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Study indicates wide rejection of new translations by US clergy

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 8, 2014 NCR Today

A vast majority of leaders of U.S. Catholic parishes polled for a new survey say they find the new English translation of the Mass "awkward and distracting," with half agreeing it "urgently needs to be revised."

Leaders at 539 parishes across the country indicate their disagreement with the new translation in a new s [1] tudy [2] conducted by Georgetown's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) and released Tuesday in conjunction with the popular liturgical blog [2]PrayTell [2].

The translation went into effect in fall 2011 and has been criticized because of its use of awkward and stilted English in translating from the Latin version of the Mass?. While Tuesday's survey rehashes many of the talking points of those opposed to the translation, it also paints in stark relief the struggle many parishes are still having in adopting the new text.

For example, some 75 percent of respondents said they either "agree" or "strongly agree" that "some of the language of the new text is awkward and distracting." Forty-seven percent answered "strongly agree" to that statement.

Likewise, an even 50 percent of those answering said they "agree" or "strongly agree" that "the new translation urgently needs to be revised." 33 percent answered "strongly agree" on that statement.

Release of the new CARA survey also comes shortly after one of the former leaders of the U.S. bishops' conference said publicly [3] that the new translation has "flaws and difficulties."

Speaking at a liturgical conference in St. Petersburg, Fla., March 29, Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory said it was time for priests and bishops to say of the translation: "We've tried it, we've lived with it, we think it needs correction." Gregory served as president of the U.S. bishops' conference from 2001 to 2004.

CARA sent its survey to 6,000 parishes before receiving the 539 responses. Of the 539 responding, 444 were members of the clergy (421 diocesan or religious priests, 13 deacons) and 75 were lay leaders (57 women religious or other laywomen, 18 religious brothers or other laymen).

The study was commissioned by the Godfrey Diekmann Center for Patristics and Liturgical Studies of Saint John's School of Theology Seminary in Collegeville, Minn.

The first question of the survey asked for the respondents overall attitude towards the translation. Thirty-eight percent responded: "Before it was introduced I was apprehensive about it and I still don't like it." Another 11 percent said they were positive about the text before but had changed their mind since the translation began use and now do not like it.

Twenty-eight percent responded: "Before it was introduced I was looking forward to it and I still like it." Another 17 percent said they were negative about the text before but had changed their mind since the

translation began use and now like it.

Among other findings from the CARA survey:

- Only 23 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are "confident that the views of priests will be taken seriously in future decisions about liturgical translation," with only 7 percent saying they "strongly agree;"
- 54 percent said they did not approve of the Vatican's leadership in bringing about the new text;
- 60 percent disagreed that the translation is "an improvement" on the prior translation;
- 59 percent disagreed that similar new translations should be made for other liturgical texts, with 37 percent saying they "strongly disagree" with that statement.

The U.S. bishops most recently approved new texts in line with the new translation style last fall at their annual assembly, approving new texts for the rites of confirmation and marriage.

Those texts were the latest in a series bishops across the English-speaking world have approved following the Vatican's 2001 publication of a new set of norms for translation from the Latin originals. Those new norms, published in the document *Liturgiam authenticam*, called for translations from the Latin to be made in "the most exact manner."

The U.S. bishops' tally in the fall was made by voice vote [4], with only short debate.

In one intervention, Albany, N.Y., Bishop Howard Hubbard proposed that the bishops change a segment of the confirmation text that reads "fear of the Lord" to read "spirit of wonder and awe of God's presence." He was voted down by a firm voice vote.

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