

## Faith and liturgical translations: the example of English-speaking countries

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Almost four decades have passed since the Second Vatican Council's constitution on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, authorised the translation of liturgical texts into the vernacular [SC36]. Today, at the start of the third millennium, at least half of Catholics have no clear memory of the old Latin Mass and have not experienced the confusion that followed as a result of the significant changes to the Church's worship. For Catholics under the age of 50 and for all converts who have joined the Church since the Council, the 'new liturgy' is the old one. Constant change is all they have ever known.

For millions of English-speaking Catholics, the main effect of the Second Vatican Council was the almost immediate translation of the Latin liturgical texts into modern English. The project for a new translation of the Bible intended for modern use had, however, preceded the Council and had received cautious encouragement from several 20th-century popes, notably in Pius XII's *\*Divino Afflante Spiritu\**.

The enormous undertaking of 'renewing' the liturgical texts during the 1960s was carried out by committees of experts – scriptural scholars, theologians and liturgists – presumably with a view to swiftly putting into practice the Council's permission to use the vernacular in the liturgy. Catholic scriptural scholars, linguists and liturgists, who could not have hoped to see their works used in the liturgy of the Catholic Church before the Council, were hastily recruited.

The International Commission on English in the Liturgy [ICEL] was established in 1963 to produce and oversee these translations and to ensure that the texts were in consistent English. Eleven bishops representing all the English-speaking national conferences of the Catholic Church form its administrative committee, and a further fifteen (representing regions where English is a second language) are associate members.

A parallel Protestant body, the International Consultation on English Texts [ICET], now known as the English Language Liturgical Consultation [ELLC], was established (under the auspices of the National Council of Churches [NCC]) around the same time as ICEL and in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture delivered at the seventh CIEL symposium, 8–10 November 2001, in Versailles

same aim: to update translations of the Scriptures and liturgical texts. The two groups collaborated closely from the outset.

A multitude of translation projects were undertaken after the Council. It soon became evident that these efforts were not merely limited to literal translations, but that the latter contained ‘updated’ ideological elements. And despite the ecumenical spirit prevailing at the time, Catholic liturgists, newly empowered, virtually ignored the vast body of traditional sacred music in English, accumulated (in fact, preserved from the Latin tradition) by Protestant churches since the time of the Reformation. The possibility of translating traditional Latin liturgical music into English was also overlooked. New music, in a popular musical style and employing contemporary theological language, was hastily composed, universally adopted and zealously promoted. The Church’s ‘new vision’ is still accompanied by this outdated music from the 1960s. The ecumenical efforts of expert theologians and liturgists have been almost uniformly directed towards reducing the ‘shared faith’ to the lowest possible common denominator from the point of view of both theology and rite.

Liturgical experimentation flourished in the years following the Council. The prevailing winds of change blew into every Catholic parish through their ‘open windows’; and since every innovation was presented (and continues to be presented) as the will of the bishops – or of Rome – radical changes were implemented in Catholic liturgical practice, in many cases literally overnight. Little thought was given to the intentions of those responsible for these changes. This may have been due in part to the confusion caused by the profusion of texts in the vernacular, but also because the highest authority of the Church was invoked with every change. The faithful were convinced that obedience to the supreme authority of the Church required their assent to all liturgical innovations.

Jacques Maritain, the great French Catholic philosopher, wrote in a letter to Pope Paul VI in March 1965:

In reality, the primary duty of a translator who is not a traitor is *always*, but particularly when dealing with an inspired text or a liturgical text, to respect the words chosen by the author..... and to use the exact equivalent, even at the risk of being obscure: an inevitable obscurity, a blessed obscurity, because it is the shadow of the grandeur of divine things, cast upon our human language , no. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, letter quoted in “World Watch”, The Catholic World Report, August 1992, p. 11

The historian James Hitchcock has also observed that “innovative religious commentators may use traditional vocabulary, but it is often evident that they have, without admitting it, altered the meanings of words. At the very least, those who wish to encourage such deviations and such redefinitions have a duty to explain what they are doing and to warn of the full implications of their work.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1969, six years after ICEL had begun producing vernacular liturgical texts, a document entitled *Instruction on the Translation of Liturgical Texts* was published by the Consilium, the body authorised by the Holy See to implement the Council’s liturgical reform. Known by its French title, *\*Comme le prévoit\**, this document—which emphasised the “contemporaneity” of all vernacular texts and the theory of “dynamic equivalence”—provided guidelines for all translation projects that remained in use for more than three decades.

ICEL’s first translation into vernacular English of *the Roman Missal*—referred to by ICEL as the ‘sacramentary’ (the Ordinary of the Mass, Eucharistic prayers, creeds and other liturgical texts)—was completed in 1973. The lectionary (Scripture readings) followed a parallel, albeit different, path.

