

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

... regarding the Saint Jean de Brébeuf Catholic Hymnal

Q. Is it acceptable to use hymn translations done by Anglicans? On the internet, a statement was made claiming that Protestants are better at translating hymns than Catholics.

It is false to claims that Protestants “are better at translating hymns” than Catholics. Some Protestants admit they *deliberately change the meaning* of hymns (thereby creating a defective translation) whenever they disagree theologically with the true meaning.

Richard Mant, for example, was an Anglican bishop who admitted in the Preface to his book (*Ancient hymns from the Roman Breviary*) that “sentiments were modified or omitted” from his translations whenever Mant deemed them “not agreeable to Holy Writ.” Many more examples could be cited.¹

Not all Protestant translators deliberately bowdlerized translations. For instance, Dr. John Neale was an “Anglo-Catholic” who created translations comparable to the finest Catholic translators: Father Fitzpatrick, Father Caswall, Father Popplewell, Father Fortescue, Father Husenbeth, Cardinal Newman, Father Wallace, Father Hopkins, and so forth.

HOW THE PROBLEM WAS SOLVED

The *Saint Jean de Brébeuf Hymnal* is the first hymnal to appear in more than seventy years which does not mimic or “build upon” Protestant models.² Those who carefully examine this book, however, will notice Protestant translations were not completely excluded. For example, Dr. Neale’s fine translation of *Gloriosi Salvatoris Nominis Praeconia* was included, even though Dr. Neale was not Catholic.

Here’s the difference: Erudite theologians approved all hymn texts in the *Brébeuf Hymnal*. When adjustments needed to be made, they were made. For example, a translation of *Christe Redemptor* (a hymn for All Saints) was included by Richard F. Littledale (an Anglican clergyman), but a theologian and poet first corrected Littledale’s faulty lines.

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- 1 For example, Isaac Williams—an Anglican responsible for *Hymns translated from the Parisian Breviary*—**admitted in his Preface** that he bowdlerized translations when it comes to “the Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Remains of the Dead”; Horatio Nelson—an Anglican responsible for the *Salisbury Hymn Book*—**admitted in his Preface** that he bowdlerized translations whenever he decided there was “something faulty in doctrine”; David Morgan—an Anglican responsible for *Hymns of the Latin Church*—**admitted in his Preface** that he bowdlerized “some passages, bringing them into full harmony” with the Anglican doctrines.
 - 2 The *New Westminster Hymnal* did not mimic Protestant models, either—but that excellent book has been out of print for many decades and would not be suitable for Catholics in the year 2021.