

The Use of the Divine *Tetragrammaton* in the Liturgy

On page 29 of last month's *Newsletter*, it was reported that the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a letter on June 29, 2008 which included a number of directives on the translation and the pronunciation of the Divine Name as signified in the sacred *tetragrammaton* in the Liturgy. The Directives have elicited many questions and much conversation, as well as some misunderstanding of the intentions and the scope of the Directives.

The letter explains that the Divine Name as revealed in the Old Testament, יהוה (YHWH), has been held as unpronounceable as an expression of reverence for the greatness of God. The directive notes that "in recent years the practice has crept in pronouncing the God of Israel's proper name," known as the holy or divine *tetragrammaton*, written with four consonants, YHWH, in the Hebrew alphabet. In order to vocalize it, it is necessary to introduce vowels that alter the written and spoken forms of the name (*i.e.* "Yahweh" or "Jehovah"). Citing theological and philological reasons, and in keeping with tradition, the letter reminds the bishops that "from the beginning... the sacred *tetragrammaton* was never pronounced in the Christian context nor translated into any languages into which the Bible was translated." Historically the Divine Name was rendered in Hebrew as *Adonai*, in Greek as *Kyrios*, and in Latin as *Dominus*. This is evident in the Bible in both Septuagint and the Vulgate texts of the Bible (the *New American Bible*, used in the *Lectionary for Mass*, follows the same principle in translation). Liturgical texts have always followed that tradition.

In a letter to the Bishops of the United States, Bishop Arthur Serratelli, Chairman of the Committee on Divine Worship, stated "While the directives contained here do not force any changes to official liturgical texts, including our continuing work of the translation of the *Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia*, which already follow the spirit of the directives, there may be some impact on the use of particular pieces of liturgical music in our country as well as in the composition of variable texts such as the General Intercessions for the celebration of the Mass and the other sacraments."

Several readers have posed a question regarding several passages in the *Lectionary for Mass* which appear to make use of the Divine Name. In three separate instances, the Name "Yahweh" appears as part of a hyphenated construction of the name of a particular place, *e.g.*, "Yahweh-yireh" (Genesis 22:14, Easter Vigil, Second Reading, long form, #41; Thursday of the 13th Week in Ordinary Time, Year 1, #380) or "Yahweh-shalom" (Judges 6:24, Tuesday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time, Year 1, #420). As proper names of places (that do not refer directly to God), changes to these constructions will not be necessary.

The staff of the Secretariat of Divine Worship has been in conversation with publishers of liturgical music regarding the recent directives. Composers of liturgical hymns and songs which are affected by the directives are in the process of creating alternate texts so that familiar songs will be usable in light of the directives. Publishers have informed the Secretariat that 2009 annual music resources were already in production when the directives were released, so they will not reflect the adapted texts. Publishers plan to make revised arrangements available online as soon as they are available.

Bishop Serratelli suggests that the Directives provide the Church with "an opportunity to offer catechesis for the faithful as an encouragement to show reverence for the Name of God in daily life, emphasizing the power of language as an act of devotion and worship." One can also appreciate the opportunity to appreciate the unbroken practice of our Jewish brothers and sisters in showing reverence for the Divine Name. The Directives from the Congregation will help the faithful to understand better that tradition.

The full text of the letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments remains available on the Committee on Divine Worship's website.