The Jerusalem Bible (so called because it was the work of pioneers from the School of Biblical Studies in Jerusalem) – an ecumenical endeavour – was one of the first translations of the Scriptures to appear after the Council. Its first edition dates from 1966.<sup>4</sup>

The Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition, widely recognised as the most accurate of contemporary English translations, was also completed in 1966 under the auspices of the National Council of Churches (NCC).<sup>5</sup>

The New American Bible [NAB] is the English translation produced by the Catholic Biblical Association at the request of the Fraternity of Christian Doctrine of the American Bishops. This is the translation that appears in parish ‘missalettes’ in the USA. It took more than a quarter of a century to produce the original NAB. It was published in 1970, although the copyright had been granted as early as 1953.

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<sup>3</sup> James Hitchcock, *\*Recovery of the Sacred\**. New York: Seabury Press, 1974. Preface X [Reprinted in 1995 by Ignatius Press.]

<sup>4</sup> The English translation of the Jerusalem Bible was based on the famous French translation, which had been newly collated with the original Hebrew and Greek texts. A commentary on the Psalms first appeared in a single-volume French edition in 1961, edited by Father Roland de Vaux OP. The main contributors to the English version numbered between 20 and 25, including Anthony Kenny, Edward Sackville-West and J.R.R. Tolkien. The Rev. Alexander Jones, Professor of Divinity at Christ College, Liverpool, was its general editor. Other experts on the committee came from the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, as well as the École Biblique in Jerusalem.

<sup>5</sup> Replaced by the *new* ‘gender-inclusive’ Revised Standard Version in 1989, the Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition was reprinted in 1994 by Ignatius Press and Scepter.

The use of the NVSR in the Catholic liturgy, although employed without the Vatican’s authorisation for a new Canadian lectionary, was officially rejected by the Holy See in 1994.

The use of lectionaries based on these three English versions of the Bible was quickly approved in the United States. However, revised translations of these new versions were commissioned almost as soon as they were published.

As early as 1975, the ICEL translators had adopted the principle of feminist (so-called ‘inclusive’) language, to which all subsequent changes to the liturgy in English would conform. The updating of all liturgical texts was deemed necessary primarily to incorporate feminist language, and certain changes were introduced immediately, even bypassing the approval of the National Conferences of Bishops.<sup>6</sup>

ICEL’s project to revise the English texts of the Scriptures used in the liturgy (the lectionary) officially began in 1978 with the translation of the Psalms (the psalter). This work was approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in July 1992.<sup>7</sup>

ICEL’s revision of the ‘sacramentary’, which began in October 1982, was presented for the first time to the bishops’ conference in June 1994 with a view to their approval<sup>on8</sup>. The introduction to the final report on ICEL’s work states that:

Throughout the revision process, ICEL has been extremely attentive to the issue of inclusive language. Since 1975, ICEL has been committed to the use of ‘horizontal’ inclusive language (referring to the assembly) in all texts prepared under its auspices. Unfortunately, this decision came too late for many of the important texts published during the first six or seven years of ICEL’s work. These included the texts of *the Roman Missal*. *Inclusive language at the horizontal level is used throughout the current revision of the Missal*. During the 1980s, ICEL also examined the issue of masculine language relating to God. In the revision, an effort was made to retain the title ‘Father’ in most cases where the Latin uses \*Pater\*, but also to remove what many had criticised as the gratuitous introduction of the title ‘Father’ in the translated prayers found in the 1973 *Roman Missal*. Where doctrinal or linguistic considerations permitted, *the revision avoided the use of masculine pronouns* to refer to the First and Third Persons of the Trinity. *In the prayers translated as original texts*, an effort was made to use a *greater variety of titles and images of God*

<sup>6</sup> Probably the best-known of these changes alters ICEL’s original 1973 translation of *pro multis* (literally ‘for many’), which was ‘for all men’. The corrected translation, ‘for all’, was incorporated into the official text over ten years ago.

<sup>7</sup> A postal ballot was held following the June 1992 conference. According to published reports, the results were 219 in favour and 27 against.

<sup>8</sup> The third progress report on the revision of the Roman Missal (International Commission for English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). Washington, DC, 1992) was received by the American bishops in May 1992. Their comments were forwarded to the episcopal committee on 1 June. The report “deals with a very small part of the Missal... that is to say, the very heart of the Eucharistic celebration”. p. 7

in order to convey a broader sense of the mystery and majesty of the Divine, p.<sup>9</sup> (italics added by the author)

“Nowadays, in particular, another translation of the psalms that did not use inclusive language would be pointless”, states Fr Lawrence Boadt, CSP, a member of the ICEL committee, writing on the subject of the new revision of the psalter.<sup>10</sup>

He also makes the following observation, with evident satisfaction:

One of the ironies regarding those who criticise the ICEL version is that the editorial committees of older English translations (which these critics so proudly denounce) are rushing to develop their own inclusive language amendments, as is the case with the New American Bible (1986), the New Jerusalem Bible (1985) and the New Revised Standard Version.<sup>11</sup>

Fr Boadt sets out the principles of ‘inclusive language’ used by the ICEL committee:

From its inception in 1978, ICEL’s liturgical psalter project was committed to producing an English translation that uses inclusive language as far as possible. In particular, this means that where the Hebrew uses a masculine singular pronoun to express a truth about all human beings... gender-neutral vocabulary has been used in English... masculine singular pronouns for God have also been translated using other gender-neutral forms.

