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New missal's lack of inclusive language is jarring

Isabella R. Moyer | May. 25, 2012 NCR Today

Don't worry your pretty little head about mere words, dear. Of course "men" includes you. Only feminists worry about these petty details.

Despite those who fail to see the importance of it, inclusive language is now expected in academic writing and journalism. But it is glaringly absent in the revised Roman Missal. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, a doctor based in Mumbai, has written a thoughtful blog [1] for *The Tablet* called, "New Missal makes women invisible."

She provides a commentary on the New Missal from the church in India, where inclusive language has become the standard:

> Such a translation is at complete odds with the "Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India" issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) in 2009, that calls the Church to be gender-sensitive at all times. By excluding women it establishes the "divinity" of man, reinforces the superiority of man, and emphasises man's close relationship with God in direct contravention of the opening remarks of Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil CSsR, then-President, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, which promote "the egalitarian message of Jesus, with the vision of a collaborative Church with Gender Justice".
>
> Making women invisible in this way is referred to as "symbolic annihilation". It implies that women are insignificant and can be wholly represented by men. Yet the CBCI Gender Policy clearly recognises the "unique experiences and insights" of women, and acknowledges the need "to make space for a spirituality that is shaped by women's life experiences and creative expression".

Here in Canada, we use the more inclusive New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible for our lectionary. Some revisions were requested by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to ensure "clarity of language and of conformity to the original Greek or Hebrew." The standard agreed upon was:

> 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.

A backgrounder [2] to the Canadian Lectionary on the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops website explains the history of the NRSV Lectionary.

When minds, ears and hearts have been formed to embrace and expect language that respects inclusivity, it is all the more jarring to pray in words that ignore it.

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