

Tantum Ergo Sacramentum

(studying the Latin of this Text)

Verse 1

Tantum¹ ergo² sacramentum³
Veneremur⁴ cernui⁵:
Et antiquum⁶ documentum⁷
novo⁸ cedat⁹ ritui¹⁰:
Praestet¹¹ fides¹² supplementum¹³
Sensuum¹⁴ defectui¹⁵

Strict Translation

Therefore, so great a sacrament
Let us venerate with bowed heads
And may the ancient document
give place to the new observance
and may faith supply a substitute
for the defect of the senses.

Poetic Rendering:

Down in Adoration Falling, Lo! the Sacred Host we hail;
Lo! o'er ancient forms departing; newer rites of grace prevail.
Faith for all defects supplying, where the feeble senses fail

¹Tantum - so great. From Tantus-a-um - a adjective meaning such, so much, so great, or, of such size. Modifies Sacramentum.

²Ergo - therefore. In this case the "therefore" links the last two verses with the verses of the Pange Lingua which have preceded.

³Sacramentum - sacrament. Neuter, singular accusative. Direct object of veneremur.

⁴Veneremur - Let us venerate. Present subjunctive, hortatory.

⁵Cernui - with bent heads. This is not a dative. It is the Nominative. plural of Cernuus, an adjective which means "with bent heads, prostrate, or, falling down." - it refers to the "we" understood as the subject of veneremur.

⁶Antiquum - ancient or old. Adjective, Nominative. sing. neuter, modifies documentum.

⁷Documentum - document. However, the words "antiquum documentum" can also be translated "Old Testament." Subject of cedat

⁸Novo - new. This is a dative singular to agree with ritui.

⁹Cedat - gives place to. This is the present subjunctive of Cedo, cedere, cessi, cessum; meaning: to withdraw, yield, allow, or, grant. Here expressing the wish or will of the speaker.

¹⁰Ritui - rite or ceremony. A dative, fourth declension. Indirect object with intransitive verb.

¹¹Praestet - may supply. The verb praesto, praestare, praestiti, praestitum - actually has a number of different related meanings: to give, furnish, grant, provide, guarantee, excel, accomplish, surpass, bestow, serve, or do good. The use of the subjunctive here parallels that discussed in note 9 above.

¹²Fides - faith. Subject.

¹³Supplementum - a substitute, supplement, a filling up. Accusative. direct object.

¹⁴Sensuum - of the senses. Genitive plural.

¹⁵Defectui - for the defect. Dative singular, indirect object.

Verse 2

Genitori¹⁶, Genitoque¹⁷
Laus et jubilatio¹⁸,
Salus, honor¹⁹, virtus quoque²⁰
Sit²¹ et benedictio²²:
Procedenti²³ ab utroque²⁴
Compar²⁵ sit laudatio²⁶.

Strict Translation

To the Father and to the Son
Be praise, and joy
good fortune, honor, strength also
and blessing:
to the one proceeding from (them) both
(may there) be equal praise.

Poetic Rendering:

To the everlasting Father, and the Son who reigns on high,
With the Holy Ghost proceeding, forth from each eternally,
Be salvation, honor, blessing, might and endless majesty.

¹⁶Genitori - the Father (the creator). Dative Singular.

¹⁷Genito - the son, the begotten. This is the dative of the perfect, passive participle used here as a substantive. From gigno, genui, genitus - to beget or bring forth. The "que" links Genito to Genitori.

¹⁸Laus et jubilatio - praise and joy. Each is Nominative singular and an subject of "sit".

¹⁹Salus honor - good fortune, honor. Each is nominative, singular and an subject of "sit".

²⁰Virtus quoque - strength also. Nominative singular and a subject of "sit".

²¹Sit - be, let there be. 3rd conj. present subjunctive used here to indicate the speaker's wish or will that something be.

²²Et benedictio - and blessing. Nominative, singular.

²³Procedenti - to the one proceeding, (i.e. the Holy Spirit). This is a present participle. Used as a substantive, dative singular. From procedo, procedere, processi, processum - to come forth, go forth, proceed from.

²⁴Ab utroque - from both. Ablative singular of uterque, utraque, utrumque meaning "both" or "each of two".

²⁵Compar - equal. Predicate Adjective, nominative, feminine singular.

²⁶Laudatio - praise. Nominative. subject of "sit."

Notes: The author is St. Thomas Aquinas. The meter is trochaic tetrameter catalectic, rhyming at both the caesura and at the end of the line. These two verses are the last two of the full hymn Pange Lingua. This hymn according to Dr. Neale, contests second place among those of the Western Church with the Vexilla Regis, the Stabat Mater, the Jesu Dulcis Memoria, the Ad Regias Agni Dapes, the Ad Supernam, and a few others leaving the Dies Irae in unapproachable glory. There is here a wonderful union of sweetness of melody with clear-cut dogmatic teaching.²⁷

²⁷cf. Hymns of the Roman Liturgy, by Rev. Joseph Connely. Longmans, Green and Co. London, New York, Toronto, 1954. And, The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal, by Rev. Matt Britt O.S.B., Benziger Bothers, New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, 1924.