

Biblical and Liturgical Implications of *Makarios*¹ (Rev 19:9) in the New English Translation of the Roman Missal

Michael Enyinwa Okoronkwo

Introduction

There are various reactions ensuing from the current version of the English Roman Missal as an officially approved rite for the Eucharistic celebration in the Roman Catholic Church. Some have consistently argued that the present version, rather than enriching the Catholic liturgical spirituality, has obscured the objective of the applauded Second Vatican Council liturgical reforms.² This is a matter of concern because of the uniqueness of the Mass in the life of the Church (LG 11). Consequently, any discussion linked with the Mass is a serious and delicate affair, never taken for granted. While the advocates for a return to the earlier version may have some points to drive home, this paper sees also some positive contributions of the new version of the Roman Missal.

Nonetheless, the business of translation, in general, always recalls the unsettled discussions on translation theories, especially between the two dominant theories: the formal and dynamic equivalence theories. While the former argues for a translation that leans faithfully towards the form of the source text, the preference of majority of worshipers and experts in liturgy tilts towards the dynamic equivalence theory, which is audience or target-language oriented.³ Its insistence is that the product of a translation should reflect the *same meaning* as the original language. It argues for a translation that is natural, cadence, idiomatic and syntactically at home with the receptor's language. It should be a

¹ The author carefully leaves the Greek word untranslated for the reader's independent judgement.

² Association of Catholic Priests, "New Translation of the Missal". *The Furrow* 62.3 (2011): 176-179. Accessed 27 September 2018. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23046406>>.

³ Association of Catholic Priests, 176.

translation that produces the same impact on the target audience as the original message would have had on the implied hearer or reader. It should aim at spurring the current hearer into action as the original version of the same text could the *intended* audience.

In other words, the translation must circumvent as much as possible the traces of archaism, elitism, ambiguity and obscurity. It is on this strength that this paper explores the semantic field of the Greek “*makarios*” to determine the biblical and liturgical implications of the new translation in the English Roman Missal where “blessed”, instead of “happy” now translates *makarios*, and successively the Latin “*beati*” in the Eucharistic Rite of the Mass:

Chief Celebrant: Behold the Lamb of God,

Behold him, who takes away the sins of the World

Blessed [*Happy*]⁴ are those called to the supper of the Lord

The People: Lord, I am not worthy

That you should enter under my roof

But only say the word and my soul should shall be healed

The prayer is a composite of allusions from John 1:29, 36; Rev 19:9; Matt 8:8; Lk 7:1-10. Its immediate context is an invitation to the worshipping community, who accepts the Gospel (2 Thess 2:14) and consider itself, though unworthy, to partake in the reception of the Holy Communion in anticipation of the messianic banquet of God’s kingdom.⁵ To appreciate the linguistic background that could have influence the replacement of the word “*happy*” with “*blessed*” in the new version of the Roman Missal is the major interest of the paper. The paper will examine briefly the linguistic liturgical nuances between the two competing English synonyms (happy and blessed) by appealing to the Greek *makarios* as the source language. This will invariably help the

⁴ The emphasis is not in the liturgical text.

⁵ Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 307-309.

reader to treasure the biblical and liturgical input of the new translation. The approach here will be historical, analytic and exegetical.

***Makarios* in the Greek World**

Makarios is a Greek adjective that originally appears as a parallel form to *makar*. It is first attested in Pindar as a state of being free from daily cares and worries. It is described in the Greek poetic literature as a reality that is more sublime and solemn than the secular “happy”; a state of serenity and fulfilment; a reflection of the supra-earthly status of the gods, which is beyond the earthly sufferings and labours.⁶ It is all about *the condition of the gods and those who share their “happy” existence*.⁷ It is simply blessed.⁸

In the secular realm, *makarios* includes the happy, lucky and fortunate state of people who rejoice in extraordinary good fortune. In the time of Aristophanes, it connoted the rich, who are elevated by the gods above normal cares because of their wealth. In this sense, it refers to inner and outer values of the state of a being, which gives it a genuine religious sense, for it points to the gods.⁹ But in the 4th cent. B.C., it gradually lost its religious and poetic meaning and drifted into the contemporary secular understanding of “happy”. Consequently, the word, as a religious and poetic term was carefully abandoned by poets (cf. Plato, *Meno*, 71a). Thus, a person can now be congratulated on a happy event; parents are congratulated and praised on account of their children; the well-to-do on

⁶ Friedrich Hauck, “*Makarios, makarizō, makarismos*” (A. The Greek Usage. B. The Stylistic Form of the Beatitude)” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; Trans. Geoffrey W Bromiley; PC Bible Study V5. Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989; X vols, 362-364. Electronic CD).

