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A war of words

The new English Missal is being introduced during Advent but its journey to fruition has been marked by the Vatican's determination to take charge. In the third and final part of his account of the politics behind the translation, our Rome correspondent tells of a final twist in the tale

Late in April 2010, one sunny afternoon, Pope Benedict XVI was presented with a handsomely bound volume of the new English translation of the Roman Missal. The ceremony took place during a luncheon in his honour at a Renaissance villa in the Vatican Gardens. It was hosted by members of Vox Clara ("clear voice"), a commission of a dozen senior English-speaking bishops that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW) had handpicked back in 2001 to help it gain greater control over the translation process.

"This has been a truly collegial enterprise," Pope Benedict said of the nine-year effort to translate the *Missale Romanum* from Latin into English. "I want you to know how much I appreciate the great collaborative endeavour to which you have contributed," he told the Vox Clara bishops, their priest-collaborators and top officials from the CDW.

Astonishingly, the Pope never mentioned the group that actually did the translations, Icel (the International Commission on English in the Liturgy). Many saw this as a deliberate slight by those who had drafted the Pope's speech, members of Vox Clara or the CDW. Even by the most benign interpretation, it was an oversight. And one that was shamefully magnified by the fact that Icel's chairman, Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds, was in Rome that day, but had not been invited to the luncheon.

It would be extraordinary if these were signs of disfavour, because Icel had already been re-shaped so that it answered directly to Rome and translated the Missal according to principles it laid down. Icel is a mixed commission, established in 1963 by the major English-speaking episcopal conferences to produce the official translations of the Church's prayer ever since the liturgy was put into the vernacular following the Second Vatican Council. It has been the body through which the bishops have sought to fulfil their rightful authority – explicitly recognised by the Council – over liturgical translations. But the Missal translation saga shows how the CDW succeeded in taking away the bishops' conferences' power. And, ironically, they did so with the help of English-speaking bishops who were appointed to Vox Clara.

Cardinal Jorge Medina Estévez, the Chilean who headed the CDW from 1996 to 2002,

led the way in reshaping Icel. Long dissatisfied with its work, in 1999 he formally ordered its episcopal board to re-draft the commission statutes. As the bishops dragged their feet to comply, the cardinal worked to reverse the Vatican's old guidelines and principles for translations by publishing the 2001 instruction, *Liturgiam Authenticam* (LA). He also set up Vox Clara, which would hold its first meeting in the spring of 2002. The future Cardinal George Pell of Australia, a man fiercely opposed to inclusive language, was appointed Vox Clara's chairman. English Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor became secretary, while US Cardinal Justin Rigali was named as treasurer. He fulfilled everyone's expectations by ensuring Vox Clara's funding through the generosity of the Knights of Columbus.

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Three other Americans, including Chicago's Cardinal Francis George OMI, were also appointed to Vox Clara. So were senior bishops from Ghana, Santa Lucia, Ireland, the Philippines and eventually Canada. Mgr James P. Moroney, formerly director of the US bishops' liturgy office, would play a key role as the committee's "special adviser". Other aides included Fr Jeremy Driscoll OSB (US), Abbot Cuthbert Johnson OSB (England), Mgr Gerard McKay (Rome) and Professor (then Fr) Dennis McManus (US).

Just before retiring in October 2002, Cardinal Medina pressurised the Icel bishops into drastically overhauling the commission's Washington-based operations. Key personnel changes were made at a meeting in late July of that year in Ottawa, including the forced retirement of Dr John Page. The American, a church historian and scholar of John Henry



Bishop Donald Trautman, one of the few bishops publicly to criticise the translation. Photo: CNS

Newman, had been the commission's executive secretary since 1980 and a senior staff member for many years prior to that. The Icel bishops replaced him with Fr Bruce Harbert, a former Anglican and a Birmingham priest who had studied classics at Oxford and patristics in Rome. Though he had been an Icel collaborator, he was a vocal critic of the commission and a proponent of more literal translations. Upon his appointment he was given the new title of executive director. Bishop Maurice Taylor of Aberdeen, ill with cancer, stepped down as chairman of the episcopal board and Bishop Roche of Leeds was elected to replace him.