“ICEL has examined this issue very carefully on several occasions because there has always been a *slight but constant opposition to this practice* amongst those who have reviewed and critiqued the completed translations of the Psalms. However, the Psalter sub-committee was persuaded to adopt its current position by *numerous studies which highlight the androcentric nature of the English language as a reflection of the androcentric nature of a society in which women have generally been treated less than fairly.*” (italics added by the author)

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., page 10.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Boadt, CSP. “Problems Relating to the Translation of Scripture as Illustrated by the ICEL Projects on the Liturgical Psalter”, in Shaping the Liturgy in English, ed. Peter C. Finn and James Schellman. Washington, DC: Pastoral Press. 1990 (pp. 405–429)

<sup>11</sup> The New Revised Common Version (NCC), completed in 1989, was accepted by the NCCB in 1991. (See note 4 above)

Fr Boadt cites the works of radical feminist theologians to support this claim. One such work is the thesis by the Lutheran theologian Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, 'The Gender of God u'12, in which she states:

It is incumbent upon us to eliminate entirely from American English the explanatory use of pronouns referring to God... Sentences must be reworked. The adjective 'divine' is helpful in possessive constructions. 'Godself' is satisfactory as a reflexive term... Thanks to Black Power, educated Americans have removed the word 'nigger' from their vocabulary. Such changes are entirely possible if the motivation exists. *What is needed is not merely a change of vocabulary, but a new perception of God.* A change of style is merely a matter of will if it is preceded by a conversion of the mind... An accurate contemporary translation of theological works will rid the study of Christianity of much of its overwhelmingly masculine tone .<sup>13</sup>

To further justify this assertion that "numerous studies" demonstrate the need for feminist language, Fr Boadt notes that the chair of the ICEL committee responsible for translating the psalter is Sister Mary Collins, OSB. Her article, "Glorious Praise: ICEL's Liturgical Psalter"<sup>14</sup> appeared just a few weeks after the bishops had examined the proposed revision of the ICEL Sacramentary for the first time.

Sister Mary Collins, prioress of her Benedictine community in Atchison, Kansas, was an adviser on feminist theology at *the Concilium*, former chair of the Department of Religion and Religious Education at The Catholic University of America [CUA], and immediate past president of the North American Academy of Liturgy.

Her article on the ICEL Psalter "demonstrates my personal commitment to the project from 1978 to the present day, and my collaboration in the research that shaped it." The application of the principle of 'dynamic equivalence', which honours 'the idiom of the target language', would result in contemporary English poetry, she writes; and the new psalter would be distinguished both by the emerging use of gender in English and by contemporary theological discussions regarding inclusive language.

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<sup>12</sup> Gail Ramshaw Schmidt. "The Gender of God", in *Feminist Theology – A Reader*, ed. Ann Loades. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. pp. 168–180. Gail Ramshaw remains editorial advisor to *\*Worship\**, the influential liturgical journal published at St John's Benedictine Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pp. 178–179, italics added

<sup>14</sup> Sister Mary Collins, OSB, 'Glorious Praise: ICEL's Liturgical Psalter' in *\*Worship\**, July 1992, pp. 290–310.

This consideration entailed, first and foremost, a commitment to overcoming the errors of earlier translations—what has been termed ‘translator’s bias’—namely, the unwarranted preference for masculine pronouns and images and metaphors centred on the male, even where these were not justified by the original text.... Once this commitment had been made to be vigilant on the issue of inclusive language (a confirmation of the broader commitment made by ICEL to inclusive language during this period), *the language would need to be carefully crafted to do it justice*.<sup>15</sup>

ICEL’s style was also shaped by contemporary discussions on linguistic gender amongst literary theorists, biblical interpreters and theologians.... *The issue has never been whether the question of gender would be considered in this translation intended for the Church in prayer, but rather how it would be critically addressed.* Who would deny the impression left by many translations that the poetry of the Psalms gives pride of place to male worshippers interacting with a supposedly male God?<sup>16</sup>

She states that during the ten years spent translating the Psalms, the ICEL editorial committee employed strategies reflecting a “typology designed *to reshape the way English speaks* about individual and social reality”, which describes feminist practices as follows:

Non-sexist language avoids gender-specific terms; inclusive language maintains balance in gender references; emancipatory language *reshapes and transforms language* to challenge stereotypical gender references.<sup>17</sup>

