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SHE WHO WAS: SCRIPTURAL LINGUISTICS AND THE ABSENT IMAGE OF GOD

By Angela Marquis

This article is peer reviewed.

Introduction

*The Second Vatican Council strongly desired to preserve with care the authentic Liturgy, which flows forth from the Church's living and most ancient spiritual tradition, and to adapt it with pastoral wisdom to the genius of the various peoples.*¹

In 2001, the Vatican issued *Liturgiam Authenticam*, an instructional document designed to both *preserve* and *adapt* the authentic Catholic liturgy so that the faithful might participate in a 'fully conscious, and active' way as ordained by their baptismal call.² Active participation is 'to be considered before all else,'³ for the 'Sacred Liturgy engages not only man's (*sic*) intellect, but the whole person who is the 'subject.'⁴ As a contemporary Australian woman of strong Catholic faith, how might I participate 'consciously and actively' in a liturgy that speaks only of and through men? How does the Australian Church respond 'fully to the particular graces given to each person in the unique circumstances of our lives and the needs of our community'?⁵ *LA* seeks to foreclose further debate about the veracity of the approved texts for use in the liturgy, claiming all approved translations are 'marked by sound doctrine, which are exact in wording [and] free from all ideological influence.'⁶ Contemporary scholarship, however, supports the reality that *all* texts carry ideological influence. Furthermore, translations which are *exact in wording* do not seek to remove or eradicate these influences. Rather, they effectively elide, yet simultaneously reinforce, 'women's marginality and absence from public consciousness by subsuming them under masculine terms.'⁷ I believe this document is not only blind to the ideological influence of patriarchy but also seeks to reinscribe an outdated understanding of God evidenced by the refusal to consider female imagery *for* God.

¹ Congregation for divine worship and the discipline of the sacraments, *Liturgiam authenticam*: On the use of vernacular languages in the publication of the books of the Roman Liturgy, 1. Accessed August 2, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html. (Hereafter cited as *LA*)

² Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1963), 14. Accessed September 18, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (Hereafter cited as *SC*)

³ *LA*, 14.

⁴ *LA*, 28.

⁵ ABC Plenary Council 2020. *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is Inclusive, Participatory & Synodal*, 7. Accessed April 17, 2021, <https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PC2020-thematic-papers-2-print-ver.pdf>

⁶ *LA* 3.

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But she said: Feminist practices of biblical interpretation*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 25.

Moreover, the inability to employ inclusive language when speaking of God's people, polarises men and women. These decisions separate the body of the faithful by deifying one half of humanity whilst silencing the other.

The *Listening and Dialogue* phase of Australia's fifth Plenary Council, revealed 'a call to recognise the unique gifts of women, who with men are equally made in the 'image of God.'⁸ Two of the discernment papers written in response to this phase, *Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal* and *Prayerful and Eucharistic*, propose a translation of the Catholic Lectionary⁹ that includes and respects 'both women and men,'¹⁰ and furthermore, 'considers inclusive language alongside accuracy.'¹¹ The lectionary currently approved for use in the dioceses of Australia and New Zealand, ignores many of the Scriptural references to women, reinforcing the false idea that few women participated in the flourishing of Christianity. By insisting upon naming our living God in purely masculine terms, both the lectionary and *LA* participate in the construction of a male God. Finally, these two documents demand the preservation of outdated androcentric language when describing the disciples of Christ, once again ignoring the presence of women and silencing them under the umbrella of patriarchy. I argue that these three strategies belie faith in a God who persistently creates and recreates, in a cycle of exuberant becomingness. A 'God not of the dead, but of the living,'¹² who breathes life into our liturgy and expresses 'truths that transcend the limits of time and space.'¹³

Tradition, Transcription and Translation

Androcentric language, imagery and metaphor pervade the Catholic liturgy, prayers and lectionary. The fact that the canon and texts of the Roman Liturgy are the result of a deeply patriarchal tradition promulgated by a masculine, clerical hegemony, is either ignored or considered irrelevant to contemporary communities of faith. It is effectively swept under the carpet in an effort to preserve the Word of an omnipresent male God who has created *man* in *his* image. Accordingly, the Word of God is unchangeable, historical and traditional. 'Traditions,' writes Schüssler Fiorenza, 'are the facts and patterns constituting Church history. Since the biblical message was addressed to a patriarchal society, the *form* of the biblical promise is situation-variable and relative to its patriarchal culture.'¹⁴ *LA* maintains that this androcentric liturgical language will differ 'somewhat from usual and everyday speech' in order to 'become truly memorable and capable of expressing heavenly realities.'¹⁵ Yet, hidden behind this claim, lies a hierarchical understanding that is inconsistent with the God of Jesus reflected within the Gospels. The Christian oral tradition has been handed down, transcribed, translated and embodied across centuries of faithful immersion. The inspiration for spiritual wrestling, 'Christianity is

⁸ ABC. *Inclusive, Participatory & Synodal*, 8.

