

CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER

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Dear Bishop N.,

The purpose of this letter is to raise some concerns I have about pastoral strategy in implementing the new translation of the Mass.

Recently I published a letter in the Southern Cross on the question of the new translation of the Mass. My motivation in doing so was primarily pastoral, and not a desire to challenge the authority of the Church or our local bishops. With my exposure to a variety of pastoral contexts throughout the country, either in my visits to Redemptorist parishes, or as a travelling mission preacher, I cannot but be aware of the responses and feelings of both clergy and people towards the new translations, and this is what I instinctively respond to. For example, in the diocese in which I am currently preaching a mission (where I am writing this letter), negative attitudes of the local clergy against the new translation are more than evident. Responses to my original Southern Cross letter, attached hereto as an appendix, are further illustrations. (With apologies, I offer them unedited, merely withholding authors' names.)

However, it was my recent experience at Rivonia parish in Johannesburg that was the greatest eye-opener to me. The parish priest there is, in my opinion, a man of exceptional humility, loyalty and love for the Church [I made this statement in response to Cardinal Napier's suggestion that if priests were more humble and obedient there would not have been a problem!]. The Mass changes had been fully implemented in his parish. Nevertheless something that happened there made me sit up and take note.

It is my practice during two-week parish missions to arrange a series of retreats for various groups during the first week. On the Tuesday evening I had about 50 extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in attendance. I led them in a Holy Hour with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. We then took a break and moved to a meeting room for discussions. The new mass translation was never on the agenda and as a matter of policy I do not bring it up, or, for that matter during missions and retreats, declare my own views publicly on it. I simply asked, by way of evoking some review of the parish's experience of liturgy, how they felt their practices could be improved. One kindly and elderly gentleman, a truly devout Catholic, put up his hand and said: "Start by getting rid of this dreadful new translation!" All heads started nodding vigorously. I then said that this is not the sort of issue I had in mind to discuss, but that since we had heard a negative

comment, it would be good to balance it with a positive one. Only one man put his hand up – a French speaker. He liked it, he said, because it was closer grammatically to the French!

Bishop N., while I admit I have personal struggles with some of these new texts and the thinking behind them, I do not go around “stirring”, as I fear you may assume. I am only reporting honestly what I see and what I hear. So let me declare to you what I believe to be a pressing current issue: It is not about authority in the Church. It is not about liturgy. I suggest it is not even primarily about language. For me, the critical issue is *pastoral*. It is about pastoral leadership, and the type of pastoral leadership needed right now.

I am appealing to your conscience as a pastor and leader.

May I submit the following areas which I believe need to be considered, not only by way of an evaluation of recent experience, but also *before any further implementations take place*.

1. Our local bishops’ conference did make a mistake. But that should not have to become an obstacle. It is not a sign of weakness – indeed, it can be a sign of strength and mature leadership – to acknowledge a mistake. Pope Benedict XVI himself provides examples of this. What people now perceive as shameful is that the latest excuse you have offered is that individual priests jumped the gun and that is why the bishops went ahead officially. This was not the reason you had given in earlier articles, and so there appears to be a contradiction. A humble gesture by the bishops will go a long way to defuse the tension.
2. What matters is not *who* is right, but *what* is right. Again, I believe that the dignity of Truth will be greatly served if the bishops at least conceded the valid points that people are making with regard to the new translations. Many are saying: We just want to be heard, and to have our legitimate views acknowledged. To date, not a single valid point is acknowledged by our leadership.
3. It has not helped that some of the rationale for the changes, presented as ‘catechesis’, is simply not true, or at least is only part of the truth. Some is in fact highly debatable, as I stated in my recent Southern Cross article. There are dozens of ‘periti’ whose expertise is being ignored: theologians, historians, liturgists, classicists and linguists. A recognition of the gifts of others, and involving them as much as possible, is essential to pastoral praxis. A common perception at the moment is that the bishops are ‘going it solo’.
4. It struck me recently that much of the *emotional* response of English speakers to these changes could be that they are mourning the loss of something they hold dear. I discern a ‘bereavement’ process taking place, a sense of grief. For some (and here I include myself as a former altar server) who were raised in the Tridentine Latin rite, the original switch to the vernacular was a joyous and liberating moment, and the new words at that time became part of the fibre of our being. People have a right to ‘grieve’ this loss. Perhaps

that was a lesson the Church failed to learn with the abrogation of the Tridentine Rite after Vatican II and which Pope Benedict is trying to rectify today?

5. With utmost respect, and again after praying about this, I am compelled to point out what I regard as a grave pastoral indiscretion in some episcopal utterances, namely, that of lumping ‘religious’ and ‘intelligentsia’ together as a ‘vociferous minority’ who are not to be taken seriously. Pastoral leadership cannot simply dismiss people who make vital contributions to the life of the Church – and who actually love the Church. At this year’s AGM of the Leadership Conference of the Consecrated Life this was the one issue considered to be most hurtful, and unnecessarily alienating.

(By way of parenthesis, I hope the bishops will receive a report of an optional meeting on the new translation which took place at the LCCL AGM. I also recommend Dominican Fr Martin Badenhorst’s paper on ‘the language of intimacy’ which was offered to this meeting, where among other things he describes most credibly, as an Afrikaans translator, the impossibility of literal translation from Latin as today there are no ‘mother-tongue’ Latin speakers whom one may consult to explain important nuances. A similar point is made by Archbishop Jabulani Nxumalo OMI in Chapter 29 of Paddy Kearney’s biography of Archbishop Hurley, where Nxumalo, most critical of *Liturgiam Authenticam*, states that “language must be an expression of the soul of the people”.)

6. I have a further pastoral concern: how to avoid a scenario of victims, martyrs, and scapegoats? What I glean during conversations in ecclesiastical circles is that you are becoming a ‘symbol’ of what people perceive to be the Congregation for Divine Worship’s heavy-handed approach in implementing these changes. Archbishop Hurley, by contrast, is becoming a ‘symbol’ of those who are seen to be ‘victims’ and ‘martyrs’ of the same Congregation. One priest has written about the commonly held view that what we are experiencing on the ground is simply the tragic playing-out of a power struggle at a higher level between the Vatican and the old ICEL. This makes me wonder: Can this be of God?

7. The best solution, I believe, is to have open and honest dialogue. Such dialogue needs to take place at various levels:

- At grassroots level it may initially require an independent survey where ordinary Catholics, many of whom have become numbed to the issue, are invited, without fear, to share their thoughts and feelings in complete honesty and freedom. (I am personally convinced that there is widespread dissent, albeit often passive, and am willing to be proved wrong.)
- At another level, it will require frank discussions with clergy, not the brow-beating I learned of in one diocese where ‘blind obedience’ was offered as the *only* option. This is, after all, the year of the priest, and priests’ voices need to be humbly listened to. Some priests I have spoken to say they have implemented the changes out of fear or passivity, not out of conviction. This can only lead to disillusionment and poor morale.

- At universal level, it may require a new angle to discussions between our bishops' conference and the Congregation for Divine Worship, sharing honestly with this Congregation what has been happening in South Africa, giving a fair representation of the full spectrum of responses, both positive and negative, to the new translation, for the good of the rest of the English speaking world. (May this well be our special contribution to the Church at this time?)

In a word, I believe our bishops' conference needs an evaluation of experience, and a new discernment of the best pastoral approach.

I myself pray for an approach that will be open to honest dialogue where the Church as the "Community of Disciples" (Avery Dulles) can discern as widely as possible what the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of Diversity of Languages, is saying to us at this present time.

Sincerely and fraternally in Christ,

Fr Larry Kaufmann CSsR