

Backgrounder on Canadian Lectionary

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has recently issued a decree known as a *recognitio* to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB). This *recognitio* allows the Conference of Bishops to proceed with the publication of a revised *Lectionary for Sundays and Solemnities*. It also concludes a long journey that began almost two decades ago.

In 1989, when the supply of lectionaries (based on the Jerusalem Bible text) was exhausted, the English Sector Commission for Liturgy of the CCCB was called upon to make a recommendation for the future. It rapidly concluded that the same service could not be given to the Church of the next generation by simply reprinting the existing books. Biblical scholarship had made considerable progress in the intervening period, and a whole new generation of translations had appeared. These had made great strides in more faithfully interpreting the original texts to English-speaking congregations. This was an important factor, but the Commission was also very much concerned to have the best possible text for liturgical proclamation, recognizing that a text designed to be proclaimed and heard demanded different qualities from one designed for private reading.

The Commission also wanted to be faithful to the wish of the Second Vatican Council that it would be preferable to have a version of Sacred Scripture which all Christians could use in common. To do this would be in keeping with the opening paragraph of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* which saw as one of the principal goals of liturgical renewal “to nurture whatever can contribute to the unity of all who believe in Christ” (Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 1).

With these criteria in mind (suitability for public proclamation, fidelity to the original Scriptural text, possibility of ecumenical use), the Commission recommended the adoption of the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) of the Bible as the basis of the Canadian Lectionary. The Bishops of Canada voted in favour of this recommendation, and contractual agreements were made with the National Council of Churches in the USA which owns the copyright to the NRSV.

Thus began the long process of preparing a new lectionary for use in the public worship of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada. In 1992, the CCCB published the Sunday Lectionary based on the NRSV translation. The Lectionary for Weekdays followed in 1994. Subsequently the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments requested that the Canadian Conference undertake a further and more complete revision of the NRSV texts as used in its Lectionaries. The project also involved consultation with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In May 2003, representatives from the CCCB and the Holy See met and agreed on a set of principles according to which the revision of the Lectionary would proceed. These principles, while giving preference to the *NRSV* text, made provision for changes deemed necessary for reasons of clarity of language and of conformity to the original Greek or Hebrew. When the original language was clearly intended to include both males and

females, the translation was to be inclusive; when the original language was clearly meant to be gender specific, this was to be respected in the translation. The principles also addressed issues of oral quality and respect for the long-standing traditions of the Latin Church as well as the common prayer texts used by English-speaking Catholics. Once these principles were adopted, the work of revision began in earnest. It has now borne fruit in this new Lectionary which will become available for the proclamation of God's Holy Word sometime in 2008.

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