⁹ *Lectionary I & 2*. (Sydney, Australia: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1983).

¹⁰ ABC. *Inclusive, Participatory & Synodal*, 15.

¹¹ ABC Plenary Council 2020. *How is God calling us to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is Prayerful and Eucharistic*, 15, italics in original. Accessed April 17, 2021.

<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/PC2020-thematic-papers-3.pdf>

¹² Mk 12:27.

¹³ *LA*, 19.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins*. 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 15, italics in original.

¹⁵ *LA*, 27.

the religion of the 'Word' of God, 'not a written and mute word, but incarnate and living.'¹⁶ Can this word be both preserved and adapted or are these two purposes mutually exclusive? 'Only the living God who spans all times can relate to historically new circumstances as the future continuously arrives. A tradition that cannot change, cannot be preserved.'¹⁷

Modern hermeneutics recognise 'that a text, once produced, obtains a certain autonomy from the historical setting in which it was composed, and is susceptible [to] newer meanings in new situations.'¹⁸ Thus, language does not necessarily overdetermine the meaning of a text, so long as the content engenders new interpretations in contemporary contexts. When language *negates access* to a text, however, it precludes engagement with that text and thus demands textual reinterpretation. The Spirit of the living God, for whom no words are truly adequate, spoke through, with and in the inscribers. If Scripture is not to 'remain a dead letter . . . [it] must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit' transforming the heart towards understanding.¹⁹ LA acknowledges 'the Holy Spirit leads the Christian faithful into all truth and causes the word of Christ to dwell abundantly within them,'²⁰ yet immediately overrides the creativity of the Spirit to assert translations are 'not so much a work of creative innovation' as a 'rendering [of] the original texts . . . accurately into the vernacular language.'²¹ If the translations lack innovative revelation, how can 'God's breath, the divine Spirit,'²² breathe new life into sacred Scripture to thus 'achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy'?²³

The written word can be 'dangerous . . . [when] it claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself,'²⁴ for although the essential qualities of language emerge from 'behind the screen of the word' the ultimate reality is hidden.²⁵ The *Word*, however, is not merely its own reality. It is more than the letters etched on parchment. It is Jesus, who 'was with God and . . . is God.'²⁶ We glean metaphors, 'glimpses of the living God' flowing through the Scriptures in words that evoke feelings and memories, and inspire us to act.²⁷ The written words remain symbols, *signs* of God's grace present amongst us. The inspired *action* of the living Word *takes* the reader, and *moves* the listener, for the 'Gospels are not transcripts but invitations to discipleship. They are theological interpretation-in-process.'²⁸ The Word-Jesus lives and breathes, dancing like a flame throughout history and across time. When we fail to recognise the inscription as a pathway, a bridge, a *movement* from the signified

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 108, Accessed September 15, 2020. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/ccc_toc.htm (Hereafter cited as CCC).

¹⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God: Mapping frontiers in the theology of God*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2007), 23.

¹⁸ Joseph Jensen, 'Inclusive language and the bible,' *America* 171, no. 14 (1994): 16.

¹⁹ CCC, 111

²⁰ LA, 19

²¹ LA, 20

²² CCC, 691

²³ SC, 24

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 144.

²⁵ André Martinet, *Diogène 51* (1965): 54, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, 31.

²⁶ Jn 1:1.

²⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 226.

²⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In memory of her*, 103.

towards meaning, we idolise words and carve their reality in stone. If we fall into the Derridean trap, the Word ceases to live.

