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FEMINISM AND THE LANGUAGE WARS OF RELIGION

OUR WANING CENTURY which has been beset by nearly every kind of war and revolution imaginable is suffering from a new kind cultural weapon -- one which leaves its victims tongue-tied and profoundly confused. What is this weapon? So-called "inclusive" language -- a linguistic innovation which forces people to make unwitting political statements with every utterance and silences normal speech. Where does it come from? From the feminist movement. Why do feminists want to control human communication? Because language is the means by which we transmit the culture from one generation to the next. Why stop this process? Why, indeed!

Feminist language, this insidiously aggressive form of mind-bending has now permeated the entire English-speaking world, but its most devastating effects so far have been felt in the academy and in the churches -- for the very good reason that both are primary storehouses as well as transmitters of moral and ethical principals and religious beliefs. Let's take a look some current evidence of the Language Wars of Religion.

Nearly everyone in America -- and surely all Catholics -- were aware that the English translation of the historic Catechism of the Catholic Church, the first in four hundred years, was delayed for over a year to correct an inaccurate translation.

Within the past few years, several new translations of the Scripture have been produced, accepted, rejected, argued over, granted imprimaturs, denied imprimaturs -- and still more new versions are forthcoming.

The most recent, and perhaps the most radical, Bible revision so far is the *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (Oxford University Press). This "Inclusive Version", based on the already inclusivized 1989 New Revised Standard Version, was released by Oxford University Press in September. Its appearance drew immediate sharp criticism from the chairman of the U.S. bishops Committee on the Liturgy, and was ridiculed by a *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer, who called it "hoey" ("P.C. Bible"

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Most Catholics now know that the Liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church is undergoing extensive revision and retranslation -- the first since 1974, when the initial English translation was completed following the Second Vatican Council. New Lectionaries (Scripture readings) and Psalters (the book of Psalms) have been compiled for liturgical use. The sweeping revision of the Roman Missal drafted by a committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) continues. The fourth of seven segments of the proposed Sacramentary (prayers of the Mass), is scheduled for discussion and vote at the November meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. This process, already delayed, will take several years.

This past June [1995], for the first time in the three decades of its existence, ICEL's reformers ran into very serious snags at the bishops conference, and approval of the texts was secured by narrow margins. (All such revisions must be approved by a two-thirds vote of a national bishops' conference and by the Holy See before they can be used in the Church.) Nearly 200 amendments were proposed by American bishops before the meeting. Though most were rejected by their Liturgy Committee, they succeeded in remanding several important texts to the ICEL committee for revision. All except two of the seven American Cardinals raised objections to the ICEL revisions.

Two years ago, an inclusivist re-translation of the Grail Psalter was voted down by the bishops -- for the second time. Clearly there is an intensified concern on the part of bishops, not only about the accuracy translations, but about the deeper meaning they project, and the effects of the proposed changes on the worship of the Church. What accounts for this unprecedented phenomenon?

All these retranslations have in common primary commitment to incorporate feminist language. Although these projects may vary in the extent to which this principle is applied, this principle is explicitly stated in the introductions to the revised texts.

In November 1990, the U.S. bishops' conference adopted a document, "Criteria for the Evaluation of Inclusive Language Translations of Scriptural Texts Proposed for Liturgical

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Use" (CEILT). Most bishops saw it as an apparent attempt to counteract the increasingly widespread practice of introducing inclusive-language "corrections" into the liturgy at will. In some cases offensive words have been `whited-out' of lectionaries and new words penciled in, or corrections are simply ad-libbed by the reader. Many bishops apparently viewed the CEILT document as "damage-control" an attempt to keep people from improvising on their own.

This strategy has not succeeded. In fact, the situation has grown steadily worse, since episcopal authorization of "moderate" inclusivizing was perceived as acceptance of the fundamental principles of its advocates. Just as a crocodile is not persuaded not to eat you just because you have thrown it a hunk of meat, the appetite for more and more changes in the liturgy has not only been unappeased but considerably sharpened since the CEILT was adopted.