A week after resigning Bishop Taylor issued a letter defending the old Icel against "attacks" that had been levelled at it by, among others, Cardinal Medina's congregation. "The impression is given, and indeed is seemingly fostered by some, that Icel is a recalcitrant group of people, uncooperative, even disobedient," the bishop wrote. "This is mistaken and untrue." He also denounced the CDW's treatment of Dr Page, saying he had been "pilloried, sometimes by name, often by title, occasionally by inference". It was a final defence of the work Icel had tried to achieve. But it was too late.

The Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze took over from Medina as CDW prefect in autumn 2002 and would preside over the final approval of Icel's revised statutes. The presidents of the 11 episcopal conferences of Icel and representatives of the 15 associate conferences met Cardinal Arinze in the Vatican Synod Hall. Astonishingly, they acquiesced

to the CDW's claim that the Holy See alone had the right to create mixed commissions. This was spelled out in *Liturgiam Authenticam* but it was also a direct contradiction of the Vatican II constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Not a single bishop raised his voice in protest. "At least they could have had the decency to change its name," said Mgr Fred McManus, one of Icel pioneers, before dying in 2005.

The 2003 statutes meant that, for all practical purposes, Icel would now answer directly to Rome and Vox Clara, not to the bishops' conferences. The restructured body began its appointed task of producing a brand new translation of the Roman Missal in great secrecy under the strict control of Vox Clara. Whereas the former commission prided itself on being transparent – through the publication of consultation books, progress reports, newsletters and the biennial report (including an audited financial statement) – the Vatican obliged the new Icel to impose oaths of loyalty, confidentiality and anonymity.

Between 2003 and 2008 it guardedly began translating the order of Mass and the rest of the prayers and blessings in the Missal. As each successive draft went before the various English-speaking conferences, heated discussions emerged. Nowhere were these more intense than in the US, the largest of the Icel member-conferences. But Chicago's Cardinal George, a Vox Clara member and the confer-

ence president, made sure Icel's literalist translations garnered enough votes for approval. At one point in the long process, he and some other conservative members of the conference warned the US bishops to approve the translations or Rome would impose its own. Apparently, there was similar friction in other conferences.

The first item to be approved was the order of the Mass. The CDW gave it its *recognitio* in June 2008. By early 2010 it appears that all of the 11 Icel member-conferences had given final approval to the entire English Missal, although the process has been so lacking in transparency that the exact timeline is not completely clear. One thing is for sure, the Americans approved the Missal texts in November 2009 and that seems to have been the clincher for Vox Clara and the CDW. The Holy See granted the *recognitio* on 25 March 2010.

But the story does not end there. The translators and officials of the revamped Icel, mostly under the direction of Mgr Harbert (replaced by Mgr Andrew Wadsworth of Westminster in 2009), were pleased with their efforts. Some of them indiscreetly boasted that their texts were superior to those of the old Icel. However, they, too, would soon feel the same bitter sting of rejection. In January 2010, Vox Clara announced that it had made undisclosed changes to the Icel text, even though the conferences had already canonically approved it.

This was not a first. In November 2009 Cardinal George caused a stir among his US colleagues when he admitted to giving Rome permission to translate a set of antiphons without first asking the conference's approval. Bishop Donald Trautman, former head of the US bishops' office for liturgy and one of the few bishops publicly to criticise the new translation, said the cardinal had violated *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and had not acted in a "collegial way". Canon lawyers agreed. But in the end, the US bishops voted 194-20 to endorse Cardinal George's decision to cede approval of the translation to the Vatican office.

But the real shock came in November 2010 when a scathing report, written anonymously, produced extensive evidence that last-minute changes had been made to the English Missal without the knowledge or approval of the competent conferences and in violation of the Vatican's own translation rules. This was six months after Pope Benedict XVI had received the CDW-approved final version of the Missal.

So it was a bitter irony that the officials of the revamped Icel should also be fed a poison similar to the one they had dished out to their predecessors. They believed their Missal, which had been given the Vatican's *recognitio*, was a done deal, only to discover that Vox Clara and/or the CDW had revised it. Some estimate that 10,000 changes were made.