⁷ U Becker, “*makarios*”, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament*, Zondervan Interactive, IV vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), CD-ROM.

⁸ This study strongly disagrees with the claim that a better English translation of *makarios* “would be happy” on the assumption that it is “more faithful to the original Greek *makarios*”. Cf. Mejia, Rodrigo. “On Anti-Slavery Campaign”, *Pope Francis on Good Governance and Accountability in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2018) 266-292 (270).

⁹ Strecker, G. “*makarios, happy, blessed*”, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, PC Bible Study v.5, edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).

their wealth, the wise on their knowledge; the pious on their inward well-being; initiates on their experience of God, and in funerary inscriptions, the dead on their escape from the vanity of things.¹⁰ It is so bastardised and secularised, and universally used that it becomes *anything to everything*.

The term is also found synonymously connected to *eutuchēs*, *olbios*, and *eudamōn*, though with some nuances in their respective applications. The word *eutuchēs* describes the one, who is provided or favoured with a happy destiny; *olbios* the one with human happiness but inseparably connected with possession of whatever the society values as well-meaningful.¹¹ *Eudamōn* applies restrictively to the dead, who have attained the state of the supra terrestrial life of the gods and a state of transcendent happiness of a life beyond care, labour and death. The dead here assumes the state of a godlike blessedness, which is closely related to *makarios*. However, *hoi makarioi*, as a term associated with the dead, is not attested in the NT. It is found only in the post-Constantinian Christian tomb inscriptions.¹² Yet in the conventional content of beatitudes of makarism of “blessed is he who...” (*Makarios hostis...*), which is common in both poetry and prose of the early Greek tradition, it reflects the sorrows and afflictions of the present, the ideals and aspirations of the Greek society.¹³ In other words, it encapsulates the existential reality of the present and the ideals (as elements of the future) that every citizen would be expected to aspire.

***Makarios* in the Old Testament and Jewish Hellenistic Traditions**

The Greek *makarios* translates the Hebrew *’ešer* (happiness, well-being), *’āšar* (happy) or *’ašrê* (well-being to...). The underlying meaning of these Hebrew cognates, as noted by Becker, revolves around the dominant aspirations and ideas of happiness ensuing from blessings.¹⁴ A demonstration of this, as Anderson puts it, is the invocation, celebration

¹⁰ Becker, “*makarios...*”

¹¹ Hauck, “*makarios...*”

¹² Strecker, “*makarios...*”; Georg Bertram, “*Makarios, makarizō, makarismos* (*Makarios* in the LXX and Judaism)” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, PC Bible Study V5. Vol. IV: 364-367

¹³ Hauck, “*Makarios...*”

¹⁴ Becker, “*Makarios...*”

and distribution of the wellbeing coming from the divine favour: fertility, authority and dominion, wholeness, peace and rest.¹⁵ The claim is obviously furthered by the literary fixed form of most of the makarisms, whether in the participial or relative clause, that refer primarily to secular goods, human endeavours or ideals (Gen 30:13; 1 Kings 10:8; Psa 127:5, Sir 14:20; 25:8; Prov 3:13; Job 29:10f.; 4 Macc 18:9) including the fulfilment of God's commandment (Pss 1:1; 41:1, 2; 119:1). The same literary form extends to the rabbinic writings.¹⁶ Strikingly, the form is never found in the ancient literature of the East including the early strata of the OT. It appears only in the late wisdom writings.¹⁷

There is, however, a significant connection in the wisdom tradition between religious happiness and the earthly happiness, which is guaranteed by Yahweh's gift and favour. It has been argued that in the Hebrew thinking, happiness as blessing can proceed from God to humans, and/or from humans to other humans, and even from humans towards God¹⁸ (as praises). However, the Hebrew mind makes a subtle distinction in the use of *makarios*. *Makarios* is commonly attributed to humans only. In the case of Yahweh, it is different. Yahweh is approached from the perspective of benediction (*eulogia*), which is an authoritative and efficacious word. Becker makes here an informative distinction in his remark that *eulogia* presupposes an age when blessing is a priestly prerogative (Sir 50:20), and lay persons have only recourse to *makarismos* as a form of expressing the blessing of Yahweh in human.¹⁹

It is Philo, however, who makes a return to the early Greek understanding of *makarios*. He relocates *makarios* in the divine and sacred sphere. For him, it is the deity who attains *blessedness*. It alone is *blessed* (*monos makarios*, *Sacr.* 101), and humans share in this only to

¹⁵ Jeff S. Anderson, *The Blessing and the Curse Trajectories in the Theology of the Old Testament* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 26.

