

Advice on the use of various Bible translations in the liturgical context

At its 1987 Convention, General Synod adopted a guide of the use of Bible versions which was prepared by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations. In view of the fact that several newer versions have been produced since 1987, the Commission on Worship has received requests for advice on the suitability of these Bible translations for use in worship. The statement below has been prepared for this purpose. It includes elements of the original statement, as well as new material commissioned by the Department of Liturgics in 2017.

Like the earlier DSTO statement *A guide for the use of Bible versions*, which was adopted by the synodical convention in 1987, the Commission on Worship cannot mandate one particular English translation for liturgical use since any choice depends on its context and purpose. We have prepared the following summary of some major English translations which are currently available to assist congregations in making an informed decision on which translation is best for their particular context.

Good News Bible (GNB)

We would not generally recommend the Good News Bible (GNB) for use in worship. One possible exception is a context where English language literacy is a major consideration.

The Good News Bible (GNB) translates some key theological passages in an incorrect or misleading way (see John 1:1; 3:6; 1 Cor 11:29; Phil 2:5,6). In certain important passages the relationship of concepts to each other has been misconstrued from misinterpretation or theological bias (see Mark 1:4; Gal 3:26; Titus 3:4-7).

The GNB translates the meaning of the original in modern equivalent forms and idioms. Its language is simple, immediate, and intelligible. Sentences are shorter. However, the search for simplicity has led at times to loss of imagery, loss of rhythm and emphasis, and occasionally, to the dropping of important connectives and key-words from the translation. Occasionally by its explicitness it excludes wider ranges of reference and deeper levels of meaning (see Gen 12:7 compared with Gal. 3:16; 1 John 5:6).

The Message

We are aware of some congregations using Eugene Peterson's *The Message* (1993) in worship. It should be noted that the Message is a paraphrase of the Bible and not a translation. It uses a high level of dynamic equivalence and idiom to make it very readable, and easy to understand. However, it generally lacks the accuracy of translation that is required for lectionary readings. In some cases, it also reflects Peterson's theological leanings. For these reasons, we cannot recommend it for use in worship; in fact, Peterson himself advises against people using *The Message* in this way.

New International Version (NIV)

The NIV occupies the middle ground. Generally, it is a theologically reliable translation and is considered more intelligible than other versions that use a higher register. However, some of it, too, remains closely tied to idioms and forms of the original and for that reason becomes awkward in its rhythms. Its sentences are frequently longer than they need to be, and its range of vocabulary often goes beyond common usage. An updated version of the NIV was produced in 2011. This version is still the most accessible as a translation that has both formal and dynamic equivalence.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Since its inception in 1989, the NRSV has become a widely-used translation in English speaking liturgical protestant churches. This is, in part, due to its adoption of inclusive language. It has been argued that it goes too far in its use of inclusive language in some instances, such as the translation of "son of man" in Ps 8:6 and Heb 2:6 by "mortals", and "sons of God" in Gal 3:26 by "children of God". It tends to use language of a higher register which may not be as accessible in certain contexts.

English Standard Version

The ESV (2001) is considered a generally accurate translation, but it is more limited in its use of inclusive language than the NRSV. It tends more towards a literal translation of the original text than dynamic equivalence, and for this reason it does not read as naturally as some other translations. It also tends towards more formal language which may be harder to understand, especially for people who have a lower English language literacy.

New Living Translation

The New Living Translation is a "dynamic equivalent" translation. In other words, it's something of a paraphrase or interpretation of the Biblical text rather than a close word-for-word translation. In reality, all translations exist on a spectrum of "formal" and "dynamic" equivalency. While other translations attempt to balance accuracy

with making clear sense, the NLT is less concerned with helping us hear the original text transparently. Thus while the NLT can be profitable for devotional reading, it is not recommended for reading in public worship. This is to ensure that the life-giving words of Christ are proclaimed in their fullness and clarity.

Prepared by the Commission on Worship (2019) using material prepared by the CTICR (1987), John Kleinig (2017), Fraser Pearce (2017), and Matthias Prenzler (2019). Updated Tom Pietsch (2020).