J. Frank Henderson, who also participated in ICEL’s language project between 1977 and 1987, writes with remarkable candour about the gradual influence of feminism on this powerful, albeit largely anonymous, organisation.<sup>18</sup> He draws on the minutes of the meetings of ICEL’s Advisory Committee [AC], the sub-committee on ‘discriminatory language’ (as it was termed at the time) and other ICEL publications and reports. Henderson unhesitatingly describes the feminist perspective as forming ‘the primary focus and priority’ of ICEL and quotes its ‘proposal concerning discriminatory language’ adopted in November 1977:

The discriminatory language under consideration relates to gender, race, colour, culture, religion (e.g. anti-Semitism), marital status (clericalism) and related issues

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<sup>15</sup> Collins, p. 295. Italics added

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 300–301, italics added

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 300–301. Italics added

<sup>18</sup> J. Frank Henderson, ‘ICEL and Inclusive Language’ in *Shaping the Liturgy in English*, op. cit., pp. 257–278.

and the issue must be examined in the context of broader problems of economic, social and legal discrimination against minority or disadvantaged groups. Within this broad field, the advisory committee considers that issues of sexist, racial and anti-Semitic discrimination are of the utmost urgency .<sup>19</sup>

Henderson writes that ICEL had already been applying the principles of “inclusive language” in all new translations since 1975, despite the findings of its survey of the eleven English-speaking bishops’ conferences, which had revealed widespread opposition to ICEL’s offer of “immediate, transitional assistance” regarding discriminatory language, as suggested by the then chairman of ICEL’s Episcopal Council, Archbishop Denis Hurley of South Africa. (Archbishop Hurley held this post from 1975 until 4 May 1991, after which Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of the United States succeeded him until June 1997. The current president is Bishop Maurice Taylor of Galloway, Scotland).

In 1987, the secretariat of the US Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy published *Thirty Years of Liturgical Renewal*, with a foreword by Bishop Frederick R. McManus. The book contains extracts from statements published by the American Commission on the Liturgical Apostolate (later the Committee on the Liturgy) since 1963, as well as insightful commentary by Bishop McManus. Bishop McManus, whose influence on post-conciliar reform was enormous, was a founding member of ICEL, a member of its advisory committee and its treasurer; he was a professor of canon law at The Catholic University of America from 1958 to 1993 and, from 1959, editor of *\*The Jurist\**, a highly influential publication of the American Society of Canon Law. He also served as an adviser to the Pontifical Preparatory Commission on the Sacred Liturgy for the Second Vatican Council; he was *a peritus* at the Council from 1962 to 1965; and he was director of the secretariat of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy from 1965 to 1975, subsequently serving as a permanent adviser. He served as an adviser to *the Consilium* on the implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy following the Council, and as an adviser to the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law (1967–1983).

Bishop McManus, although his name is not widely known, is therefore very highly regarded amongst the few priests who carry the most weight in America on matters of liturgy and canon law.

In his comments appended to the 1985 statement by Archbishop Pilarczyk (who was then chairman of the NCCB Liturgy Committee) ‘clarifying’ the committee’s position following the publication of the revised Grail Psalter (which ‘was characterised by the deliberate removal of language that was ex-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 262



exclusive language, that is to say, language that discriminates on the basis of gender...”<sup>20</sup> )<sup>20</sup> had failed to secure the bishops’ approval, Bishop McManus notes that although “minor changes and corrections” made by the publishers and owners of liturgical texts have been carried out regularly, in the case of the Grail revision, as with all ICEL revisions, there is an issue to be examined, namely that of “inclusive” language:

The issue raised here is that of inclusive language in general. There is a growing realisation that changes in the meaning of words in the English language, as well as the perception of those meanings—coinciding with the liturgical renewal of the last thirty years—must be taken seriously. The notion of exclusive language—whether it excludes women or constitutes a discriminatory illusion towards certain groups, races or nations—must be examined carefully. The original texts must now be scrutinised thoroughly, even if they are unintentionally exclusive or were understood as authentic by the previous generation.

The liturgical texts in English produced by ICEL in the years leading up to the mid-1970s illustrate... a clear effort to encompass the entire Church community or humanity... In other texts, the much more common use of ‘man(s)’ and masculine pronouns to refer to both women and men has persisted and may cause offence. This is true not only in North America... but increasingly throughout the English-speaking world...

In the early 1970s, with a keen awareness of the issue, ICEL texts – like those approved by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops on the recommendation of its episcopal committee – were translated or composed with great care to avoid exclusive language. This fact often goes unnoticed, but it becomes a problem when an existing English text is revised to eliminate exclusionary or sexist language.

ICEL’s first official acknowledgement of the problem is worth noting: it dates from August 1975: “The committee recognises the need, in all future translations and revisions, to avoid words that completely ignore the position of women in the Christian community or that seem to relegate women to a secondary role.” Since its expansion, this principle has been applied to new translations and revisions as well as to the original liturgical texts submitted by ICEL to the bishops’ conferences of the English-speaking world. In the case of the Eucharistic prayers, which have been slightly revised

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<sup>20</sup> McManus, Frederick R., Editor. *Thirty Years of Liturgical Renewal – Statements of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy*. Washington, DC: Secretariat of the Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, NCCB. July 1987. p. 247.

in 1980 to take account of this issue, the US Bishops' Conference swiftly approved the revision.....