¹⁶ Raymond F. Collins, "Beatitudes", David Noel Freedman(ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. I (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 629-30.

¹⁷ Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*. Digitized (New York: Scribner, 1969) Web. 26 September 2018.
<<https://archive.org/details/growthofbiblical00koch/page>>

¹⁸ Anderson, *The Blessing*, 26.

¹⁹ Becker, "Makarios..."

the extent that the divine nature penetrates creation. Nevertheless, many of Philo's contemporaries still cling to the OT usage, which makes the notion of eschatological blessedness alien to the word.²⁰ It is important to note here that the Greek usage of *makarios*, which predates the Hebrew, associates *makarios* in its earliest form with the "divine" but only later abandoned it because of the "linguistic" abuse. In other words, *makarios* from its inception has been of a religious, spiritual and eschatological concern that points towards the *ideal* and *aspiration* of humans.²¹

An addition to the above is the OT hortatory and parenetic insinuation (Psa 1:1; 41:1, 2; Prov 3:13; 8:34; 28:14; Sir 14:1; 25:8; 26:1). It evokes an inspirational, eulogising and complimentary aura that is defined either in the context of human peace and or in the praise of piety and fear of God. The tradition is found especially in the Jewish apocalyptic texts and in some paradoxical references that weave together the features of eschatology and martyrdom (Job 5:17; Dan 12:12; Tob 13:14ff; 4 Macc 7:15, 22; 10:15), and are sometimes expressed with the hope for eternal bliss (4 Macc 17:18; 18:19 A).²² Again, the pronouncements of blessedness are in some cases supplemented by a contrasting series of woes (Sl. Enoch 52:1ff.; cf. 1 Enoch 103:5). In substance, these pronouncements have the force of an eschatological consolation (Pss Sol 17:15; 1 Enoch 58:2).

***Makarios* in the New Testament**

There are about 50 instances of *makarios* in the NT, of which about 56% of them are attributed to the synoptic Gospels (28x: Matt=13; Lk=15 but never in Mark). In the absence of the Matthew and Luke, the Book of Revelation is the only NT document that uses *makarios* most frequent

²⁰ Becker, "*Makarios*..."

²¹ This is a critical linguistic factor that the study of Ewherido seems to overlook by arguing that the dominance of the eschatological and spiritual elements in makarism is as a result of the "less use of the speech events that commanded existential consequences". (cf. Anthony O. Ewherido, "Blessings and Curses in the Book of Revelation: A Study of the Seven makarioi Oracles (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14) and their Corresponding Curses" (11th Annual Convention 2018 of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) in Abuja. This article appears above in the present volume of the ACTS.

²² Bertram, "*Makarios*."

(7x=1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). In all the cases, it appears in the third person, and indirectly addresses the churches as hearers of the message (1:3 and 22:7). Ideally, it is expressed in adjectival form, “followed by a relative or personal pronoun introducing a clause, which describes a particular conduct or quality, which prompted the praise of the person who is pronounced blessed”.²³ It is a declarative and solemn pronouncement on existential characteristics. The pronouncements may be “actual or preferred” with “wishes and outcomes” that may or may not be rooted in the here-and-now but often with eschatological features.²⁴ Generally, they carry the notion of good news to the persecuted church and its members, the faithful martyrs and confessors (14:13, cf. v.12), and above all, to those who persevere to the end, even if it would end with physical death. They are promise and assurance of final victory over their enemies, and above all, death (20:6), for those who wash their garments (7:14), and “are invited to the marriage feast of the lamb” (19:9). They will “enter through the gates into the city” (22:14).²⁵ In other words, *makarios* in the Book of Revelation carries a note of comfort and admonition, a call for steadfastness and vigilance (16:15) in anticipation of the imminence of the unexpected coming of the Lord (cf. 3:3; 1 Thess 5:1ff.; Matt 24:43; 2 Peter 3:10). It is within this setting that the *makarios* of 19:9 assumes its biblical and liturgical meaning as an invitation that apocalyptically points to the eschatological banquet, the foretaste of which is experienced in the Eucharistic liturgy within the context of the Mass. The earthly church (humans) joins the heavenly choir to praise, and “the angel blesses those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9)”.²⁶