Because all the new translations and revisions -- biblical and liturgical -- have a single common denominator: a commitment to "inclusivism" judged necessary in order to achieve justice for and/or sensitivity to women, it becomes necessary to focus any serious discussion of these texts and alterations of the liturgy on the theories which undergird them. Until now, however, most Church authorities have avoided "taking on" feminism directly, and have confined the discussion, for the most part, to linguistic theories, matters of esthetics, even the mechanics of proclamation (whether a text is "singable", for instance). Understandable though this may be given the prominence and power of feminist women in the the Church, notably in the field of liturgy and theology, it is critical that the temptation to avoid grappling with the harmful influence of feminism in society and in the Church be overcome. It is high time this matter came out of the closet.

I

One of the problems we have with confronting feminism at the present time is that so many variations of feminism have developed during the past three decades. Feminists now describe themselves as eco-feminists, liberation feminists, equal-rights feminists, radical feminists, gender feminists -- even "feminists for life". Feminists who belong to minority groups (blacks, hispanics) now call themselves "womanists" and "mujeristas" to

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distinguish themselves from the white affluent educated elite who dominate the feminist movement. It must be clearly acknowledged, also, that just as not all women are feminists, not all feminists are women. Constantly re-defining the term is a pretty effective way of keeping criticism at bay.

Another reason why it is so hazardous to attempt any critique whatsoever of any aspect of feminism or the feminist agenda is that the critic, whether a man or a woman, will automatically be accused of opposing the equality and dignity of women: if the critic is a man, he is called a sexist victimizer of women; a woman critic is an anti-feminist collaborator with the oppressors of her sex.

But whatever the variety, it is by now evident that feminism is an extremely influential ideology which has penetrated deeply into virtually all of society -- from religion and the academy to to the family -- and that the pervasive influence of feminism will continue to affect us all for the foreseeable future.

Recently there has been an attempt to "tame" feminism -- to renovate the concept by proposing a feminism that is not deconstructionist or militantly egalitarian, but which proclaims the fundamental equality and dignity of men and women; a feminism which does not advocate aberrant sexual practices or abortion, but which will affirm all women, not only in their active participation in society, but also motherhood and authentic femininity. Some Christians may hope that by reclaiming the term they may detoxify feminism's noxious effects by engaging in dialogue rather than grappling directly with its destructive aspects. For example, some pro-life "feminists" suggest that being pro-abortion is anti-woman -- therefore *real* "feminism" is anti-abortion. This argument is persuasive to those who already oppose the killing of children in the name of women's freedom; but has had no effect on feminist ideologues. Another objective of those who propose a "safe" feminism is to capture a rhetorical means of neutralizing a negative image imposed by feminists upon Christianity (which fundamentally and intrinsically contradicts *any* "ism" of the world), and upon Christian believers who stand firmly for the truth. No matter how laudible its objectives, however, the project of cleansing feminism of its destructive aspects cannot truly succeed, but will only become one more named variety of an ideology which is *fundamentally* opposed to -- in fact, at inimical to

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Christianity.

Feminism *is* an ideology, like other `isms' (communism, facism and capitalism are examples), with its own orthodoxies and its own heresies. Also like other `isms', ideological femininism exaggerates reality. For example, "*Equal Rights*" feminism confuses equality with identicality (or `identity'), rejects sexual distinctions as irrelevant, advocates interchangeability of social roles, devalues specifically gender-based roles, like motherhood and `housewifery'. *Liberationist* or "*victim*" feminism also claims equality, but actually exaggerates feminine weakness, vulnerability, dependency. One has to be oppressed by something in order to be liberated from it. So this kind of feminism feeds on wounding experiences like sexual abuse or harrassment (real or imagined) or even lack of appreciation, and nurses a sense of oppression by men. Common denominators to both Equal Rights and Liberationist feminism include advocacy of abortion as a basic right of women, along with rejection of authority (in particular, authorities who are white, heterosexual men: i.e. "the patriarchy") That feminist nostrums tend overlap considerably from one variety to another accounts for some of the incoherence within the feminist movement.

