

WORLD & NATION

Vatican instruction aims for exact translations

By John Norton
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Seeking to close an era of debate on liturgical translation issues that has been especially heated in the English-speaking world, the Vatican issued a new instruction that underlines its insistence on exact translations and its role in the process.

On a particularly contested point, the document rejects the systematic use of inclusive language in translations. Instead, officials said, it adopts a moderate approach taken in the recent revision of the Lectionary, or book of Mass readings, for the United States.

The instruction also foresees several noticeable changes to phrases used by English-speaking Catholics at Mass, including in the opening of the Creed, in one of the most common Mass acclamations, and in the penitential rite.

The Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments posted the 32-page instruction, *Liturgiam Authenticam* ("The Authentic Liturgy"), in English, French and Latin on the congregation's page of the Vatican Web site late May 7.

The instruction describes the rules as setting the stage "for a new era of liturgical renewal."

While addressed to the whole church, the document treats a number of issues that have been under debate in the English-speaking world, officials said.

"Almost every paragraph of it concerns subjects that I've heard bishops of the United States discussing over the past five, 10 years," said Father James P. Moroney, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Liturgy and a consul-

tor to the worship congregation.

"Certainly the document provides in the name of the Holy See a significant milestone in defining the answers to questions that have been raised," he said in an interview in Rome.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, said the new instruction reflects long consultations between the Vatican and English-speaking bishops.

"It is now our hope and expectation that there will be a much quicker approval of liturgical texts" by the Vatican, he said in a May 8 statement.

In recent years, citing problems with the translation principles used, the Vatican has slowed or denied final confirmation for several major liturgical texts approved by English-speaking bishops.

The new instruction rejects the looser translation approach, known as "dynamic equivalence," commonly taken by English-language translators in favor of one more closely tied to the original text.

"The original text, insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content and without paraphrases or glosses," the document said.

On the question of inclusive language, Father Moroney said he saw "a high degree of correspondence" between the principles laid out in the new instruction and those used in revising the Lectionary for the United States.

While the instruction forbids translators from using a number of common devices to incorporate inclusive language, Father Moroney said the guidelines still

would permit some inclusive translations like "Happy the one ..." instead of "Happy the man ..." where the original text clearly intended to communicate men and women.

The instruction said liturgical translations should be "free of an overly servile adherence to prevailing modes of expression," even if that leaves some texts difficult to understand or interpret correctly.

"It is the task of catechists or the homilist to transmit that right interpretation of the texts that excludes any prejudice or unjust discrimination on the basis of persons, gender, social condition, race or other criteria, which has no foundation at all in the texts of the sacred liturgy," it said.

For certain prayers and liturgical expressions deemed particularly important to the church's heritage, the document requires translations that are "as literal as possible."

For example, the instruction said translations of the opening of the Nicene Creed, recited at Mass, should conform to the first person singular, "Credo," found in the definitive Latin-language missal. The current English rendering, "We believe," is based on the ancient Greek text.

In addition, it said the Mass participants' response to the priest's greeting, "The Lord be with you," should be a literal translation of the Latin, *Et cum spiritu tuo*, or "And with your spirit." In current English usage, the congregation responds, "And also with you."

The instruction also requires a literal translation of the Latin words in the penitential rite, "mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa," or "through my fault,

through my fault, through my most grievous fault," instead of the current simplified English translation, "through my own fault."

The changes would bring the English translations in line with other translations, which nearly all use literal language, said an official at the worship congregation who asked that his name not be used.

The official acknowledged that "it will be a jolt" for English-speaking Catholics to learn the new expressions, but said the existing translations could not be justified.

Many of the new rules are aimed at the behind-the-scenes mechanics of liturgical translations, in large part by setting strict limits on the activity and responsibility of translation commissions employed by bishops' conferences.

While repeatedly emphasizing the primary responsibility of bishops' conferences for preparing and approving translations, it says the Vatican "will be involved more directly" in preparing translations in major languages like English.

Last year, the Vatican called for an overhaul of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, known as ICEL and based in Washington.

ICEL's 11 members — bishops' conferences in English-speaking countries — have begun revising the body's statutes and reassessing its translation principles.

"I'm sure this instruction will provide even greater clarity to both of these tasks," said Father Moroney.

"It's clear that many people will see this in terms of power," he said, but "I see no monsters here."

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