The *Makarios* of Rev 19:9 in the English Bible Translation

It is interesting to note that biblical and classical lexicographers are divided on the exact English synonym for *makarios*. Opinions sway between “happy” and “blessed”. For Louw and Nida, *makarios* is the

²³ Collins, “Beatitudes”, p. 629.

²⁴ Ewherido, “Blessings...”

²⁵ Strecker, “*Makarios*...”

²⁶ Michelle V. Lee, “A Call to Martyrdom: Function as Method and Message in Revelation”, in *Novum Testamentum* 40.2 (1998): 164-194. 26 September 2018. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1560983>>

state of “being happy” and “enjoying favourable circumstances”.²⁷ Majority of the English translators, however, prefer using the two synonyms, sometimes interchangeably. For them, *makarios* “blessed” and “happy”.²⁸ That notwithstanding, Friberg, Timothy and Miller further make a distinction when they observe that *makarios* is “simply blessed” “of persons characterized by transcendent happiness or religious joy”. But without any religious connotation, it is fortunate, lucky or happy.²⁹ So, *makarios* in a liturgical setting is “transcendent happiness”, hence blessed. It is that inner fulfilment occasioned by the feelings of the presence of God. It is heavenly, sacred and divine, pronounced not by humans but by an angel. This idea is taken up by majority of the English Bibles, which translate *makarios* to mean to “blessed”. In other words, the idea of *makarios* in Rev 19:9b is not necessarily “happy” as understood in the secular sphere but “blessed”, the sublime feelings of the divine presence.

The Text of Rev. 19:9

The scene (19:1-10) within which *makarios* is located is a shift from the preceding *mourning* pericopé (18:1-24).³⁰ The contrast is between the mourning on earth over the fall of Babylon (18:1-24)³¹ and the rejoicing in heaven over the fall of the Babylon; the “ungodly suppressor of God’s people” and those who profited from her now mourn her. The cause of the joy is the vindication of the martyrs,³² who are the “faithful

²⁷ Johannes E. Louw and Eugene A Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), #25, 119

²⁸ Barclay M Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibel gesellschaft, 1993) #3845; Joseph Henry Thayer, ed & Trans. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* 1889, Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti, BibleWorks 2006. ver.7.0.012g. (Dallas: IBT, 2000) #3294; and Hengry George Liddell et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1843) #26232.

²⁹ Barbara Friberg, Friberg Timothy and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 1768 (1).

³⁰ Lee, “A Call to Martyrdom ...”, 179.

³¹ The referent “Babylon” is problematic: does it refer to Rome or the world government in generally?

³² Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Biblical Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IntrVarsity, 1993).

believers”³³ that constitute the “eschatological bride”³⁴ of the Lamb.³⁵ There is here a kind of value-reversal, which is one of the features of the NT *makarios*; for the persecuted are now *blessed*.

Inside the world of the text, there is equally a contrast between the “great harlot” that corrupts the earth (19:2) and the bride, who is preparing to marry the Lamb (19:8). This is not without its interpretative controversy on the actual identity of the “bride of the Lamb”, the church.³⁶ Does it refer to the Church as a body that houses the people of God³⁷ or the faithful individuals themselves, who constitute the Church, the bride of the Lamb? According to Miller, it is the “collective entity of those, as members of the church of John's age, who exhibit, precisely, the righteousness of fidelity to God and Jesus, and now share in the reign of God and of their bridegroom the Lamb”.³⁸ That notwithstanding, what is of interest is found in Johnson's reflection on the intrinsic relationship between the bride (Eph 5:21-33) and the bridegroom in the person of Jesus (Matt 9:15; Jn 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Rom 7:4), and the dependence of the former on the latter.

