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Bishops overwhelmingly approve continuing liturgy translations

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 12, 2013 NCR Today
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The U.S. bishops voted overwhelmingly Tuesday to continue a controversial set of English translations of liturgical texts, approving new rites for the Catholic celebrations of marriage and confirmation.

Both votes happened quickly Tuesday morning and occurred after little debate. The new marriage texts were approved 212-5; the new confirmation texts, 213-4.

The texts are the latest [1] in a series of new texts 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. Their approval comes four days after publishing of a new study [2] that suggested a majority of Catholic parish leaders think such translations should not proceed.

Although the texts were approved quickly, there were several minutes of debate on the floor of the bishops' meeting regarding the marriage texts.

Springfield, Ill., Bishop Thomas Paprocki rose to make an amendment that the bishops revise the texts to replace each use of the word "marriage" with the word "matrimony," saying that was a closer translation of the Latin original.

Referencing the approval of marriage equality in 15 states, Paprocki also said what the bishops mean when they say the word "marriage" is "different than what our society is saying now."

"The word marriage has now been co-opted," he said. "I think we have to recognize that reality ... and then make some distinctions about what we mean by matrimony."

New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond, who leads the bishops' committee responsible for spearheading the translations, said his divine worship committee did not support making that change.

"We believed it was better to use [the words] interchangeably, otherwise it could be construed that we are admitting defeat" on the redefinition of the term marriage, Aymond said.

Paprocki's initial amendment was voted down by the bishops in a firm voice vote. Paprocki then proposed they change the word "marriage" to "matrimony" in the title of the rite, which the bishops approved by 114-95.

There was also short debate on the confirmation texts when Albany, N.Y., Bishop Howard Hubbard proposed that the bishops change a segment of that text that reads "fear of the Lord" to read "spirit of wonder and awe of God's presence."

That amendment was voted down by a firm voice vote.

Preliminary findings released Friday by the Diekmann Center for Patristics and Liturgical Studies at Saint John's University School of Theology-Seminary in Collegeville, Minn., found that 41 percent of U.S. Catholicparish leaders agree that the style used in the Mass translation should be used for other rites, like marriage and confirmation.

Most leaders (52 percent) disagreed that such rites should be translated similarly, the study found.

The Diekmann Center commissioned a study of the acceptance of the Mass translations by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. The results released Friday are preliminary results only. Final results are expected in January.

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