Among the most virulent strains of feminism are the religious feminists. Frances Kissling, head of the militantly pro-abortion "Catholics for a Free Choice", is but one notorious example, and she has support among some who are strongly identified as Catholic, notably women religious. Less well known are radical "Catholics" like Mary Hunt, of WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual), a lesbian advocacy group, Ruth Fitzpatrick of the Women's Ordination Conference, Sister Maureen Fiedler of "Catholics Speak Out", Sister Janine Grammick of "New Ways Ministries", and groups like "Loretto Women's Network", "Call to Action", "Chicago Catholic Women", and "Association for Rights of Catholics in the Church". (Donna Steichen's 1991 book, *Ungodly Rage*, exposed the seriousness of what was too-often dismissed as crack-pot antics of many such groups and individuals.)

Although "New Age" is practically synonymous with odd feminist spirituality, and its self-conscious "paganizing" is carried on in the darker corners of organized religion as well as in "post-Christian" circles; probably the best known non-denominational

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"Christian" feminist group is the "ReImagining" movement which promotes "Sophia goddess" worship. This year, an ecumenical initiative, the Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society, has been launched by women leaders from mainline Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church to address this phenomenon, .

A very revealing discussion of feminism and its hopes for "reform" of scripture and liturgy is found in the work of one very mainstream feminist, Sister Sandra Schneiders. Her definition of feminism and its goals is significant not only because it represents the dominant point of view of feminist reformers still at least nominally within Christianity; but because of her influence within the Catholic Church. Unlike Kissling of CFFC, she is hardly a member of the "radical fringe" among Catholic feminists. She is a professor of New Testament and Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. She teaches seminarians and has done so for many years. She is a member of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was educated at the Gregorian University in Rome, has written several books, and lectures widely throughout the country especially in seminaries. Here is how Sister Sandra describes feminism in her 1991 book, *Beyond Patching*:

"Feminism is a comprehensive ideology which is rooted in women's experience of sexual oppression, engages in a critique of patriarchy as an essentially dysfunctional system, embraces an alternative vision for humanity and the earth, and actively seeks to bring this vision to realization. [F]eminism is a comprehensive theoretical system for analyzing, criticizing and evaluating ideas, social structures, procedures and practices, indeed the whole of experienced reality. This definition of feminism as an ideology suggests immediately that one cannot be a feminist by default, e.g. by not being overtly and deliberately sexist; or anonymously, i.e. without knowing it; or on the side, as an interest which can be displaced in favor of other concerns." [p 15-16]

"[Feminism] engages in a focussed social analysis which has *revealed the role of patriarchy not only as the root of women's oppression but also as the source of the interconnectedness of sexism with all other forms of hierarchical domination*

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"[T]he Catholic Church was a major participant in the oppression of women and this was not an accidental historical development but a *major systemic problem with Catholicism itself*." [p 33]

Scripture has not only been *interpreted* wrongly by men to further oppress women, but, according to Sister Sandra, is

"A male-centered account of male experience for male purposes with women relegated to the margins of salvation history, but also is patriarchal in its assumptions deeply sexist, i.e. anti-woman. Its God-language and imagery are overwhelmingly male. *the problem is in the text*. [38]

To say that Scripture is the word of God is nothing more than a metaphor, she maintains. We must "emancipate the text" by changing or *reinterpreting* texts which she believes are "morally unacceptable," a process she calls "transformational hermeneutics." Scripture must also be freed from the "oppressive masculinity of the language" which reinforces "ecclesiastical patriarchy". [21]

It may be clear, now, why "feminist language" is a more accurate term than "inclusive" language. [Examples: St. Francis Hymn - 'brothers all are we' has recently been "corrected" to 'one in him are we'; commonly understood phrases, like 'brotherhood of man' (which is not the opposite of 'sisterhood of woman') are excised from our speech. Sometimes 'inclusive' is *exclusive*. Native English speakers understand this inclusive (generic) and exclusive (specific) form of masculine gender nouns and pronouns doing double duty easily enough.]

The project of transformation of the language in which we speak and pray and worship is a *fundamental* part of the feminist agenda within the churches. It is now very clear that feminist reformers regard "correcting" the language of prayer as absolutely critical to the achievement of feminist objectives for the Church. They understand quite well the ancient principle, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (literally, 'the law of prayer is the law of belief, or,

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more idiomatically, "how we pray governs what we believe" In order to change the *belief* of the Church it is necessary to change the very *language* in which that belief is expressed in the liturgy, the worship of the Church.