The Lamb and the Marriage Feast

It has been argued in the early part of this study that the prayer, “*ecce agnus Dei*” is partly derived from John 1:29, 36 and Rev 19:9. On the presupposition that the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation share the same authorial background, the reader's attention is drawn to the Johannine lexical preference in the identification of the Lamb. According to Johnson, when speaking of Christ as the Lamb, John makes exclusive

³³ Norman Hillyer, “‘The Lamb’ in the Apocalypse”, *The Evangelical Quarterly* 39.4 (1967), 228-235.

³⁴ Kevin E. Miller, “The Nuptial Eschatology of Revelation 19-22”, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60.2 (1998):302. 27; September 2018. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43723261>>

³⁵ Lee, “A Call to Martyrdom ...”, 174.

³⁶ Hall W. Harris, “A Theology of John's Writings”, Roy B Zuck (ed.), *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 179; J. P. Bauer, “*gynē*”, Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider(eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).

³⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament, An Interpretation* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2009), 583.

³⁸ Miller, “The Nuptial Eschatology...”, 304, 309-310.

use of *arnion* in the Book of Revelation (5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4(2x), 10; 15:3; 17:14 (2x); 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3.) and of *amnos* in his Gospel (John 1:29, 36).

Biblically, the Lamb in the Gospel is linked with the genitive of relationship, that is, of God (*tou theo*), which may not be regarded as a mere allusion. There is here a nexus between Jesus' baptism (cf. vv. 32-34) and his redemptive mission to humanity.³⁹ Jesus is the one "who takes away the sins of the world" (v. 29), the saviour of the world (3:17; 4:42). Taken almost certainly from the Passover Lamb and from Isaiah and Exodus, the acclamation underscores the messianic and soteriological mission of Jesus as the Lamb of the world.⁴⁰

However, the imagery of Lamb in the context of *makarios* in the Book of Revelation now assumes a "central glorious figure of power and authority".⁴¹ It is the image for the crucified (sacrificed), but now exalted and glorified (John 17:5) Messiah.⁴² In other words, the Paschal Lamb, the Servant and the divine Shepherd of Israel, are now fused together.⁴³ By joining the Gospel and the Revelation materials in the prayer, an intrinsic connection is established between the sacrificial victim of the Gospel and the victorious Christ of Revelation. "He is one and the same, and even though triumphant in Revelation, He still carries the marks of His sacrifice..."⁴⁴ Those who join him to carry the marks of His sacrifice are thus invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), hence blessed.

The OT and later Jewish literature will compare the relationship between God and Israel to a bride wedded to God (Hos 2:19-21; Isa 54:6) and portray the messianic age as a banquet (Isa 2:6-7). The same imagery is at this instant applied to the Messiah (cf. Psalms 45; Hebrews 1:8f.), especially in the NT to Christ and His Church (3:20; 21:2, 9; 22:17).⁴⁵ So, the concept *makarios* in the context connotes both contemporaneous and

³⁹ Harris, "A Theology...", 192-94.

⁴⁰ Hillyer, "The Lamb...", 228, 230.

⁴¹ Hillyer, "The Lamb...", 228.

⁴² Johnson, *The Writings ...*, 580.

⁴³ Hillyer, "The Lamb...", 230.

⁴⁴ Harris, "A Theology...", 194)

⁴⁵ Hillyer, "The Lamb...", 235)

eschatological features. It represents a world of consolation, which is spiritually real and inviting.

The Invitation as Election

It is God himself, who through the angel, proclaims those who are invited to the wedding feast blessed. Wall interprets the invitation as a “divine election”⁴⁶ destined for those who are chosen and called. The emphasis here is that the “called” do not choose themselves but the choice is the Lord’s (cf. Mark 13:20; Luke: 13; John 15:16; Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13). It is a divine election. God remains the actor and the initiator of the call. And the “called” are pronounced “blessed” (*makarios*) not because of their individual or collective merits but that God graciously invites them to the wedding feast.⁴⁷ Again, the invitees are not all but *only* the great multitude,⁴⁸ the ones who have overcome the tribulation. They are the ones who are poetically described as clothed with “fine linen, bright and pure” (19:8; cf. 7:14). These are the wedding garments, the distinctive eschatological mark⁴⁹ that qualifies them to be at the wedding feast with the Lamb (cf. Matt 22:11-13). The wedding feast is their consolation for their faithfulness. Such are the blessed state of those on whom the angel pronounces as blessed, who are now praising and worshipping (19:1-10). The marriage feast, as David aptly points out, is beyond the secular or family supper as many could have imagined.⁵⁰ It is a supper (*deipnon*) in the sense of wedding feast, banquet and a dinner of special sort. What counts more is the privilege to seat at table with the Bridegroom and the joy that is associated with such a privilege.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Wall, *Revelation New*, International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 223.

