

Benedictine monk describes new translation of Roman Missal

Zoe Ryan | Nov. 4, 2011 NCR Today

"It's such a fascinating story."

That's how Fr. Anthony Ruff, a Benedictine monk and a professor of liturgy, music and Gregorian chant at St. John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minn., described the process of the new translation of the Roman Missal for English. Ruff led one discussion at the Call to Action national conference (in Milwaukee) on why there were new translation guidelines and the results of the translation in English (strengths and tricky problems).

"Today I'm speaking for myself," he said, no one else -- strictly Ruff.

In 2006, Ruff supported the idea for a new translation.

But it took a turn. For more on Ruff's story, see Jamie Manson's column [right here](#) [1].

"For many" seems to be a favorite in the translation discussion, so let's highlight that bit of the talk: In Latin, "pro multis" is the term, Ruff said.

He continued: "That literally does seem to say 'for many' but you have to say 'What did it mean in the original context?' And it's an idiom that means 'for the great masses of the people.' Then you have to say, 'Is that the meaning conveyed today when we say 'for many'?' The problem is that literal translation in our culture is heard to mean 'not for all but for some.' So you *could* make the case that it's a mistranslation because it distorts the original meaning, or you could say 'we must explain to people what that context was so that they hear "for many" today in an expansive context.' But even there that shows that it must not be entirely accurate because originally they didn't have to do that explaining, why do we have to do so. Even more importantly, how is the change from 'for all' to 'for many' heard 50 years after Vatican II? All of these terms have taken on a particular meaning because of our political situation and that can't be ignored. That's a part of what a translation has to be accountable to."

Like any good teacher, Ruff had a handout of key points, including this bit from 1969's *Comme le prevoit*:

"12. The translator must always keep in mind that the "unit of meaning" is not the individual word but the whole passage. The translator must therefore be careful that the translation is not so analytical that it exaggerates the importance of particular phrases while it obscures or weakens the meaning of the whole."

But things change. He brought the conversation to [Liturgiam authenticam](#) [2]. Check it out.

During his talk, Ruff also gave a shout out to the PrayTell blog, which is co-sponsored by St. John University's School of Theology and Liturgical Press. The blog started two and a half years ago and was meant to be about liturgy in general, Ruff said, but they had no idea the Missal would become almost a primary focus of it.

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/anthony-ruff-accidental-activist>

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