Absent Women

Although *LA* claims that liturgical ‘translations will respond to the hunger and thirst for the living God that is experienced by the people of our own time,’²⁹ it also insists upon preserving the ‘rich patrimony’ that has been ‘passed on through the centuries.’³⁰ The patriarchal history of the Church which informed the writings of the Fathers has predominantly excluded the female voice. In both Jesus’ time and beyond, however, women were ever present – searching for living water,³¹ seeking forgiveness,³² reaching out in faith,³³ anointing,³⁴ and challenging Jesus.³⁵ Jesus responded to these women, acknowledging them, recontextualising their societal position, touching and healing them. In the early Church, women were leaders,³⁶ prophets,³⁷ and co-workers of Paul.³⁸ Although the ‘Epistles . . . contain the names of numerous women who were apparently active as missionaries, leaders of house-churches, and ministers’ the lectionary denies their presence by preferencing readings that focus on the words and actions of the *male* followers of Christ.³⁹ Moreover, when the selected texts do include women, female characters are mere ‘adjuncts to male actors . . . important in relation to marriage; otherwise . . . expendable.’⁴⁰ For centuries, women have led by example, suffered, taught and passed on their faith, all for the sake of the Cross. It is my contention that suppressing the female narrative in the current lectionary is more than a passive action. Rather, it exposes an active decision to ignore their presence, render them absent, and legitimise androcentric language. If women are simply absent, they need not be acknowledged. *LA* instructs translators to maintain proper ‘regard for the norm of fidelity to the original text,’⁴¹ yet, if translators fail to reject ‘the patriarchal politics of biblical texts and interpretations by rejecting textual absolutism and tracing the intimate interaction between text and socio-political reality,’ then fidelity to the generative biblical urtext has already been betrayed.⁴² Therefore, a lectionary that truly proclaims the life, death and resurrection of Christ (by *LA*’s very injunction), must *include* female witness, prophecy, faith and action, ‘lest the historical context of the biblical passages be obscured.’⁴³

²⁹ *LA*, 25.

³⁰ *LA*, 20.

³¹ Jn 4:7-42.

³² Jn 8: 3-11.

³³ Mk 5:25-34.

³⁴ Mt 26:6-13.

³⁵ Mk 7:24-30.

³⁶ Rom 16:1-2, 1 Cor 1:11.

³⁷ Acts 21:9.

³⁸ Phil 4:2-3.

³⁹ Marjorie Procter-Smith, ‘Images of women in the Lectionary,’ In *The power of naming: A concilium reader in feminist liberation theology*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 181.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴¹ *LA*, 42.

⁴² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But she said*, 35.

⁴³ *LA*, 42.

Inclusive Language

As a female reader of the Word, I am regularly required to proclaim texts such as the second reading from the 29th Sunday in Ordinary time, ‘We know *brothers*, that God loves you and that you have been chosen.’⁴⁴ Were there no women in Thessalonica? Did Paul speak only to men? Is the context of the reading altered if I orate *brothers and sisters* instead? The Greek word *adelphoi*, in the pericope above, is traditionally translated into English as *brothers*. While brothers may have long been considered appropriate, the literal translation of this word is *siblings* or *brothers and sisters* when a mixed group is addressed.⁴⁵ Translators ‘must determine if the NT [texts] were written equally to male and female believers. . . if women were included, then which is more precise in modern English— ‘brothers’ or ‘brothers and sisters’?’⁴⁶ The people of Thessalonica were not an exclusively male enclave but a society, including women and children in their number. If not, Paul’s later comparison of the Lord coming ‘like a thief in the night’ with the sudden onset of ‘labour pains . . . upon a pregnant woman’ would be non-sensical.⁴⁷ Contextually then, ‘which meaning did the author intend to convey?’⁴⁸ In this letter, Paul is speaking to both men and women, thus by the Vatican’s own standard, ‘the precise intended meaning of the text’ necessitates inclusivity.⁴⁹ *LA* further states, a correct translation must avoid ‘any expression . . . which is confusing or ambiguous . . . such that the hearer would fail to grasp its meaning’ seemingly unaware that identifying women as *sons, brothers* and *men* is confusing in contemporary society.⁵⁰ As Jensen points out, regardless of the language used in the original text, maintaining ‘the third person masculine’ when English no longer has this inclusive sense, is a mistranslation as it does not convey ‘the true meaning of the text.’⁵¹

LA instructs that when a single term is used to express the ‘universality . . . of the human family . . . the language of the original text should be maintained in the translation.’⁵² In particular, it insists upon the precise translation of words such as ‘the Hebrew word *adam*, the Greek *anthropos*, or the Latin *homo*.’⁵³ The translation of Mark 8:34-38⁵⁴ renders the Greek *anthropas* as man, yet *anthropas* in this context ‘does not mean a male human being, but rather a human being in general.’⁵⁵ According to the Vatican, the *precise intended meaning* of the word *anthropas* means both *man* and *men and women*, thus they have created an irreconcilable paradox—the translation *man* has already resorted to the ‘imprudent . . . transition from the singular to the plural’—its singularity is inevitably thwarted.⁵⁶

⁴⁴ 1Thes 1:4, italics mine.

