate this theme of forgiveness from our official prayer of praise puts us in the same category as thousands of other groups who create "insiders" and "outsiders", those people they favor and accept, and those they shun and attack. I always figured Christianity was better than that.

This devastating distinction between good will people and bad will people is not good news, not the gospel. It's just another group of prejudiced people who discriminate against some other group. And since the people of bad will are so vague as to who they are, each of us can decide who our bad will opponents are, thereby destroying the cross and resurrection.

Wow! All of that in a few words of our solemn song of praise at Mass? Yep. That's what I hear, which is why, when I remember, I don't say them. I believe Jesus wouldn't either. I see him interrupting the prayer and saying: "Wait a minute, wait a minute! That's not what I meant."

We finally had it right when we prayed "peace to his people on earth", since his people are all people. The fourth century Latin text is not the normative translation. It may come as a surprise to some Vaticanistas, but Latin is not God's preferred language. God speaks the language of the human heart, and any words in any language are mere sprinkles on the ocean of God's love.

The Gloria is a magnificent, beautiful prayer and a resounding song of praise, as multiple exquisite musical settings demonstrate.

It's a downright shame they messed up one phrase so badly.