

## **The Need for Reform in Modern Anglican Worship**

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This presentation is addressed to the Anglican Church of North America, specifically those involved with standardizing liturgy and Scripture usage in our Archdiocese.

There are issues present in both the usage of the English Standard Version of the Bible (henceforth referred to as the ESV) and in the current version of the Anglican Eucharistic Rite which lead to confusion, some of which will be addressed here.

### 1.1. Problems with the ESV

While the ESV is certainly not the most ill-suited translation for use in corporate worship, it does have serious drawbacks. One of its primary issues is the attempt to translate words as exactly one-to-one as possible. For example, where the Greek has a pronoun, the ESV will use the corresponding English pronoun (James Pohlig, personal communication, 2023). This is problematic because Greek uses pronouns a lot more than English does, and during liturgical readings, listeners could become confused as to who is speaking and doing certain things. A similar problem exists for the word “and”, which is translated from the Greek “καί” (pronounced kai). While perhaps not as much a cause for confusion, it makes for a reading that seems unnatural.

The ESV also holds strongly to some unhelpful traditions in English Bible translation which go all the way back to the King James Version. One of these is the archaic use of “even”. In John 14:16-17, the ESV (2008) reads, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” The use of “even” here is to mean “that is.” But in modern English, it has taken on the role of emphasizing the statement attached onto it.

Another issue is that the ESV tries to cover too much ground, so to speak, in its intend purpose. It is advertised as being good for both public reading and for private study. The problem is that this pulls the needle in two opposite directions, and obscures the meaning. Here, a distinction should be made

between plain, common sense meaning, and deeper theological significance (Pohlig, personal communication, March 27, 2023). Neither a Southern Baptist nor a Roman Catholic translating 1 Peter 3:21 should try to expand the plain reading beyond the text, whether that be trying to negate what the text plainly says, or expanding it out into a philosophical speculation of how the process described therein works. As for deeper theological significance, that is the purpose of preaching, footnotes, commentaries, and translations that are geared towards private study. But for a pew Bible, the plain text itself should be accessible and understandable to the common man, something which the ESV in some cases fails to do.

## 1.2. Problems with the 2019 ACNA Eucharistic Rite

One problem which plagues many liturgical traditions is the continued use of the subjunctive mood in a linguistic landscape where the subjunctive is all but dead. The subjunctive mood is a way of expressing a desire or wish, something one wants to see in the future. For example, the *Sursum Corda* starts with the celebrant saying or singing, “The Lord be with you,” and the congregation responds, “And with your spirit” (Anglican Church in North America [ACNA], 2019, p. 132). Here the celebrant is expressing the desire that the Lord will be with the people in the congregation, not necessarily that it already is the case; otherwise it would read, “The Lord is with you.” But because the subjunctive mood has mostly fallen out of use in Modern English, many people interpret it as a statement of fact, and read the usage of “be” instead of “is” as a plural verb referring to the Trinity of persons in God (Roberts, 2022, 18:44).

Another fairly major issue is the use of the English word “mystery” in continuity with early Christian liturgies using the Greek word “μυστήριον” (pronounced *mustérion*) in the Prayer of Consecration: “Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.” (ACNA, 2019, p. 133). While the two words are etymologically related, the traditional usage

of μυστήριον in Christianity was not to refer to something that is currently obscure and cannot be figured out (as many people today interpret it), but to something hidden that has been revealed (in this case, the death, resurrection, and eventual return of Jesus Christ) (Roberts, 2022, 1:28).

## 2. Secondary Solution: Sidenotes

One possible solution is to include sidenotes in the pew editions of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer. Thus, confusing terms could be clarified in the margins, and the laity would have an overall better understanding. But this does not address the root problem, and if this method is relied upon too much, sooner or later there would be more notes than text, and the text itself would be completely incomprehensible.

This would still prove helpful as an auxiliary solution, nonetheless. For persons wishing to understand more deeply what is being communicated in the liturgy, having those notes available could enrich the individual's experience of it. And one can see historically that such explanations could have saved some grief, for example, in the Church of New Zealand, when they authorized an experimental liturgy in 1966. Among the many changes implemented, there was a shift from referring to God in the (now outdated) second person singular (thou, thee, thy) to the second person plural (you, you, your). Many objected to this because it was not formal enough in their view of it, despite the second person singular originally being used because it denoted intimacy (Peters, 1990, p. 50).

## 3. Primary Solution: Replacement and Revision

The ESV, ultimately, is a translation with goals that make it unideal for use as a pew Bible, and it would be most efficient to simply look for a new translation to use. As there are hundreds of English translations of the Bible in existence, many of which were made by well-informed scholars, one that addresses the issues with the ESV and remains a clear and understandable text can most certainly be found. It would not be an easy job, but it can be done.

The best solution for the liturgy would be to ensure that the texts are more or less up to date with the modern understanding of words. Not that the liturgy needs to give up words just because they have developed a different secular connotation, or even that it cannot use words that are no longer in common use, but the message needs to be clear. Beauty and clarity need to be in balance here; in the words of the late Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury (quoted in Peters, 1990, p. 35), “I believe that little would be gained and much lost if we sacrificed forms of speech that have stood the test of time, which are loved by millions the world over, and which can be understood with a little thought on the part of the worshipper or anyhow with a little bit of instruction.” While his words would have little effect on the development of the Church of New Zealand’s Eucharistic liturgy, they still hold true: beauty can and should be applied in Christian worship, but there should be balance with comprehension.

#### 4. Implementation: Involve the Laity

Given the hierarchical nature of the ACNA, it would not be very costly to disseminate a questionnaire where the laity could give their understanding of the liturgy, especially in parts which already are known to be problematic. The insights of younger members of the ACNA (especially those raising children) would be extremely valuable, since they would be more familiar with contemporary understandings of certain words and grammatical structures (Pohlig, personal communication, March 27, 2023.). A second poll would then have to be conducted to make sure the revisions are helpful.

There should be a consideration that the new Bible translation to be adopted should match the tone of the ESV, as people within the Church are accustomed to the tone and style of the ESV due to its extant usage. This would not be a major factor, however, as most modern translations use more or less the same formal tone. This presenter leaves it to the better judgement of others on what specific translation should be used for pew Bibles.

#### 5. Conclusion

As has been demonstrated here, there are issues present in both the ACNA's current choice of Bible translation to use in public readings, and in the wordings of some parts of the Eucharistic rite. With some thought and much wisdom, however, these problems may come to be rectified.

## References

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