

Bible Versions and Commentaries - Roman Catholic

Liturgical Use in United States

There is only one English text currently approved by the Church for use in the United States. This text is the one contained in the Lectionaries approved for Sundays & Feasts and for Weekdays by the USCCB and recognized by the Holy See. These Lectionaries have their American and Roman approval documents in the front. The text is that of the New American Bible with revised Psalms and New Testament (1988, 1991), with some changes mandated by the Holy See where the NAB text used so-called vertical inclusive language (e.g. avoiding male pronouns for God). Since these Lectionaries have been fully promulgated, the permission to use the Jerusalem Bible and the RSV-Catholic at Mass has been withdrawn. [See note on [inclusive language](#)]

Devotional Reading

A bewildering array of Catholic Bibles are available for personal use. They all have imprimaturs, but not all avoid the use of inclusive language. That use is indicated in the summary. The order is generally chronological.

1. Douai-Rheims. The original Catholic Bible in English, pre-dating the King James Version (1611). It was translated from the Latin Vulgate, the Church's official Scripture text, by English Catholics in exile on the continent. The NT was completed and published in 1582 when the English College (the seminary for English Catholics) was located at Rheims. The Old Testament was published in 1610 when the College was located at Douai. Bishop Challoner's 1750 edition, and subsequent revisions by others up to the 20th century, is the most common edition. Retains some archaic English. The 1899 edition is available from TAN Books. The text is widely available on line, including EWTN's library.

2. Confraternity Edition. Begun in 1936 by the American bishops' Confraternity for Christian Doctrine as a translation from the Clementine Vulgate. The publication of Pius XII's encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu* (1943) caused the translation committee to switch to the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. Not all books were completed by the time of Vatican II (1962-1965). Those that were finished were used in the liturgy in the 1950s and 60s. Published in a dignified American idiom. Though hard to find, this edition of the Scriptures is worth possessing.

3. Revised Standard Version (RSV) - Catholic Edition. Translated for an American audience from the original languages in the 1940s and 1950s by the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and adapted for Catholic use by the Catholic Biblical Association (1966). Considered the best combination of literal (formal equivalence translation) and literary by many orthodox Catholic scholars. Published today by Ignatius Press (Ignatius Bible) and Scepter Press, and available through EWTN's [Religious Catalogue](#).

4.1 New American Bible or NAB (1970). Translated from the original languages by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine according to the principles of Vatican II for use in the liturgy. It was the basis of the American Lectionary from the 1970s until 2002. A good translation, but it was criticized for its changing of some traditional and familiar expressions, such as "full of grace".

4.2 NAB with Revised New Testament (1986). A restoration of some traditional familiar phraseology. Unfortunately, it also included some mild inclusive language. No longer widely available, owing to the publication of the revised Psalms (see next entry).

4.3 NAB with Revised Psalms and Revised New Testament (1991). It was due to the use of vertical inclusive language (re: God and Christ) and some uses of horizontal inclusive language (re: human beings), that the Holy See rejected this text as the basis of a revised Lectionary for the United States. This is the version of the NAB currently on sale in the United States.

4.4 Modified NAB with Revised Psalms and Revised New Testament (2000-2002). This title is of my own invention. It does not refer to any currently available Bible, but to the NAB with Revised Psalms and Revised NT, *as modified* by a committee of the Holy See and the Bishops for use in the liturgy. It is the text found in all current Lectionaries in the U.S.. The Holy See accepted some use of inclusive language, where the speaker/author intended a mixed audience (e.g. "brothers and sisters", instead of the older "brethren"), but rejected it in references to God or Christ, and man, where the word has anthropological and theological significance (e.g. Psalm 1:1, with reference to Adam and Christ). Whether a Bible will be made available having these modified NAB texts is not known at this time. Since they do not extend to the entire Bible, it is possible that none will be, as that would require further editing of the underlying NAB text.

5. Jerusalem Bible (1966). A translation based on the French edition of the Dominicans of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, who translated it from the original languages. This Bible is the one used by Mother Angelica on the air. The full version has copious footnotes but is hard to find, as it has not been recently republished. A Reader's Edition, without the full footnoting, is available through EWTN's [Religious Catalogue](#).