The presentation of the Grail Psalter provided the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy with an opportunity to affirm strongly, through its chairman, its support for the principle of inclusive language , f. <sup>21</sup>

In 1983, Archbishop Pilarczyk stated that the committee firmly affirmed the Liturgy Committee's commitment to the Grail Psalter and the new liturgical language:

The Bishops' Conference has encouraged the use of inclusive language in liturgical texts and has approved such language since 1978... The fact that the Grail Psalter has not yet been authorised should not be interpreted as a lack of sensitivity to the issue...

The committee remains committed to ICEL's plans and projects in which liturgical texts are revised or translated with inclusive language in mind.

The committee applauds and commends the Grail's work on this carefully revised Psalter in inclusive language... and eagerly awaits its publication...

Finally, the committee wishes to make it clear that the issue of inclusive language is one that deserves the Church's attention due to the cultural development of the English language. The committee does not view the issue of inclusive language as merely a "women's issue". Rather, the committee views inclusive language as an important issue for the cultural development of the English language and, consequently, a fundamental issue for all the faithful of the Church. The committee hopes... that a version of the psalter in inclusive language will be authorised for use in the liturgy in the dioceses of the United States <sup>22</sup>

Although the Grail Psalter was ultimately rejected by the bishops (in 1993), the report of the Liturgy Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops from November 1991 states that they "agreed to re-examine the revised Grail Psalter (inclusive language version) and that they would establish a mechanism to recommend to the publisher the changes required by the *Criteria for the Evaluation of Inclusive Language Translations*," and that "once the issues have been resolved to everyone's satisfaction, the committee will recommend that the NCCB grant authorisation for the use of this version of the psalter in the liturgy ."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 249

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 250

<sup>23</sup> AGENDA REPORT, November 1991, minutes of the NCCB Committee on Liturgy, p. 27

At the NCCB assembly in November 1990, on the recommendation of the Liturgy Committee (chaired by the Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, Bishop Wilton Gregory), the American bishops adopted the *Criteria for the Use of Inclusive Language in Translations of the Scriptures* – fifteen years after ICEL’s commitment to use feminist language as a guiding principle for all liturgical translations, and just at the start of an intense period of new translations.

The following year, the new translation of the New American Bible (NAB) lectionary, prepared explicitly to incorporate ‘gender-inclusive language’, was accepted by the bishops.<sup>24</sup> At the November 1991 assembly, in a special statement to the bishops on the policy for revising the NAB Psalter by the ‘Committee on Revision and Organisation’, reference was made to the guidelines in *the Criteria*; and the anonymous authors stated that it was ‘urgent’ and ‘legitimate’ to change the text, because this ‘preserves the meaning without offending our sensibilities’.

When Hebrew uses the third-person masculine form in generalised contexts, it is used as it was in English, that is to say, in an inclusive sense. But since in English it no longer has this inclusive meaning, translating it as the third-person masculine would not be a literal translation (that is to say, a translation that gives the exact rendering of the text) but a poor translation.

In the case of horizontal language, our revision of the Psalter avoids exclusive language by various means; most often by using the plural....

The case of vertical language is more difficult. The Bible predominantly depicts God in masculine terms, and no attempt is made to change the imagery of the king, warrior, shepherd, etc. The use of the masculine pronoun is somewhat different. The revision committee proceeded in the belief that the bishops would agree that *pastoral needs take precedence over the demand for strict literalism*. To this end, we *eliminate the use of the masculine pronoun for God* where this can be done easily...

Bearing in mind the overriding concern to produce a psalter intended for use in the liturgy, taking note of the *serious pastoral concern*, and with the intention of producing a revision that meets today’s needs, we believe that the

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<sup>24</sup> This and other new translation projects, both major and minor, approved by the bishops or currently undergoing approval, and the principles governing the process, are described in *AGENDA REPORT, Documentation for the NCCB General Assembly*, 11–14 November 1991; *Action Items* 2–4, reports by the Liturgy Committee (pp. 1–11, 228–234; 238–240), and in the information items on pp. 25–34. Also in *the Agenda Report (Action Items* pp. 252–256) is the committee’s report on pastoral methods concerning the granting of imprimaturs on behalf of the NCCB by a small internal committee. Other, less far-reaching revisions were planned as part of the ‘inculturation’ process aimed at ‘Native Americans and other minority groups’.

The means we have used to make the language of this revision inclusive are legitimate.<sup>25</sup>

Apparently, the members of ICEL and the American bishops' committee on liturgy were unanimous regarding the main objectives of the renewal of the liturgical texts. Their view also appears to be consistent with that expressed by Letty Russell, an Episcopalian "priest" who teaches feminist theology at Yale Divinity School, when she says: "The way to respect the original word [of God] is to retranslate it as our interpretation changes".

