



# ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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**FR. ANTHONY RUFF, OSB**

**THE NEW ROMAN MISSAL**

## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM? WHAT CAN BE DONE

ST. ROBERT BELLARMINE

REDFORD, MI

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### Introduction

### Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

Good afternoon. For our topic today, we have: *The New Roman Missal: What is the Problem? What can be Done?*

There is no one better qualified to address this subject than Fr. Anthony Ruff, who is a Benedictine monk, and was a chairperson of a portion of The International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). It was the function of this commission to prepare and update the Roman Missal, the public prayer of the Church, for the countries using English as their primary language.

The motto of the Benedictines is: “*ora et labora*,” “prayer and work,” a motto that goes back some 1500 years to St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547), founder of the order. Fr. Anthony Ruff comes from the St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, MN, which is a monastery long renowned in the U.S. and in the world as a monastery truly committed to the liturgy. And Anthony is well prepared to carry on St. John Abbey’s tradition. He is a monk and priest of St. John’s Abbey and associate professor of theology at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota.

Fr. Anthony did his BA in liturgical music and organ performance at St. John’s University, minoring in philosophy and theology. He earned his M.Div. for his seminary studies at St. John’s. He has a master’s degree in theology from Yale, where he studied organ with Thomas Murray. His doctorate in theology is from the University of Graz, Austria.

He is the founding director of the National Catholic Youth choir, a summer camp for high schoolers, which concludes with a tour through the Midwest. He has served on the Executive committee of the hymn Society of the United States and Canada. He is on the Advisory Council of the national Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM). He was on the committee which drafted the 2007 music document sing to the Lord: Music in divine Worship for the united States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He was director of the international music committee which composed the English chant for the Roman Missal.

He is the author of *Sacred Music and Liturgical Reform: Treasurers and Transformations* (2008), based on his doctrinal dissertation, of musical implications of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. He is a composer of *Responsorial Psalms for Weekday Mass: Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter*.

Fr. Anthony is moderator of the blog, Pray Tell, a joint effort of Liturgical Press and St. John’s School of Theology•Seminary. He is abbey music director, including playing the organ and directing Gregorian chant.

In 2010 Fr. Ruff resigned his position in ICEL because he did not believe he could support the New Roman Missal in its current format. He formulated his withdrawal in an open letter the U.S. bishops, which was published in America magazine on February 14, 2011. See attachment.

Fr. Anthony Ruff is here today to share with us his reflections on the *New Roman Missal*. What is the problem? What can be done? And so I ask you to give a warm Elephants’ welcome to Fr. Anthony Ruff.

# The New Roman Missal

## What Is the Problem? What Can Be Done?

Elephants in the Living Room, St. Robert Bellarmine, Redford, MI, Friday, December 14, 2012  
Fr. Anthony Ruff, OSB  
St. John's Abbey / St. John's School of Theology•Seminary, Collegeville, MN

### I. My History with the New Roman Missal

2005: invited to chair ICEL music committee.  
2005-2010: increasing skepticism about the product and process.  
January 2009: pointed orations for singing.  
January 2010: began *Pray Tell* blog (of St. John's School of Theology and Liturgical Press).  
Spring/Summer/Fall 2010: sex abuse crisis erupts in Europe.  
June 2010: learned of 10,000+ revisions in final version; asked to revise music over summer.  
July 2010: saw Msgr. Moroney of *Vox Clara*, who praised final text.  
Fall 2010: increasingly critical of final text at *Pray Tell*, reported on leaks elsewhere.  
Fall 2010: secret internal report leaked on internet; *Pray Tell* reported on it.  
November 2010: removed from ICEL.  
January 2011: discerned that I didn't support missal and needed to withdraw from presentations on it.  
February 2011: formulated my withdrawal in an open letter to US bishops – in *America* magazine.  
Summer 2011: Agreed to speak to *Call to Action*. (I speak only in my name, not for anyone else.)  
Advent 2011: New roman Missal implemented in U.S.

### II. Two Roman Documents on Translation

#### 1969 MS – *Comme le prévoit* – Instruction of the Consilium (Rome)

In the case of liturgical communication, it is necessary to take into account not only the message to be conveyed, but also the speaker, the audience, and the style. (7)  
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. The prayers (Opening prayer, Prayer over the gifts, Prayer after Communion, and Prayer over the People) from the ancient Roman tradition are succinct and abstract. In translation they may need to be rendered somewhat more freely while conserving the original ideas. This can be done by moderately amplifying them, or, if necessary, paraphrasing expressions in order to concretize them for celebration and the needs of today. In every case pompous and superfluous language should be avoided. (34)

#### 2001 *Liturgiam authenticam* – Instruction of the Congregation of Divine Worship (Rome)

The translation of the liturgical texts of the Roman liturgy is not so much a work of creative innovation as it is of rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language. While it is permissible to arrange the wording, the syntax and the style in such a way as to prepare a flowing vernacular text suitable to the rhythm of popular prayer, the original text, insofar as possible, must be translated integrally and in the most exact manner, without omissions or additions in terms of their content, and without paraphrases or glosses. (20)

If indeed, in the liturgical texts, words or expressions are sometimes employed which differ somewhat from usual and everyday speech, it is often enough by virtue of this very fact that the texts become truly memorable and capable of expressing heavenly realities. ... Thus it happens that a certain manner of speech, which has come to be considered somewhat obsolete in daily usage, may continue to be maintained in the liturgical context. (27)

The connection between various expressions, manifested by subordinate and relative clauses, the ordering of words, and various forms of parallelism, is to be maintained as completely as possible in a manner appropriate to the vernacular language. (57a)

### III. The Process

Vatican II liturgy constitution: bishops approve translations; Rome only certifies bishops' approval.