6. New Revised Standard Version - Catholic Edition (1989). An adaptation for Catholic use of the NRSV of the National Council of the Churches of Christ. Although used in the American edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it was rejected for liturgical use by the Holy See owing to inclusive language in some unacceptable places. With this exception, like the predecessor RSV, it is a good formal equivalent translation (i.e. literal, but literary).

7. New Jerusalem Bible (1990). A revision of the Jerusalem Bible directly from the original languages. It contains inclusive language, similar to that rejected in the revised NAB by the Holy See for use in the liturgy, but is considered a very literary text, and comparable in quality to the NRSV in scholarship.

8. Today's' English Version - Catholic (1992). This is the Catholic edition of the popular *Good News Bible* by the American Bible Society. Translated according to the principle of dynamic equivalence for readability. The same principle was used by ICEL to translate the Mass texts. Would be better to call a paraphrase than a translation.

Catholic versus Protestant Bibles

Bible translations developed for Catholic use are complete Bibles. This means that they contain the entire canonical text identified by Pope Damasus and the Synod of Rome (382) and the local Councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397), contained in St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation (420), and decreed infallibly by the Ecumenical Council of Trent (1570). This canonical text contains the same 27 NT Testament books which Protestant versions contain, but 46 Old Testament books, instead of 39. These 7 books, and parts of 2 others, are called Deuterocanonical by Catholics (2nd canon) and Apocrypha (false writings) by Protestants, who dropped them at the time of the Reformation. The Deuterocanonical texts are Tobias (Tobit), Judith, Baruch, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), Wisdom, First and Second Maccabees and parts of Esther and Daniel. Some Protestant Bibles include the "Apocrypha" as pious reading.

Commentaries

While an older orthodox commentary from the 1950s, called *A Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Nelson Publishers) can sometimes be found, we are now starting to see new faithful commentaries being published. The best one is the Navarre Bible (Scepter Press). It is a work in progress from the University of Navarre in Spain. It has both the RSV and the Latin Vulgate, with commentary underneath from the Fathers, Doctors, the Magisterium and the writings of St. Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei. So far the volumes of the New Testament (one per Gospel and collections of the epistles) are available, as well as some Old Testament volumes (Pentateuch, Joshua-Kings). Additionally, Ignatius Press has begun to publish the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, individual NT volumes by orthodox scholars, including Scott Hahn. So far the Gospels and Acts have been published. Both the *Navarre Bible* and the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* can be obtained from EWTN's [Religious Catalogue](#), the publishers, and through most Catholic catalogs, distributors and bookstores.

The most widely used Catholic commentary is probably the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, now in a 2nd edition. There is also a summary version of it. This commentary is the work of well-known Catholic Biblical scholars and is filled with articles on historical, archaeological, linguistic and other subjects useful for understanding the background of the Scriptures. The *JBC* is, therefore, a valuable resource for those seeking such information. However, the textual commentaries use primarily the historical-critical method, and thus must be read with discernment. The

Church approves of the use of this method for the purpose of understanding the historical and literary foundations of the text (see Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 11-13), but finds it an incomplete method apart from the Tradition. Scripture must be interpreted according to the analogy of faith, that is, in accordance with what God has revealed *in toto*, as taught by the Magisterium.

Inclusive Language

The common practice of English historically has been to use male nouns and pronouns (man, mankind, he) when referring collectively to human beings, regardless of sex. In recent decades some feminists have claimed that this is offensive to them, as it represents a "patriarchal worldview" in which men are superior to women. Through their media influence they have effectively ended such use in publishing, academia, television and movies, as well as in common speech. Within the Church, through the well-oiled machinery of dissent, the rejection of such "non-inclusive" language has been applied to the use of male terms in connection with God.

