

Revised Grail Psalter, 2008, approved for liturgical use

In the mid 1950s—a time when the movement toward liturgical reform that began in the early twentieth century had gained significant momentum—the Ladies of the Grail (England), a lay women’s community, gathered a group of scholars to prepare a new translation of the psalms. Published in 1963, the Grail Psalms were adopted worldwide for the Liturgy of the Hours and approved for general liturgical use following the Second Vatican Council. The unique character of the Grail Psalms is that they incorporate the rhythm of the original Hebrew text and are singable to the psalmody of the late French Jesuit priest and composer Joseph Gelineau. The combination of this text and the Gelineau music came to be widely known as the “Gelineau Psalms.”

In subsequent years, when inclusive language became a growing concern within the church, two revisions were undertaken and published in 1983 and 1993. Both revisions were submitted to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops requesting approval for liturgical use; neither received the two-thirds majority vote required for passage. It should be noted, however, that the later version was granted an *imprimatur*.

In the wake of the 2001 document *Liturgiam authenticam*, all contemporary translations of the psalms came under criticism for their use of paraphrase—*LA* having called for more literal translations of the Scriptures and liturgical texts. This criticism affected the Grail Psalms, original and revised; the psalms, both original and revised, from the *New American Bible*; and the ICEL Psalter, among others.

Benedictine monk and priest, musician, and Old Testament professor Abbot Gregory Polan, O.S.B., of Conception Abbey, Missouri, responding to a request of the then-Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy and with an eye to its use for his own monastic community, undertook the work of preparing a third revision of the Grail Psalms. For this task, Abbot Gregory worked exclusively from the original Grail version and the Hebrew Massoretic and Greek Septuagint texts, with an eye to the *Nova Vulgata*. During the process, he conferred with the Grail, as well as Vatican and international sources, in order to create a version that would meet the requirements of *Liturgiam authenticam* and be suitable for English speakers throughout the world.

Earlier this year the final draft was submitted to the Bishops Committee on Divine Worship, which subsequently submitted it to a vote of the entire bishops conference. On November 11, 2008, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the *Revised Grail Psalter* for liturgical use by a vote of 203 to 5. It will now be sent to the Vatican for its formal *recognitio*.

Since the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has monitored and advised the process of preparing this version, one expects a *recognitio* to be granted without undue delay.

On the international front, the International Commission for the Preparation of an English Language Lectionary (ICPEL)—a mixed commission initiated in 2003 by the Vatican for the purpose stated in its title—has expressed a desire to incorporate this new version into its project, and the bishops of Kenya, East Africa, have become the first to adopt it for their forthcoming revision of the Liturgy of the Hours. All this suggests the *Revised Grail Psalter, 2008*, may well be destined to become the universal psalter for English-speaking Catholics.

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The first publication of the new text will occur in the form of a book containing the complete text and will be available as soon as the formal *imprimatur* is received.