But the feminist-inspired alteration of the Bible was not the only aberration. At their autumn 1991 assembly, the American bishops officially approved a strange translation, by the American Bible Society, of the lectionary for Masses. Here is what its introduction states:

Upon its publication, the Lectionary for Children's Masses will be the only approved lectionary for use in children's Masses in the dioceses of the United States of America.<sup>26</sup>

(Although the bishops approved it on condition that it be revised after five years, the children's lectionary is still in use in 2002.)

At the same 1991 assembly, the Liturgy Committee proposed granting permission for the creation of a new lectionary based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the National Council of Churches (NCC), stating that "since the recently revised versions of these biblical translations use inclusive language, the secretariat has received several requests asking that they now be authorised for liturgical use."<sup>27</sup> (The Administrative Committee of the US Conference had already granted its imprimatur to the NRSV translation in September 1991; the bishops were therefore in the awkward position of having to vote on a translation that had already received this form of approval.) Fortunately, the NRSV secured a two-thirds majority of the voting members at the conference. (In 1994, the NRSV had been explicitly rejected by the Holy See.)

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<sup>25</sup> AGENDA REPORT, pp. 233, 234 – emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> AGENDA REPORT – Action Items, p. 11. During the NCCB assembly, the lectionary for children's Masses became known in the press as the 'Sesame Street Bible' or 'Away-in-a-Feedbox', in particular reference to the translation of 'mangeoire' as 'feedbox' (trough). Despite the vigorous defence of the term 'feedbox' by the chairmen of the bishops' committees on Liturgy and Pastoral Methods, the bishops voted to change the term and reinstate 'manger'. This was the only correction the bishops sought before granting their approval to the entire text.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 238

A new lectionary based on the NAB, created primarily with the aim of making its ‘archaic’ English acceptable to feminists<sup>28</sup>, was introduced at the June 1992 assembly. The result of the bishops’ vote was announced six weeks later: 219 in favour; 27 against. The lopsome vote was not surprising. The new translation had already received the *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat* from the Conference through its Administrative Committee and the newly created ad hoc committee for the Approval of Revised Translations of the Scriptures.

By the time these ‘theologically corrected’ translations reached the floor of the bishops’ assembly, they were, in effect, already a *fait accompli*. The plenary assembly of bishops was therefore expected to approve the work of its committees.

The remarkable candour of those involved in the massive retranslation project – who had made no attempt to conceal their ideological agenda – was no doubt due to their confidence that official approval from the bishops and the Holy See would not be long in coming. Generally, when ‘the will of the bishops’ is conveyed to the relevant figures in the Vatican, they accede to the wishes of the national conference. Thus Archbishop Pilarczyk, in his report on ICEL to the NCCB at the November 1991 assembly, expressed confidence that ICEL’s depleted resources would be replenished once the new liturgical books were ready for distribution by 1997.<sup>29</sup> (It appears, however, that ICEL’s assets stood at around seven million US dollars in 1999).

The history of ICEL’s liturgical renewal project, as explained by its own members, reveals: 1) that the commitment to so-called ‘inclusive’ language had been the guiding principle for over twenty years; 2) that ICEL’s decisions concerning all English translations of Scripture and prayers used in public worship were, with rare exceptions, accepted by the bishops’ conferences with virtually no questions asked; 3) that ICEL’s committees were heavily influenced by radical feminist theology and biblical scholars; 4) that only eleven bishops, members of ICEL’s Episcopal Council, gave their approval to the work of an even smaller number of people who actually produce these translations; and 4) that ICEL’s commitment to adopting an attitude of theological and ecclesiastical revisionism,

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<sup>28</sup> See references above to Sister Mary Collins, OSB; J. Frank Henderson, Lawrence Boadt, et al. in *\*Shaping English Liturgy\**.

<sup>29</sup> AGENDA REPORT – Information Articles, p. 113. “ICEL’s income comes from the liturgical texts it prepares and from licences granted to publishers who produce them following authorisation by the conferences. Current indications suggest that ICEL’s financial position will be difficult in the coming years, particularly from 1993 onwards. This situation is the result of the high cost of the missal revision project—which will have taken twelve years from the initial consultation phase to its presentation to the conferences—as well as a general decline in revenue from liturgical works previously prepared by ICEL. More recent publications, such as the *Regulations for Christian Funerals*, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*, the *Book of Blessings* and the *Ritual for Bishops*, whilst generating some revenue, have provided only a meagre injection of funds. In some cases, the sums spent on preparing these texts have not yet been recouped and, realistically, probably never will be, given the costs involved in producing liturgical works. The declining financial position will no doubt continue until early 1997, when new revenue is anticipated from the revised missal.”

has been imposed for many years on millions of English-speaking Catholic faithful through the gradual incorporation of texts using feminist language throughout the English-speaking Church.

