

opinion poll conducted for The Catholic World Report by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut, there is good reason to think that they do not. The key data of the survey (presented elsewhere in this issue) indicates that strong preference for "inclusive" language is held by less than 25% of American Catholics. Nearly 75% of the respondents did not even recognize the term "inclusive language." 71% rejected the notion that words such as "man" and "mankind" when used to refer to all people seem to exclude women. When asked if the church should avoid the use of those "masculine" pronouns, 69% said it should not.

What should be the reaction to the Roper Center poll? Regard it as biased and dismiss it? My own investigations tell me that it is quite sound sociologically. Use it to fight "inclusive" language lectionaries and sacramentaries? This would not be a good strategy, for the very people most prone to this direction are the first to argue that the church is not run on opinion polls. Use it to show how much in need of education ordinary Catholics are and to prove the prophetic nature of liturgiology on cultural matters? This approach could generate

appearances of elitism and of a "knowledge class" mentality.

I myself would be regarded as a cautiously moderate proponent of horizontal "inclusive" language and I would not encourage excessively dramatic extrapolations from the Roper poll. Yet, in my opinion, the poll underlines yet again a most serious problem: the chasm that yawns, on the one hand, between the official agenda of ongoing liturgical reform as represented by the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy and ICEL, liturgical faculties and organizations and, on the other, the mass of ordinary Catholics, clergy and laity alike. The U.S. bishops are in the unenviable position of being caught between the two constituencies.

The Roper poll is not the end of the world for those who propose "inclusive" language. But it is a wake-up call on a phenomenon which is difficult to deny: that ongoing liturgical renewal is being driven by the squeaky wheel of professionals speaking for the whole church. The Roper report provides an opportunity for the other wheels to squeak.

ANTIPHON Publication of The Society for Catholic Liturgy

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Antiphon is published three times yearly; subscription \$12