Whether in the secular arena or in the Church, almost no resistance has been offered to this forced development of language, and few are even aware of what is at stake, seeing it only as a matter of fairness to women. Thankfully, the Holy See has resisted the tide and clearly drawn the lines between what is an acceptable use of inclusive language and what is unacceptable. Acceptable use would include those collective expressions for human beings which today a speaker or author would be expected to use, such as "ladies and gentleman" or "brothers and sisters". It is unlikely that any one would use "brothers" or "brethren" for a mixed audience today. Thus, there is nothing wrong in principle to this kind of *horizontal* inclusive language.

What is unacceptable to the Magisterium, however, is the use of inclusive language in collective terms for human beings which have an anthropological significance, or, in terms for God or Christ (*vertical* inclusive language). The collective term *man*, for example, is both a philosophically and theologically appropriate term for the human race. Just as there is a certain precedence within the Trinity, by which the Father is God, the Son is God by generation and the Holy Spirit is God by spiration, Sacred Scripture reveals that an image of this Trinity of equal Persons in God is reflected in the creation of woman from man. Adam (which means man) is a *man*, Eve is a *man* (since she shares his nature), and each of their descendants is a *man*. This expresses equality, NOT inequality, as feminists claim. Whatever injustices men have perpetrated on women through the millennia, Adam's sin is the cause, not God and His wise created design.

So, human nature is called *man or mankind*, and each human person is a *man*, just as the divine nature is called *God* and all Three Persons are God. (The sexual distinction is expressed as male and female, though man and woman also does so. Even these contain implicitly the evidence of the origins of *woman* from *man* in the economy of creation.)

The problem with vertical inclusive language with respect to Christ is similar. Destined to be the New *Adam* Christ is prophetically anticipated in certain Hebrew texts which play on the word *adam* as both the name for the human race and the name of the first member of that race. A good example, which can be a test of a text to see if it has objectionable inclusive language, is Psalm 1. It should read "Happy the *man* who follows not the counsel of the wicked" (or similar). Inclusive language versions will replace "man" with "one" or "mortal" or some variation. The Holy See has rejected this as contradicting the messianic references to Christ implicit in the text, where *man* refers not only to David the author of the psalm, but back to Adam (*the man*) and forward to Christ (Son of David and Son of *Man*).

Finally, the use of vertical inclusive language for God is likewise unacceptable. No one should understand that God is male or female. He is not. God is pure spirit, whereas masculinity and femininity are the properties of animal bodies. In man these bodies are united to a soul, and thus we can also speak of spiritual characteristic of men and women - a way of loving others, for example, that is characteristic of women, versus men, and vice versa. Such spiritual characteristics, whether of men or women, must be rooted in some way in God, who is the source of all good. Thus, in the Old Testament the love of God for his people is sometimes referred to as a "womb-love" (*rahamim*), a clear reference to the love of a mother for her child. Similarly, Jesus in the New Testament speaks of wanting to take His People under His wings like a mother hen. Thus, Scripture shows us, and the Church teaches, that all that is good in man and woman, save the purely material sexual distinctions proper to bodies, comes from the Author of all that is good.

However, is this a warrant to speak of God as Father and Mother, and to avoid the use of male terms with respect to God (Father, Son, Him, He etc.)? While it is certainly just to speak of what is motherly or feminine in God, in the sense described above, it is nonetheless certain that God has revealed Himself in a certain way and that we must first respect His sovereign decision, and second try to understand it. One of the difficulties is that as the debate has gone forward, it has become clear that many Catholic feminists do not respect the Word of God, but see it the word of men re-enforcing an unjust patriarchal order. Since this overthrows Divine Revelation's authority, and many dogmas of the faith with it, it cannot and should not be dialogued with or accommodated in any way. Certainly, the Holy See has taken that stance. Unfortunately, many others who do not intend such a vast rejection of Tradition have been duped into believing in the bias of translations and the influence of patriarchy on the transmission of Revelation in the Church, and so need a good explanation of the reasons for the usages of Scripture and Tradition.