Documents from ICEL's sister Protestant organisation, now known as the English Language Liturgical Consultation [ELLC], would no doubt reveal a parallel development throughout the National Council of Churches. And whilst the active politicisation of the Church's prayer has met with negligible resistance from Catholic bishops for over thirty years, the feminist reform of other religious bodies has met with none at all. Most major Protestant denominations now have multiple 'alternative' forms of worship, and although these are technically optional, they have the official approval of the governing bodies and appear in official worship manuals, hymn books, etc.

As in the Catholic Church, it seems that liturgical reform in other major religious groups has usually been carried out by a small group of experts. However, one point that may be of significance is that the approach taken by most non-Catholic religious bodies, which have a 'democratic' or generally representative structure, grants the faithful a degree of control over liturgical or doctrinal changes – at least in theory. It is therefore possible that proponents of reform might one day be overruled at a legislative synod or convention.

In the Catholic Church, of course, it is the bishops who bear primary responsibility for changes to the liturgy. For more than three decades, bishops who sought to defend Scripture and the liturgy against ideological assaults have been powerless to mount an effective opposition to reform proposals. Criticism of the politicisation of the Church's doctrine and liturgy risked being labelled as reactionary, fundamentalist or eccentric; it was often ridiculed or simply dismissed as coming from 'amateurs'. What was perhaps more damaging than these epithets, even within the Bishops' Conference itself, was the accusation of being 'prone to polemics'.

At *the* beginning of the third millennium, almost forty years after the publication of *\*Sacrosanctum Concilium\**, what one bishop called a "reversal of trend" took place – no doubt resulting from numerous "phenomena".

The most significant element of this "reversal of trend" is, of course, the publication of *Liturgiam authenticam*, the fifth instruction on the correct implementation of the constitution

on the liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (S.C., art. 36). Published on 7 May 2001, it was approved by Pope John Paul II on 25 April. The document was translated into English by the Holy See.

As early as 1988, in his Apostolic Letter marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Constitution on the Liturgy, the Holy Father emphasised that “the responsibility for promoting the renewal of the liturgy lay first and foremost with the Apostolic See”. He also called for an analysis of the changes made since the Council.

On 4 December 1993, the thirtieth anniversary of *\*Sacrosanctum Concilium\**, in his *\*ad limina\** address to a group of American bishops, the Pope emphasised the importance of accurate translations. At the time, the English version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church had been delayed due to translation issues (particularly those relating to ‘inclusive’ language), and the massive project of retranslating and revising all English-language liturgical texts—the Missal and the texts of Scripture—was underway.

In his address to the bishops, the Holy Father stated:

The painstaking task of translation must safeguard *the full integrity of doctrine* and, in accordance with the character of each language, the beauty of the original texts. When so many people thirst for the Living God (Ps 42:2)—whose majesty and mercy lie at the heart of liturgical prayer—the Church must respond with a *language of praise and adoration that fosters respect and gratitude for God’s greatness, compassion and power*. When the faithful gather to celebrate the work of our redemption, the language of their prayer – free from any doctrinal ambiguity or ideological influence – must foster the dignity and beauty of the celebration itself, whilst expressing the faith and unity of the Church. (italics in the original ).<sup>30</sup>

A few months later, the fourth instruction for the implementation of the Council’s liturgical reform, *\*Varietales legitimae\**, was published. And the English translation of the *\*Catechism of the Catholic Church\**, revised under the close supervision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was also published in June 1994.

Several important factors contributed to “the new era of liturgical renewal” signalled by *\*Liturgiam authenticam\**, such as:

- The proposed revisions to the English texts required the bishops’ approval of the new texts, and this, in turn, gave the

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<sup>30</sup> Address by Pope John Paul II to the bishops of California, Nevada and Hawaii, December 1993; published in *\*L’Osservatore Romano\**, 15 December 1993.

This gave the bishops the opportunity to examine even more closely the proposed changes they had received immediately after the Council. As a result of discussions concerning the revisions to the ICEL Missal, which lasted for years, the bishops gained a new sense of their profound responsibility towards the Church's liturgy – and of the importance of accurate translations. In 1993, the American bishops refused to vote on the first instalment of the proposed revision of ICEL's 'Sacramentary', thereby delaying the ratification process by several years. This delay reflected the bishops' growing concern regarding numerous scriptural and liturgical texts and the process by which they were approved, and it gave them more time to examine the new proposals.

- The publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the need to translate it, also drew considerable attention to issues of accurate translation. The Holy See had to intervene regarding the English version, published in 1994.

- Several new translations of Scripture appeared in 1990, all of which required the approval of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in order to be used in Catholic worship. Problems raised by several of these scriptural texts led the CDF to draw up, in the meantime, 'Norms Concerning the Translation of Biblical Texts for Use in the Liturgy', published in 1997. (*Liturgiam authenticam* incorporates much of this document.)

