

Tridentine Community News

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Beyond the New English Ordinary Form Missal: Other Issues With Approved Translations – Part 3

In Part 2 of this column series, we compared English translations of the Holy Bible. We provided an example of the same passage of Holy Scripture as translated in the Douay-Rheims Bible (used in most translations of the Extraordinary Form of Holy Mass), the New American Bible (used in the Ordinary Form in the United States), and the New Revised Standard Version (used in the Ordinary Form in Canada). Our argument was that the Douay's use of hierarchical language when addressing God, along with other reverent constructs of English, are particularly fitting expressions of the content of the Bible, consistent with commonly-found English translations of the Ordinary and Orations of the Tridentine Mass.

We are always open to corrections and differing views. A reader of this column who happens to be a Biblical scholar e-mailed some interesting points that deserve mention:

1. When the Douay-Rheims was originally published, the language that it used was the common language of the day. It was not meant to be hierarchical language. That perception arose as “thee” and “thou” dropped out of everyday usage. Because nowadays most people only hear those pronouns used in Old English settings such as the works of Shakespeare, or in various Biblical translations, they have acquired a reputation of reverence which was not intended by the original translators.

2. In 1943, Pope Pius XII issued *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, an Encyclical which urged subsequent translations of the Bible to be made directly from the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The Douay and various other translations had been made from the Latin Vulgate, which itself was a translation from the original languages. As a translation of a translation, the Douay is, in principle, less accurate than the NAB or NRSV, both of which are direct translations from the original languages.

3. In the over 400 years since the Douay was originally published, considerable advances in Biblical scholarship have taken place. Increasing familiarity with the original texts, improved communications between those conducting Biblical studies, and discoveries such as the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s have resulted in more accurate translations being made in recent decades than have been possible in prior years.

4. Truly accurate translations might surprise us. For example, when our Lord addresses the Apostles in Matthew 4.19, and in the language many of us know, commands them to be “fishers of men”, the original Greek actually says “fishers of human beings”. Thus, accurate translations may require some adaptation on our part. It is not safe to make a blanket assumption that seemingly more modern expressions are inaccuracies, when in fact the contrary may be the case.

5. By and large, hierarchical language was not used in the original Biblical texts. Desiring it as a part of current-day ideologies is actually imposing a notion that was not there to begin with.

6. It is not pastorally appropriate to suggest that the judgment of the Canadian and American bishops in approving the NRSV and NAB translations may have been flawed. Our bishops did so recognizing that these particular translations were the work of Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and Jewish scholarly translating teams whose focus was accuracy. They are direct responses to Pope Pius XII's encyclical and eminently suitable.

A Clarification of Our Own Thoughts

We cannot be cafeteria Catholics. We cannot accuse liberal Catholics of picking and choosing what they like, if we of a more traditional bent are guilty of the same. Our column was not meant to suggest that we approached the topic from a perspective of Biblical expertise. Quite the contrary: this author is relatively unfamiliar with the Holy Bible, and is not qualified to debate, for example, point 2 above. Our reader is one of this region's noted experts on sacred Scripture, thus his observations bear weight.

We can agree to disagree on some points, however. A gender-neutral translation of Matthew 4.19 when “men” itself is widely acknowledged to be usable in a gender-neutral context is arguably an imposition of a current-day ideology, the very thing our reader seeks to avoid in point 5. Interestingly, the NAB uses “men” in this particular translated phrase, but the NRSV does not.

Our preference for the Douay-Rheims – for usage in the Extraordinary Form – is grounded in three areas:

First, hierarchical language (as we now perceive it) has intrinsic value. Our Protestant brethren use similar translations, such as the King James, in part because of that language. It's an asset both aesthetic (subjective) and a matter of liturgical custom (objective).

Second, the vast majority of hand missals, and the English translations of the Extraordinary Form Roman Ritual book of blessings and Sacraments (the *Rituale Romanum* and its abbreviated sister *Colléctio Rituum*), use hierarchical English and Douay-Rheims translations of Biblical passages. One might draw an analogy to High Anglican services, whose Tridentine Mass-like rituals and Old English verbiage would seem familiar to those who attend the Extraordinary Form. In the English-speaking world, there is a culture of language around the Extraordinary Form. One cannot simply replace the Biblical passages with the NRSV or NAB; those readings would have a form inconsistent with the remainder of the Missal. Changing the rest of the Missal and Ritual into comparably less-hierarchical English would be a jarring, rather non-pastoral change to established traditions.

Third, over the past forty years, there has been only one newly-published hand missal for the Extraordinary Form that has an *Imprimatur* (the approval of a bishop): the Baronius Press Daily Missal. That missal incorporates...you guessed it...Douay-Rheims readings. The bishop who gave the approval, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, is intimately familiar with the Extraordinary Form; this was no casual sign-off. Like the bishops who approved the NAB and NRSV, Bishop Bruskewitz made an informed decision, one that we must respect.

Comments? Ideas for a future column? Please e-mail tridnews@stjosaphatchurch.org. Previous columns are available at www.stjosaphatchurch.org