

# Ruling mystifies bishops, scholars

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Scholars and bishops have criticized the Vatican ruling against liturgical use of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. And the heads of the U.S. and Canadian bishops' conferences planned meetings with Rome officials to resolve differences.

The Vatican also ruled against liturgical use of the New American Bible revised Psalter, or Book of Psalms, although current consultations with Rome could lead to approval of a changed version.

Both the NAB Psalter and the NRSV use inclusive language in references to people. Vatican doctrinal congregation sources cited inclusive language as the source of problems in the texts.

The planned meetings in Rome did not mollify some Bible scholars, who considered the Vatican action mystifying and based on a misunderstanding of inclusive language.

Franciscan Father Alexander A. Di Lella, editor of the Catholic edition of the NRSV, said, "I'm totally dismayed ... It doesn't make any sense."

The Executive Board of the Catholic Biblical Association called the ruling "demeaning" to the bishops' conferences

and said it puts the credibility of the church at risk.

Catholic parishes throughout Canada will be forced to scrap three new Lectionaries they have begun using since 1992 if the Vatican ruling sticks. But the bishops' conference has told priests to take no action until they receive further word — possibly after officers of the conference have met with Vatican officials in November.

U.S. scholars and bishops who head committees overseeing Scripture translations or their liturgical use defended the NRSV and the NAB Psalter.

"The revised New American Bible and the New Revised Standard Version are faithful translations," said Auxiliary Bishop Richard J. Sklba of Milwaukee, a Scripture scholar and head of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on the Review of Scripture Translations.

"Inclusive language is a necessity in our American idiom and culture today," said Bishop Donald W. Trautman of Erie, Pa., head of the bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

"It is necessary in Scripture, in the liturgy and in catechetics," added Bishop Trautman, who is also a Scripture scholar.

The Rev. Dr. Arthur O. Van Eck, director of Bible translation and utilization

at the National Council of Churches, which sponsored the NRSV, said he was disappointed because the Vatican did not even respond to the council's offers to try to work out difficulties.

"It would have enriched the process if we had had a dialogue about some of the alternatives. I hope that can still happen," he said.

Cardinal-designate William H. Keeler of Baltimore, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, announced Nov. 1 that there will be a meeting of Vatican and U.S. Catholic representatives in Rome to try to clear up differences.

He said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, agreed to have a group of U.S. bishops and Scripture scholars meet with Pontifical Biblical Commission members residing in Rome.

Cardinal-designate Keeler expressed hopes that Vatican-U.S. collaboration would lead soon to "a Lectionary which will be both faithful to the tradition of the church and serve the urgent needs of our people for a Lectionary in the English currently used in our country."

News of Vatican ban on liturgical use of the inclusive-language Scripture translations first appeared Oct. 25 when Catholic News Service reported on an interview with Archbishop Geraldo M. Agnelo, secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

The archbishop said his congregation, on instructions from the doctrinal congregation, had revoked the permission for liturgical use of the NRSV which it had given to the U.S. bishops in 1992 following their decision to approve it for liturgical use.

The NAB Psalter had similar approval for liturgical use from the U.S. bishops and confirmation from the Vatican in 1992, but liturgical use of it was also revoked in the new decision.

Archbishop Agnelo also said catechetical use of the NRSV was forbidden — a comment that still had U.S. and Canadian church officials puzzled more than a week later, since the decision to which the archbishop referred speaks only about liturgical use.

Cardinal-designate Keeler said conference officials initially said they had not yet seen the Vatican decision because they took some of Archbishop Agnelo's comments to mean that there was a new letter in the works which had not yet arrived.

Canadian church officials remained mystified in early November, saying they had not yet received any communication from Rome about the revocation of the text which is used throughout their country in English-language Lectionaries.

Bishop Sklba said he had been working since summer to gather together responses by top Bible scholars to a list of specific questions Vatican officials had raised about the NRSV and NAB revised Psalter.

"I'm surprised at the way the conversation seems to have been short-circuited" by the Vatican issuing its decision before that consultation was completed, he said.



AP/Wide World

## Precairous Mass

Archbishop of Sarajevo Vinko Puljic celebrates a Mass marking All Souls Day at Sarajevo's main Bare cemetery, which has been closed for most of the war. The prelate Oct. 30 was elevated to cardinal by Pope John Paul II. Sniper shots interrupted the Mass several times since the cemetery is located just several hundred yards from Bosnian-Serb positions.

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