⁴⁷ Cruz, V. P., “The Beatitudes of the Apocalypse: Eschatology and Ethics”, M Shuster and R Muller(eds.), *Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 277.

⁴⁸ D. A Carson and Douglas J Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 700.

⁴⁹ Collins, “Beatitudes”, 631.

⁵⁰ O. F. M. Cap David, “Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper”, *The Furrow* 28.6 (1977):388. 27 September 2018. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27660382>>

***Makarios* as “*Beati*” in the Latin Roman Missal**

It has earlier been argued that the “*Ecce Agnus Dei*” as represented in the Roman Missal is strongly influenced by Rev 19:9.

The Greek Version from Rev 19:9	Latin Version of the Roman Missal	Earlier English Version of the Roman Missal	Present English Version of the Roman Missal
<i>Makarioi oi eis to deipnon tou gamou tou arniou keklēmenoi</i>	<i>Beati qui ad cenam Agni vocati sunt.</i>	<i>Happy</i> are those called to the supper of the Lamb	<i>Blessed</i> are those called to the supper of the Lamb

The two English versions of the Latin text are almost identical. However, the difference lies in the translation of word “*beati*”. In the quest to translate the Latin word, the translator(s) has chain of English synonyms at their disposal: lucky, fortunate, favoured, pleasing, happy and blessed. But the competing synonyms are *happy* and *blessed*. The earlier version prefers the word “happy”, and the present version prefers “*blessed*”. In other words, the question revolves around the linguistic shift between the two English lexemes. The reader may wonder if the distinction makes any significant difference. The issue can only be properly contextualised if one recalls that the Greek *makarios*, which is translated *beati* the Latin, is a religious and poetic concept, defined in the realm of the divine before its later abandonment. Therefore, humans can only be spoken of as blessed in relation to the gods.

One of the implications of the current English translation of the Latin *beati* is a reminder that the language of liturgy is sacred and divine. Therefore, the invocation of the *makarios* in the liturgical context of the Mass is jubilation and consolation.⁵¹ The primary concern is not the human happiness but that the worshippers are counted among the blessed; that the Lamb assures them of a wedding feast irrespective of

⁵¹ Lars Hartman, “Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre”, David Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983), 329-43.

the present challenges of life. It is an exultation in the face of torments of the world, in the dilemma of choice between only “white” and “black”.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The Book of Revelation contains a message of witness, reinforcement and worship addressed to both insiders and outsiders. It counsels fidelity to those wavering in their convictions, encourages endurance to those holding firm in obedience to God, promises reward to those who were losing their life through martyrdom, and also pronounces judgement on those persecuting the faithful.⁵² It informs the reader that God’s decisive intervention on behalf of the oppressed is already on course and its goal will be fully realised at the marriage feast.

The lexical choice suggests three principal semantic domains: worship, prophesy⁵³ and witness, apocalyptic and salvific eschatology.⁵⁴

Worship	Apocalyptic and Salvific Eschatology	Prophecy and Witness
saying and hearing (vv. 1), hallelujah (vv. 1, 3, 4, 6), multitude [in heaven] (vv. 1, 6), loud sounds/voice (vv. 1, 6), glory (v. 1, 7) smoke (v. 3), amen (v. 4), throne (vv. 4, 5), worship (vv. 4, 10), praise (v. 5), fear ([reverence] v. 5), rejoicing, exulting (v. 7)	salvation, ⁵⁵ glory and power (v. 1), loud sounds/voice (vv. 1, 6), judgement (v. 2), vengeance (v. 2), reign of God (v. 6)	righteous deeds (v. 8), write this (v. 9), true words of God (v. 9), testimony of Jesus (v. 10), the spirit of prophecy (v. 10)

⁵² Johnson, *The Writings ...*”, 575.

⁵³ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation. Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1996), 18.

⁵⁴ For details see Williamson, *Revelation...*; Gregg, Steve. *Revelation: Four Views. A Parallel Commentary* (NashVile: Thomas Nelson, 2013); Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (NashVile: Thomas Nelson, 2013); Ramsey R. Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation. Guides to the New Testament Exegesis*, Ed. McKnight Scott (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1992).