(Feminist political manipulation of language is not confined to the language of worship. For example, it is now rare to see the term "unborn child" or "baby" in the secular press used in connection with abortion.)

II

The Jesuit scripture scholar, Father Paul Mankowski, has described the phenomenon of 'politically correcting' the language by artificially neutering the gender of its words as "gelding" the language. But there is an active effort to eradicate the feminine, as well as the masculine. Radical feminism is not simply "ambivalent to motherhood" it violently rejects motherhood with even greater savagery than is directed at masculinity and fatherhood. Evidence of this, of course, is the militant advocacy of abortion by most feminist groups. The reason for this is surely that motherhood, even more than fatherhood, is intimately and inextricably connected to the formation of future generations of human beings, and to the direct transmission to children of religious truths and moral principles. For feminists, the image of Mother is just as much in need of fundamental transformation as the image of Father.

By attributing both Motherhood and Fatherhood simultaneously to God, both images are confused, neutralized, rendered essentially meaningless. This neutering of God was given an inexplicable respectability in some Catholic circles by Sister Elizabeth Johnson, in her prize winning and well written but essentially unoriginal 1993 book, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (Crossroad). Her basic argument, deviating only in tone from those other feminist theologians, is that in order to offset the potent masculine image of God, a "metaphor" invented, controlled and enforced by males throughout history, it is necessary to indulge, now, in an overdose of feminization of images for God.

Feminist principles of translation heavily influence new scripture translations as well as

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the proposed retranslation and revision of the Roman Missal.

For example, the New Revised Standard Version, defended by some bishops as a "moderate" concession to feminist sensibilities and theology (something like being a little bit pregnant). The NRSV was approved for liturgical use by the American bishops and routinely ratified the Vatican, then, in an unprecedented action of the Congregation for Divine Worship, approval was *withdrawn* in 1994. The NRSV introduction says:

"The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation. Paraphrastic renderings have been adopted only sparingly, and then chiefly to compensate for a *deficiency in the English language* the lack of a common gender third person singular pronoun.

"During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the *inherent bias of the English language* towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division [of translators] specified that, in references to men and women, *masculine-oriented language* should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture.

Similarly, Third Progress Report to bishops on the revised Sacramentary (June 1992) accepts the fundamental argument of feminist theologians for re-imagining God, while attempting to limit this to only two out of three Persons in the Godhead:

"Throughout the revision process ICEL has been attentive to the question of inclusive language. Since 1975 ICEL has pledged itself to the use of "horizontal" inclusive language (referring to the assembly) in all of the texts prepared under its auspices. Unfortunately this decision came too late for many of the major texts issued in the first six or seven years of ICEL's work. These included the texts of *The Roman Missal*. Inclusive language on the horizontal level is used throughout the present revision of the Missal. Over the course of the 1980s, ICEL also studied the question of *masculine language used of God*. In the revisions an effort has been made to keep the title "Father" in most

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instances wherever the Latin has *Pater* but to remove what many have criticized as the gratuitous introduction of the title "Father" into many of the translated prayers found in *The Roman Missal* of 1973. Where *doctrinal or linguistic* considerations allowed, the revisions have *avoided the use of masculine pronouns* to refer to the First and Third Persons of the Trinity. In both the translated and original prayers and effort has been made to use a larger variety of titles and images for God in order to open up a greater sense of the mystery and majesty of the Godhead." (p 10)

Father Lawrence Boadt, CSP, president of the Catholic Biblical Association and a member of ICEL's committee on revision of the Psalter (published in two versions this year by Liturgy Training Publications of the Archdiocese of Chicago). cites works of feminist theologians to substantiate his claim that all scripture and liturgical prayer must now be revised. One of these is Lutheran, Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt's essay, "The Gender of God"¹, in which she says,

"It is incumbent upon us to eliminate altogether in American English the expository use of pronouns referring to God. Sentences must be recast. The adjective 'divine' is helpful in possessive constructions. 'Godself' works well as a reflexive. As a result of the Black Power movement, educated Americans removed from their active vocabularies the word 'Negro.' Such alterations are quite possible if the motivation is present. *What is required is not only the will to change one's vocabulary, but a renewed perception of God.* Change of speech is a willing task if it follows a conversion of mind. Contemporarily accurate translation of theological works will rid the study of Christianity of much of its overwhelming male overtone."²

(Ms. Ramshaw-Schmidt is a member of the board of the influential Catholic liturgical journal *Worship* published at St. John's Benedictine Abbey, Collegeville.)