⁴⁵ Scott Munger, ‘Women, the Church, and Bible translation: Key passages, issues, and interpretive options,’ *Priscilla Papers* 29, no. 2 (2015): 6-13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁷ 1Thes. 5:2, 3.

⁴⁸ Scott Munger, ‘Women, the Church, and Bible translation,’ 6.

⁴⁹ *LA*, 30.

⁵⁰ *LA*, 44.

⁵¹ Joseph Jensen, ‘Inclusive language and the bible,’ 16.

⁵² *LA*, 30.

⁵³ *LA*, 30.

⁵⁴ The Gospel for Friday of the 6th Week in Ordinary time, Year 1

⁵⁵ Donald Trautman, ‘Inclusive language and revised liturgical books,’ *Word on Worship* 15, no. 1 (1997), 6.

⁵⁶ *LA*, 31.

To address 'women using male language denies women their own identity' and excludes them from full participation.⁵⁷ *LA* circumnavigates this issue by claiming it is 'the task of catechists or of the homilist to transmit [the] right interpretation of the texts that excludes any prejudice or unjust discrimination.'⁵⁸ The Vatican belies its own rationalisation of language 'considered somewhat obsolete in daily usage' by claiming that the *right interpretation* can be gleaned from catechesis, while simultaneously retaining androcentric language in both *LA* and the CCC.⁵⁹

Naming Toward the Divine

I believe in one God. I acclaim this with passion and zeal each week at Sunday Mass. I believe deeply in the first five words of the Apostle's Creed, however, the one God of my faith is not necessarily *Father, almighty*. Those who sit close may hear me utter, *the one name above all names*, or I AM THAT I AM, *Creator of heaven and earth*. When Catholics speak of God as *the one* God, they are no more reducing God to the unitary, singularity of the number one, than attesting a belief in *gods* when they speak of the Trinity. Yet, to reduce God solely to he (or she for that matter), is to confine our imagery, metaphor and language to a narrow, anthropomorphic concept, utterly undeserving of God's magnitude. Our language constrains us to naming God as a singular almighty being, and in doing so does harm to the multifaceted plenitude that is God. We only ever name 'toward God, using good, true, and beautiful fragments experienced in the world to point to the infinite mystery who dwells within and embraces the world but always exceeds our grasp.'⁶⁰

How is it that the same Judaic God whose name cannot be uttered, and from whom Moses hid his face,⁶¹ has become so clearly embedded in humanity's consciousness as an aged white bearded man? 'Holy mystery who is source, sustaining power, and goal of the world cannot be confined to one set of images, but transcends them all.'⁶² *LA* is insistent that the Hebrew *tetragrammaton* YHWH should be 'rendered into any given vernacular by a word equivalent in meaning.'⁶³ *Is there an equivalent for YHWH? When Moses asks how he should name God, the answer is, 'I AM WHO I AM.'*⁶⁴ Jesus refers to himself in the same way, 'Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I AM.'⁶⁵ Neither said 'I am a ...' thereby fostering an image of God as an atrophic single being. God, as love, is a verb, pluralistic in nature and essence. *Elohim, God-they*, desired to 'make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness.'⁶⁶ God, *elohim* – all things yet no/thing, whose *oneness* is multidimensional, whose Spirit (*elohim ruach*) hovers over the water at the birthing of creation,⁶⁷ and descends upon Jesus as he rises up from the waters of his baptism.⁶⁸ The Spirit

⁵⁷ Donald Trautman, 'Inclusive language,' 6.

⁵⁸ *LA*, 29.

⁵⁹ *LA*, 27.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 20, italics in original.

⁶¹ Ex 3:6

⁶² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 97.

⁶³ *LA*, 41c.

⁶⁴ Ex 3:14.

⁶⁵ Jn 8:58.