A direct understanding of God is not accessible to human reason. Spirit cannot be perceived or tested experimentally, and so God must speak in analogies familiar to our experience. In choosing which analogs to use in reference to Himself He chose those most suitable within creation. Unlike the Shamrock of St. Patrick, which has a certain similitude to God, there was and is nothing more suitable for explaining God than the creatures He made in His image and likeness, both as God and as Trinity. Thus, He chose

the human race to explain Who He is. Man is both the creature in the visible creation most like God, and the creature most understandable to man.

Image of God in the Nature of Man

The closest likeness to the spiritual nature of God in the visible creation is the human soul. The spiritual nature of the soul gives to man the capacities to reason and to choose, to know and to love. This is why God made Adam governor of Eden and told him to name the other creatures. In giving Adam a wife God made her a helpmate in these tasks, as she too, having the same human nature as Adam (unlike the other animals), is suited to this collaboration. It should be noted that this work is in the first place a spiritual work, knowing creatures, especially their natures and ends, and willfully directing them to God's purposes. In the creation in which Man lives, however, this cannot be separated from the need for a body. Thus, although the image of God is primarily said of the soul of human beings, the body of Man has been so designed as to serve the soul and the special place of Man in creation. Unlike God, without a body Man cannot accomplish what has been given to him to do. Thus, both man and woman have been equipped with the primary faculties needed for this work (intellect and will), and with bodies which complement each other in the multitude of different tasks which must be done in life.

Image of God in the Differentiation of the Sexes

God is not a solitary nature but a Communion of Persons. As noted above, the Processions of Persons (Father generating the Son, and Father and Son spirating the Holy Spirit) is reflected in the order of Man's own creation. "Let us make man in our image and likeness. Male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26). God made the representative type Man (Adam) first, and then differentiated Man into two kinds, male and female, by creating Eve. With respect to the likeness of God's divine nature in Man, man and woman are equal. Thus, Adam is the representative type because of his humanity, not his maleness. However, with respect to the order of creating, as a created analogy to the order of procession within the Trinity, there is a first and second. Adam is analogous to the Father in coming first, Eve to the Son in coming second. Within God this is not a sexual distinction, the Eternal Word is not male or female in the divine nature, but God from God. Rather, it is an order of the procession of life and love. The Father gives life and love to the Son, and the Son returns both infinitely and perfectly, which can only be a Divine Person, the Holy Spirit.

God's taking woman from man emphasizes in the first place, therefore, a fact about God's own interior Life. It then establishes a reality about Man - there is to be an orderly procession of life and love within human nature, as there is in God. This is made possible in human nature by the distinction of the sexes and a complementarity of psychology and body suited to the perpetuation of human love and life in this world. These bodies, male and female, are therefore particularly equipped to pro-create and nurture human life to maturity. The psychology and body of a man enables him to give life and love actively in a manner analogous to the First Person of the Trinity in generating the Son, but also analogous to God's creating the universe outside of the Godhead. On the other hand, the

psychology and body of woman allows her to receive, nurture and herself communicate life and love, analogous to the Second Person receptively then actively loving and giving life, as well as the creation receiving life from God and nurturing it within.

So, in giving human nature this created order, an order which in our embodied existence includes a common nature, as well as male and female, God not only stamped us with an image and likeness of His own nature and the Trinitarian Communion, but gave us a means and a language to understand Him. The use of male terms (Father, Son, He, Him etc.) are not statements about the masculinity of God, but ways to understand from our experience of ourselves, imperfect as we are, what are essentially spiritual realities. If God's self-revelation is perverted, then both our understanding of God and ourselves is changed, as well. When God is named Mother (and a name speaks of what is of the essence of a thing), God is turned into an earth goddess of which we are but a part (panentheism). This is, in fact, what New Agers believe, and sadly some Catholics. On the other hand, as Father He is the transcendent Creator. Likewise, if there is no order in creation between man and woman, then the Church's sexual and marital teaching is not valid. Not surprisingly, there is a close connection between the ideological foundations of feminism and those of lesbianism (less so, male homosexuality). Thus, it is both theologically and anthropologically necessary to preserve the use of male terms with respect to God and Christ, as well as in some case of collective nouns referring to the human race.