Father Boadt also mentions that the chairman of ICEL's Committee for translating the Psalter is Sister Mary Collins, O.S.B. Her article, "Glorious Praise: The ICEL Liturgical Psalter"³ appeared in *Worship* magazine, July '92, only a few weeks after the bishops had

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their first look at ICEL's revision of the Sacramentary [Roman Missal]. (A revision of Sister Collins's essay forms an Introduction to the ICEL Liturgical Psalter.)

Sister Mary Collins is a Benedictine who chairs the department of religion and religious education at The Catholic University of America [CUA]. She is advisor on feminist theology to the theological journal *Concilium*, and past president of the North American Academy of Liturgy.

Her essay on the ICEL Psalter, she says, "reflects my own involvement in the project from 1978 to the present, including collaboration in the research that gave it its shape." The new Psalter, she says, would be distinguished by "attention both to *emerging English gender usage and contemporary theological discussions about inclusive language*."

"This consideration included first of all a commitment to overcome lapses in earlier translations into what has been called 'translator's bias,' the unexamined preference for male pronouns and male-centered images and metaphors even when these were not warranted by the original text. Once this commitment was made to be alert to the inclusive language question (a confirmation of the broader ICEL commitment to inclusive language made during this period), *language would have to be carefully crafted to honor it*.⁴

"ICEL style also took shape under the influence of contemporary discussions about linguistic gender among literary theorists, biblical interpreters and theologians. The issue was never whether the matter of gender would receive attention in this translation for use in the praying Church, only how it was to be approached critically. Who could deny the impression of many translations that the poetry of the psalms gives overt voice to male devotees interacting with a putatively male God?"⁵

She states that, throughout its ten years of Psalm translation, the ICEL editorial committee had employed strategies reflecting a "typology for *refashioning English speech* about personal and social reality" which describes feminist usages:

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"Non sexist usage avoids gender-specific terms; inclusive language balances gender references; emancipatory language reshapes and transforms language to challenge stereotypical gender references."⁶

III

Although it has recently been suggested that feminist usage has now become a "dialect" (therefore, like any normal dialect, its use should not be considered politically motivated) no genuine dialect has ever been imposed from above. A true dialect is developed gradually, organically, and unconsciously, over many generations. It is impossible to say this of "inclusive" language. Speakers of real dialects are not conscious of natural changes, whereas the very purpose of inclusive language to *raise* consciousness and maintain it at a very high pitch.

Two opinions shed some light on the political aim of inclusive language.⁷ Sociologists Peter and Brigitte Berger write (in *The War over the Family*, Doubleday Anchor: 1983):

It matters little, in the final analysis, that here is a theory of language that rests on little or nothing beyond the emotions of the theorists. What matters a lot is that the theory legitimates a linguistic offensive that is part of a general political strategy. In this strategy, every masculine pronoun purged from a text, every insertion of "person" as a generic suffix, constitutes a symbolic victory in the larger struggle. Once again, everyone involved in these affairs intuitively understands what's going on--which is precisely why emotions run so high on matters that to an outside or uninvolved observer might appear deafeningly trivial.

Philosopher Michael Levin stresses that causing self-consciousness in speech is not a first step but the goal of language manipulation (*Feminism and Freedom*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction 1987, p. 258).