⁶⁶ Gn 1:26, italics mine.

⁶⁷ Gn. 1:2.

⁶⁸ Mt 3:16.

embodies Jesus who ‘is . . . God blessed forever.’⁶⁹ It is vital to complete the circle and recall that God *is also* the Spirit, ‘never *less* than God. The Creator Spirit is always *God*.’⁷⁰

How then can we speak about God if our words always *fall short*? *LA* teaches that a ‘deficiency in translating the varying forms of addressing God . . . may render the translation monotonous’ yet simultaneously fails to comprehend that the insistence upon androcentric language impoverishes the vocabulary with greater severity.⁷¹ God created women in the divine image and likeness, thus it is appropriate to ‘employ metaphors taken from women’s lives to point to the living God.’⁷² The Vatican’s insistence upon particular and exclusive metaphors casts I AM WHO I AM solely in masculine human terms and reinforces the patriarchal structures they so vehemently deny. One such metaphor, writes Ross,⁷³ is that of the bride and bridegroom. *SC* poeticises that the Church is Jesus’ ‘beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father.’⁷⁴ While metaphors naturally embody several meanings, ‘when one meaning dominates all others, the metaphor becomes nothing but an equation.’⁷⁵ God/Jesus is imagined as masculine *bridegroom*, and Church is imagined feminine *bride*. While women can only be bride, men as males *and* Church, can be both. Selective in heeding the instruction not to ‘confuse our image of God . . . with our human representations,’⁷⁶ the Vatican clearly understands ‘the divine essence . . . to be essentially and fundamentally male,’⁷⁷ yet affirms tautologically ‘*He* is neither man nor woman: *he* is God.’⁷⁸ God, as neither man nor woman, requires pronouns, images and metaphors to be used interchangeably. ‘If God is ‘she’ as well as ‘he’—and in fact neither—a new possibility can be envisioned of a community that . . . allows women and men to share life in equal measure.’⁷⁹

LA insists that ‘translations be made directly from the original . . . Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek’ texts, thus a *faithful rendering* might acknowledge a contradiction in reference to the Trinity.⁸⁰ The lectionary’s English translation renders God’s Spirit masculine, however, the Hebrew *ruach* is a feminine noun. A literal translation of Genesis 1:2⁸¹ is thus, ‘the Spirit of God *she* was hovering.’⁸² In Greek, *pneuma* (Spirit) is neutral – thus a literal translation of John 16:13⁸³ is, ‘the Spirit of truth . . . *it* will guide you . . . for *it* will not speak on *its* own.’⁸⁴ As Munger demonstrates, ‘even the most literal translations do not always translate the original languages

⁶⁹ Rom 9:5.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 183, italics in original.

⁷¹ *LA*, 51.

⁷² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 97.

⁷³ Susan A. Ross, ‘Can God be a bride? Some problems with an ancient metaphor,’ *America* 191, no. 13 (2004): 12-15.

⁷⁴ *SC*, 7.

⁷⁵ Susan A. Ross, ‘Can God be a bride?’, 13.

⁷⁶ CCC, 42.

⁷⁷ Susan A. Ross, ‘Can God be a bride?’, 14.

⁷⁸ CCC, 239, italics mine.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 100.

⁸⁰ *LA*, 24

⁸¹ First reading of the Easter Vigil each year.

⁸² Scott Munger, ‘Women, the Church, and Bible translation,’ 7, italics mine.

⁸³ Gospel of Pentecost Sunday, Year B.

⁸⁴ Jn 16:13, italics mine.

literally.⁸⁵ *LA* stipulates ‘the original text . . . must be translated . . . in the most exact manner,’⁸⁶ yet ignores its own teaching when referring to the Holy Spirit as ‘the established gender usage of each respective language’ is clearly not maintained.⁸⁷ The Vatican’s ‘assumption of the normative maleness of God, and of Christ’s saving activity being linked to his maleness’⁸⁸ is taken even further by Noll, who acclaims the ‘*Triune God, while not male . . . is masculine*, and any attempt to imagine a gender-fluid deity is simply idolatrous.’⁸⁹ To *name toward* the ‘incomprehensible . . . invisible [and] ungraspable’ God with multifarious and varied metaphorical language and images is *not* idolatrous.⁹⁰ The overuse of masculine metaphors alongside selective methods of translation sanctions God’s masculinity, thereby fixing ‘God to a definite form and man-made image.’⁹¹ That *is* idolatry.