- In June 1996, Archbishop Jorge Arturo Medina Estévez [now a cardinal] was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. The Archbishop had helped to draft the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, served as *a peritus* at the Second Vatican Council, and was a member of the Theological Commission for the Interpretation of Canon Law. At the time of his appointment, Archbishop Medina Estévez said in an interview:

It is right to lament the fact that certain translations are not faithful but rather quite fanciful [*fantasiosi*]. I am convinced that the texts of the Leonine, Gregorian and Gelasian sacramentaries possess inexhaustible richness and value. And it is possible to translate them faithfully. Sometimes translation is confused with interpretation, but they are two different things.



- That same month, during a meeting with Archbishop Pilarczyk, president of the ICEL Episcopal Council, Archbishop Geraldo Majella Agnelo, secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, said:

Although *the document* contains valid principles, it must be recognised as a text dating from 1969, from the early period of liturgical reform. Its current value is therefore shaped by the experience of the last twenty-seven years, not to mention the fact that there are new norms of canon law concerning the approval of such translations.

“In this context, there may be a need to provide further clarification to the bishops’ conferences in order to increase their commitment and influence in a matter which is both their right and their duty: the translation of liturgical works and texts .<sup>31</sup>

- Many Catholic faithful, often dismayed by years of unchecked liturgical innovations, have become aware of the proposed liturgical changes, revisions and retranslations of biblical and liturgical texts, and have begun to understand more clearly their own responsibilities – not only as participants in Catholic worship, but also as participants in the transmission of the faith in its entirety to future generations of Catholics. During these years, new associations and movements of clergy and laity were formed to express their fidelity to *the Magisterium* and to foster a deeper sense of the sacred in Catholic worship. Several of these initiatives focused primarily on issues relating to the liturgy .<sup>32</sup>

- In October 1999, Cardinal Medina Estévez called for a comprehensive reform of ICEL’s procedures and structures, and ordered ICEL to reform its statutes. In a letter to Bishop Maurice Taylor, chairman of ICEL’s episcopal council, the cardinal noted that problems with liturgical translation into English “take on particular gravity because the influence of English on other language groups is ‘a proven and inescapable fact’” .<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted from the Catholic News Service report, 13 June 1996.

<sup>32</sup> In the United States, for example, the Adoremus Society for the Renewal of the Sacred Liturgy and the Society for Catholic Liturgy were founded in 1995, and the following year ‘The Oxford Declaration’ was published by the Society for Catholic Culture in England. Credo, an organisation of priests committed to improving translations, was founded in 1992, and Women for Faith & Family, established in 1984 to support the Church’s teaching, have consistently opposed the influence of feminist theology on language and the liturgy.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Cardinal Medina to Bishop Maurice Taylor, 26 October 1999.

To this day, the world is still awaiting the publication of the third typical edition of *the Missale Romanum*. Originally intended for publication during the Jubilee Year (2000), it was delayed, first of all, due to issues raised in the United States concerning the translation of the rubrics, or the rules governing the celebration of Mass.

Initially, professional liturgists strongly opposed certain elements of *the new Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, published in July 2000. They urged the American bishops to make ‘adaptations’ to incorporate certain innovations. However, at their assembly in November 2001, the American bishops revised the adaptations they had approved in June in order to align themselves more closely with the Holy See’s position.

Furthermore, ICEL’s role in the translation of liturgical texts has not yet been settled. In principle, it seems a positive step to have a “joint commission” to provide liturgical translations in a language (such as English or Spanish) that is used in a large number of countries. It remains to be seen, however, whether the current members of ICEL—who apparently remain deeply committed to principles that are fundamentally at odds with those laid down by the Holy See—will be willing to accept the change.

At their assembly in November 2001, the American bishops voted unanimously to reject ICEL’s translation of the *\*Institutio Generalis Romani\** in order to comply with the translation principles set out in *\*Liturgiam authenticam\**.

It is now clear that ICEL’s revision of the ‘sacramentary’, sent to the Holy See for *recognitio* more than three years ago, is obsolete. The long-awaited new edition of *the Missale Romanum* will require a new translation – one free from ideological bias and removing the ‘original texts’ added and invented by ICEL members.

It is true that some liturgists and a few bishops are strongly opposed to what they regard as unjustified interference by the Holy See in the liturgy. However, it is also now clear that a large majority of American bishops strongly affirm the authority of the Holy See regarding changes to the liturgy – and have welcomed *Liturgiam authenticam*.

Above all, it is the deep hope of the majority of the Catholic faithful – bishops, clergy and laity – to see peace, unity and integrity restored to the Catholic liturgy as soon as possible. The Church’s worship is, as the Council put it, “the source and summit” of our lives as

Catholics. We must restore the profound truth that the Mass always embodies the full measure of beauty, mystery, transcendence and a sense of the sacred which animate, strengthen, inspire and ennoble the faith of the faithful, and prepare us to enter the realm of the heavenly liturgy where our Redeemer dwells.

To this end, for the renewal of the sacred power of the Catholic liturgy, we must all pray – and work. The faith of our children, and of our children's children – the future of the whole world – depends on it.