Possibly because the only difficulty created by ordinary language is that feminists do not like it, feminist linguistic reform has become a kind of ongoing referendum about

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feminism itself. ... As a result, whatever thought is to be conveyed in the act of communication is consciously subordinated to equity, with the collateral effect of obscuring whatever is actually being said. ... Linguistic change legislated to conform to a worldview makes people self-conscious about their own language, an uncomfortable state of mind that may properly be called oppressive. Language is the vehicle of thought, and in an important sense speakers must be unconscious of choosing their words if they are to express their thoughts. When we become entangled in decisions about how to talk, we lose contact with the reality our thought is supposed to be about. Like playing the piano, language is largely a system of acquired habits, and fluent speech accompanied by constant conscious decisions about which words to utter is as difficult as fluent pianism accompanied by constant conscious decisions about which keys to hit.

Is it true, as inclusivists claim, that those who oppose inclusivizing are stubborn troglodytes living in the past and terrified of change? Or are critics of the inclusivists correct in calling the project a key example of political correctness and that you cannot legislate a language or forbid its normal use without severely injuring its ability to transmit thought, ideas, history, culture? Feminists would and do contend that the whole point of mandating inclusivist usage is *precisely* to disrupt the transmission of thoughts, ideas, history and culture that they have pronounced patriarchal, oppressive and evil. The manuals, style-sheets, workshops, seminary directives, and class-room lectures mandating their politically manufactured language are all aimed at exactly this. If you can't speak it, you can't think it.

IV

Cardinal Ratzinger, in his book on the liturgy, *Feast of Faith*, (Ignatius, 1986) offers some important insights:

- Liturgy is not the private hobby of a particular group; it is about the bond which holds heaven and earth together, it is about the human race and the entire created world." Cardinal Ratzinger (p 135)

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- Christian liturgy is essentially Catholic, that is, it proceeds from the whole and leads back to it, it leads to unity with the pope, the bishops and the faithful of all times and places. The Catholic element is not something added on externally, a legislative restriction of the community's freedom, but *something from the Lord himself who seeks everyone and seeks to bring them all together*. Liturgy is not "made" by the community; the community receives it from the whole And it can only remain an ecclesial community by continually giving itself back in commitment of this whole. [149]
- The Eucharist does not stand or fall by its effect on our feelings. [two points:] Liturgy is not a matter of variety and change; it is concerned with an ever-deeper experience of something that is beyond change Liturgy is not only concerned with the conscious mind and with what can be immediately understood Liturgy addresses the human being in al his depth [150]
- The Eucharist is not a ritual meal; it is the shared prayer of the Church in which the Lord prays together with us and gives us himself. [152]

Cardinal Ratzinger's insights help provide insights in answering some of our more pressing questions in relation to all of this: What *is* liturgy (essence), how does it *function* (*actio*) within the hearts and minds of believers? How does it affect the culture? What is the function of language within liturgy? What happens when we revise it?

One important thing that happens when a language is tampered with is the disruption of a kind of cultural collective or universal Catholic memory -- something akin to the *sensus fidelium*. This function of memory, and the result of its destruction are not easy to measure. The complex and fragile ecosystem of Catholicism includes, in addition to doctrine and dogma, Catholic culture and customs (we speak of ethnicism, "multiculturalism" and "inculturation" of religious elements) This ecosystem includes the Church's worship: devotions, liturgy, sacramentals, music; scripture and prayers; .

Language development and changes, too, proceed in a gradual, organic way, not unlike the soil which nourishes rainforests and wheatfields, and the effects of our interference (even when undertaken for supposedly beneficial reasons) may have consequences which

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may be as dramatically harmful to the deposit of faith as strip mining, or overharvesting trees in the rainforest.

In this way, also, Christianity increases or loses its integrity: that is, how the Church can be true to herself. Act (*praxis*, participation) must always be consistent with, confirm, reaffirm, the *essential* Truth of the faith, its *credal foundation*. Otherwise its center cannot hold.

New "myths" using new metaphors, symbols, language, cannot be "created" without endangering, in fact, destroying the *essence* of the Faith. It is this *essence of the faith itself* -- the claim of the Church that the faith she embodies is *true* -- which must be sacrificed on the altar of the god/ess of the New Myth.

What happens to memory, to the "ecology" of worship, if we create new liturgical language to express a new concept of religious truth? Can unintentional (as well as deliberate) harm be repaired? Can normal stability be restored?