In 1978, Pope John Paul I acclaimed, ‘God is our father; even more God is our mother.’⁹² Why is the image of a maternal God so difficult to accept? I suspect it comes down to Christianity’s slavish personification of the words, *Father, Son* and *Holy Spirit*, or the three *persons* of the Trinity, which as Johnson shows, has lost its transcendent power through centuries of translation and misinterpretation, and will ultimately be the subject of future analysis.⁹³ Yet, the difficulty also lies in Jesus’ instruction to pray with the words, *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*. Jesus called God *Father*, expressing a personal relationship with YHWH, the God of Israel. Jesus acknowledges his identification with, and belief in, Israel’s God, not to confirm God’s masculinity but simply because God’s name *could not be spoken*. As Johnson uncovers, the prayer above ‘is not a redundant expression, as though Father were now the name of God all by itself’ but an expression that acknowledges I AM WHO I AM as the one God of Israel.⁹⁴ ‘The one who taught this prayer practiced a hallowing of God’s name precisely by addressing God as Father rather than using the sacred, unspoken Name.’⁹⁵ Sadly, the *Our Father* has, in part, authorised the ‘masculinity of theological and liturgical God-language . . . not [as] a cultural or linguistic accident but . . . an act of domination in and through proclamation and prayer.’⁹⁶

Conclusion

The only way language can *transcend time and space* is when it adapts itself to new eras and epochs. Stories can only be preserved if the reader/listener hears it in a language they can understand. Retaining language that isolates and silences

⁸⁵ Scott Munger, ‘Women, the Church, and Bible translation,’ 7.

⁸⁶ *LA*, 20.

⁸⁷ *LA*, 31a.

⁸⁸ Susan A. Ross, ‘Can God be a bride?,’ 15.

⁸⁹ Stephen Noll, ‘Image-Bearers for God: Does biblical language for man matter?,’ *Evangelical Review of Theology* 43, no. 3 (2019), 197, italics in original.

⁹⁰ CCC, 42.

⁹¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In memory of her*, 133.

⁹² John Paul II, ‘*Osservatore Romano*,’ (September 21, 1978): quoted in Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 102.

⁹³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 218.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Breaking the Silence—Becoming visible,’ in *The power of naming: A concilium reader in feminist liberation theology*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 171.

groups of people ignores the central themes of the Gospel and thus subverts both its message and its context. It is vital to enliven the language of the liturgy precisely for its ability to *flow forth* and inspire, enabling the faithful to participate in their Baptismal call. Women have existed alongside men throughout history. They are (and have always been) present—often unacknowledged, frequently blamed for the sin of humankind, and invariably subsumed under the headings of *sons* and *brothers*. Historical women may have understood themselves yoked to these descriptors, however, to avoid ‘splitting . . . a unitary collective term into masculine and feminine parts’ is inappropriate both in English and contemporary society.⁹⁷ An honest translation that depicts the historical milieu, disavows *brothers* and *sons*, because these words no longer describe both men and women. Retaining androcentric language, not only represents an outmoded theocratic ideology but distorts the very *history* of the Church. As Schüssler Fiorenza so poignantly points out, ‘The history of patriarchal oppression must not be allowed to cancel out the history of the life, struggles, and leadership of women in biblical religion.’⁹⁸

The Vatican’s refusal to render inclusive the language of sacred texts either denies that women were present in the Hebrew scriptures, the Gospels and post resurrection narratives, *or* acknowledges that highlighting their existence will rob the current structure of the Church of its power to name and control. A translation that portrays both the historical and current reality of the Church, will and must, disrupt the established order and invite a wellspring of flourishing at the expense of patriarchal rule. If ‘the whole structure of church and society’ is transformed, we invariably make ‘space for a new community of mutual partnership.’⁹⁹ *LA* requires translators to ‘make choices that . . . enable the hearer to recognise [themselves] . . . as vividly as possible.’¹⁰⁰ This edict necessitates an inclusive lectionary, one where God, I AM THAT I AM calls me, as woman, as daughter, as female image of God, to an ever-present transcendent awakening in which I have the dignity and grace to be, alongside all my sisters and brothers, the presence of God in this world.

⁹⁷ *LA*, 31.

⁹⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In memory of her*, 351.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the living God*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ *LA*, 42.