⁵⁵ Pronouncement of salvation in v.1 is very impressive because the only other occurrences are in 7:10 and 12:10; although the occurrences in 19:1 and 7:10 are structurally different from (12:10)

The opening verse of the passage begins with a declaration of praise and ascriptions of salvation to God and the Lamb. Besides, the passage is loaded with the language of worship, prophecy and salvation. The literary features of apocalypse and eschatology are obvious in the text (see the above table). The connection between the Lamb, the believers, and their salvation provide the motivation to stand fast in their faith through the promise not only of salvation, but also a continuing and intimate relationship with the Lamb.⁵⁶ This is cathartic to an audience suffering from a “perceived crisis” of persecution.⁵⁷ In reassuring the saints of their being worthy for the feast of the Lamb, the text draws attention to many realities that find their full meaning in the future, hence eschatological. It is eschatologically a pledge of the resurrection of the Christ’s faithful to glory, a call to the eternal wedding-feast of the Lamb.⁵⁸

But what is of more interest for this discussion is the lexical appearance of *makarios* in the context of worship. It forms the conceptual basis and carries the key to unlock its dynamic role in v. 9. It appears within an eschatological-judgement setting,⁵⁹ and implies a kind of value reversal in an immediate liturgical environment, though realising its full meaning in the supernatural. The word “blessed” is among the true words of God to which John bears witness, and which enables the Church on earth to participate in the heavenly liturgy by hearing and re-echoing the language of the angel(s). The liturgical pronouncement of *makarios* is revelatory. It is an insight that Christians on earth in communion with the “saints” and angels participate in the heavenly liturgy, which is yet to be fully realised. This is the thrust of the argument of Shepherd, that the entire Revelation is based upon a “heavenly” liturgical pattern.⁶⁰ It is,

⁵⁶ Lee, “A Call to Martyrdom ...” pp.185-86.

⁵⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

⁵⁸ David, “Happy...”, 389

⁵⁹ Kenneth A. Strand, “Chiastic Structure and Some Motifs in the Book of Revelation”. *AUSS* 16 (1978), 401-408; Kenneth A. Strand, *The Open Gates of Heaven* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Publishers, 1972).

⁶⁰ M. H. Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960).

first and foremost, about the members of a worshipping community, who gather to remind themselves in their liturgy that the story of Jesus shakes the world. It opens the “eyes” of the worshipers to have a fresh apocalyptic dimension to life, where the glimpse of the heavenly “blessedness” is beheld. It is a moment of communion with the eternal purposes and the birth pangs of a new world to those whose words and deeds make them marginal in the things of the world.⁶¹

Again, the pronouncement of “blessed” is both invitatory and engaging. It is also illocutionary. It carries a note of prophecy and urgency within a liturgical setting, and it is formed by the consciousness of the imminent return of Christ (1:1, 3). Johnson stresses the same point in his argument that prophecy is not just an aspect of early Christian worship. There is an inseparable correlation between prophecy and witness, especially in the Book of Revelation. The worshipping community is a witnessing and testifying community.⁶² Thus when “blessed” is pronounced in a liturgical assembly, it is a prophetic summon. With the pronouncement, like the prophets of the OT, the worshipping community carries out its prophetic mission of bearing witness to the glorious Christ. It testifies to God’s truth and judgement in an overtly hostile environment. This is the liturgical message of the “*Ecce Agnus Dei*”.

The new English translation of the Greek *makarios* and its successive Latin *beati* equivalence as “blessed” is simply a return to the early Greek understanding. It is more original and *adrem* to the liturgical context. The English rendition is profoundly biblical, especially in the Book of Revelation. It is a true reflection of the language of the apocalypse, and it agrees with the temperament and traditions of the contemporary religious person (LG 38). It draws out in a more profound manner the Catholic Eucharistic liturgical spirituality, which is rooted in the heavenly liturgy of the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). It speaks directly to the Nigerian Christian, serving as it were, as an exultation in the face of torments of the current situation, thus in the dilemma when a choice, though difficulty, must be made. It reminds the worshipers always about

⁶¹ Christopher C. Rowland, “The Book of Revelation: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections”, L.E. Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, CD ROM. Vol. XII (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

⁶² Johnson, *The Writings ...*, 135.

MICHAEL ENYINWA OKORONKWO

the eschatological banquet which is already inaugurated in the Eucharistic celebration.