Some might reintroduce a concept discarded early in the post-Conciliar liturgical reform, a special "liturgical language", a classical poetic English used only for the liturgy, which would be perennial and have a "sacred sound". The only remnant of this kind of language in Catholic worship in the English-speaking world, aside from private devotional prayers which have not been entirely rooted out of the Catholic consciousness, is in the "Our Father". Although ICEL revisors again proposed adopting the "ecumenical" 1976 contemporization of this paradigm prayer for the revised Roman Missal, they withdrew the suggestion again, as they had done 30 years ago, before the bishops vote last June. Clearly this proposal would have failed, had it come to a vote. And even principle advocates of "inclusive language" have expressed outrage at the Oxford University Press *New Testament and Psalms* invocation of "Our Father-Mother in heaven..."

It may be of some small comfort to us to recall that there the Church has encountered serious liturgical problems in the past. The history of the breviary in the old Catholic Encyclopedia gives an account of these and it has a familiar ring. During the Renaissance, with the rediscovery of classical Latin and fascination with ancient Rome, there was a

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serious and sustained attempt to revise the liturgical texts. These changes intended reflect the contemporary sensibilities of Humanists by invoking an "ancient tradition". Sound familiar? Translators (or revisers) used *classical* Latin "purified" of the usages of liturgical Latin; The prayers and hymns actually invoked deities from the Roman pantheon (Minerva, Jove, even Sappho.) They were self-consciously literary, "contemporary", while claiming fidelity to an earlier "tradition" found on the Italian peninsula namely, that of *pagan* Rome. The liturgists who committed these politically-corrected revisions, like those of our time, invoked an earlier time as authorizing their revisions.

But even if we attempt to put our current battle for the Church's worship into a historical perspective, many Catholics have become discouraged. Some fear that so much has already been so thoroughly destroyed by relentless and unchecked iconoclasm that the liturgy is beyond repair. Some Catholics have been drawn to schismatic movements which claim to be untainted by the pollution of modernist liturgical reform or have simply wandered away into other churches. This is both deeply ironic and deeply disturbing. Some people have become cynical or simply decide to ignore the problems. And still others -- and this surely will continue -- simply do not understand the implications of even very radical changes, and accept the explanations of so-called liturgical experts unquestioningly and uncritically. The virtual collapse of women's religious orders in these troubled times seems to many a telling symbol of the spiritual seduction of and perversion by destructive ideologies which now prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls.

In *Feast of Faith*, Cardinal Ratzinger speaks compellingly about the role of beauty in the worship of the Church. The Church, he says, "must arouse the voice of the cosmos and, by glorifying the Creator, elicit the glory of the cosmos itself."

"Next to the saints, the art which the Church has produced is the only real 'apologia' for her history. It is this glory which witnesses to the Lord The Church is to transform the world but how can she do that if at the same time she turns her back on beauty, which is so closely allied to love? For together beauty and love form the true consolation in this world, bringing it as near as possible to the world of the resurrection."

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The Church now needs tireless prayers to help us transcend the dismal limitations and constraints of contemporary ideologies, and to break out of the narrow confines of our very small space in history. We must pray and work to repair our 'bare, ruined choirs' that our words of worship may resound in all our Churches and to all the people of the world with crystal clarity and with all the compelling beauty and all the Splendor of Truth. *Ad majorem dei gloriam.*

Helen Hull Hitchcock 9/29/95

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1 Gail Ramshaw Schmidt. "The Gender of God", in *Feminist Theology a Reader*, ed. Ann Loades. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. pp 168-180.

2 Ibid. pp.178-179, emphasis added.

3 Mary Collins. "Glorious Praise: The ICEL Liturgical Psalter" in *Worship*, July, 1992, pp 290-310.

4 Collins. p 295. emphasis added.

5 Ibid. p 300-301. emphasis added.

6 Ibid. p. 302.

7 Both essays quoted below appear in *The Politics of Prayer*, ed. Helen Hull Hitchcock (1992, San Francisco, Ingatius Press)

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Reference : <http://www.adoremus.org/FeminismLanguage.html>