

Years and years ago I studied French for several weeks one summer in a language school in Paris. It was very frustrating for me, my classmates, and the teachers. I still remember one teacher storming out of the room because we were all too dense to understand what she was telling us. Other teachers were immensely patient, and I still wonder how they managed to keep a straight face. Once we were learning about various household items and we got onto the subject of cleaning. After we established the word for vacuum cleaner, *aspirateur*, the teacher asked the class what do you call the stuff that a vacuum cleaner sucks up. The correct word for dust is *poussière*. I had run into it already in the instructions on how to leave the room where I was staying. But on this particular morning, I couldn't quite remember the word, and when the teacher looked at me, I said *poulet*. So, to translate this conversation for you into English, the teacher asked, "What is it you suck up with a vacuum cleaner?" And I answered, "Chickens." I'm sure they wondered, "What do American homes look like? And what do our vacuum cleaners look like?"

Translating is hard, and once in a while you run into a word which really can't be translated into another language. For example, the Italians have a word for someone who has the same first name that you do. That person is your *onomastico*. We just don't have that word in everyday English. Some things don't translate well. Some customs don't translate well.

A successful corporation today develops a concept that does translate well into other parts of the world. You succeed if everybody drinks your soft drink, buys your running shoes, and uses your health care products. That's the goal, to get a product everyone will understand.

The first Pentecost Sunday proved that Christianity was something that would translate well. Through the miracle of tongues on Pentecost, everyone, no matter their nationality, heard the Christian message and understood it. It made sense. Even if they didn't even want to hear it, they did, and they understood its meaning.

Christianity has a universal appeal because it meets people at basic human levels. It accepts life and death, suffering and tragedy, forgiveness and joy as parts of human life, and it integrates these universal concepts in a way that helps people live with meaning.

Some forces try to silence the voice of Christianity. Christian song and imagery are forbidden from certain institutions of our free country. People feel more comfortable talking about where they shop than where they worship. Christian ideals are kept away from the marketplace. In the end, though, the Christian message will endure because it reaches beyond boundaries to touch people where they live, suffer, and hope. Pentecost proclaims the universal language of Jesus Christ.