Gradually, since Vatican II: more Roman involvement. 2001: Rome can *impose* texts.

Original texts: permitted and allowed in 1969; permitted in 2001 document, but not done.

Holy See issues official edition in Latin.

ICEL prepares translation – with experts, consultants, committees.

Bishops' conferences receive two drafts for input and (possibly with amendments) final vote.

Pre-2001: ICEL publishes progress reports, shares texts upon request, drafts original texts.

Post-2001: Everything in secret; all players anonymous; new *Vox Clara* committee; all drafts receive comments from Rome; Rome can impose translations.

Bishops' conferences submit texts to Rome for final approval.

Rome gives *recognitio* (approval).

President of bishops' conferences announces implementation date.

### IV. Four Translations of the Sacramentary/Missal

1. The 1974 Sacramentary: Quite free, sometimes loose paraphrase (per CLP 1969!)

Theological improvements upon the Latin (e.g., Father, sacrifice, human effort)

Syntax: short phrases, short sentences; Latin is completely broken down.

Vocabulary and style: simple, accessible, rather inelegant.

2. The 1998 Sacramentary: (approved by the bishops, rejected by Rome): Inclusive language

Closer to Latin: somewhat more complex syntax

Language more elevated and poetic, yet accessible

Alternate texts (not based on Latin); e.g., alternate Opening Rites of Mass.

3. The 2008 Translation approved by the bishops, AND

4. The 2011 Missal text after the Vatican changed what the bishops submitted:

Quite literal in Latin vocabulary and syntax; long sentences; occasional difficult vocabulary; some mistranslations and odd word order.

January 1, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God: Prayer over the Gifts/Offerings

1974	1998	2008	2010
God our Father, may we always profit by the prayers of the Virgin Mother Mary, for you bring us life and salvation through Jesus Christ her Son, who lives and reigns ...	You, O God, are the beginning of every good and bring all things to perfection. On this feast of Mary, The Mother of God, Grant that, as we delight in your first gifts of grace, We may rejoice one day in their glorious fulfillment.	O God, who in your loving kindness begin all good things and complete them, grant to us who rejoice in the Solemnity of the holy Mother of God, that as we glory in the dawning of your grace, we may find joy in its completion.	O, God, who in your kindness begin all good things and bring them to fulfillment, grant to us, who find joy in the Solemnity of the holy Mother of God, that, just as we glory in the beginnings of your grace, so one day we may rejoice in its completion.

*Deus, qui bona cuncta inchoas benignus et perficis,/da nobis, de sollemnitate sanctae Dei Genetricis laetantibus,/ sicut de initiis gratiae gloriamur, /ita de perfectione gaudere.*

### V. Translation as an Issue of Nature and Grace

1. Grace is ubiquitous.
2. Grace elevates nature
3. Grace is not an epiphenomenological “add on.”

### VI. Issues Raised by the Imposition of the Revised Missal Translation

1. Ecclesiology: monarchy, centralism, collegiality.
2. Inculturation.
3. Relationship between hierarchy and scholars.
4. Ecumenism.

### VII. The Implementation Happened. Did It Work? What Comes Next?

We do not have a transcript for this educational forum. Our media provider was out of town and unable to get back in time for this event. Because we use the CD he records for our transcriptions, we were unable to provide such a transcription for Anthony Ruff's talk. For that we apologize. However, we are fortunate that one of our members, Richard Novak, took notes and published the following e-mail. We hope that with Fr. Ruff's outline and Richard Novak's comments, we may provide substantially what Fr. Ruff told us. In addition, we are providing Fr. Ruff's article that appeared in the National Catholic Reporter a few days before he gave this talk. We are also providing the letter of his resignation to the USCCB that appeared in America magazine in February 2011.

*Tom Kyle*

Elephants in the Living Room

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### New Roman Missal--Problems and What can be done?

Hello Friends,

Yesterday, I attended the Elephants in the Living Room forum by Fr. Anthony Ruff, a noted Benedictine liturgy scholar, on the problems with the new (English) Roman Missal that we've been required to use since last year at this time. His presentation was clear, excellent, thorough, well-researched and documented. I admire and respect his personal integrity for taking the stand that he did in resigning from the US bishops' publicity campaign last year for the new missal, when he found that he could no longer endorse the content of the translation, nor support the processes used to develop and implement (or mandate?) the new missal. Bravo!!!

I know many of you patiently tolerated my developing rants concerning the new missal in my essays and letters to the editor over the past handful of years. Father Ruff pulled it together much better, more concisely and with greater credibility than my previous efforts. Yessss! I'm gladly content to ride on his coat tails!

For those of you who attended - or who recall my essays - there's no need to rehash the details of the pros and cons of the new missal. I want to focus rather on some newer insights that Father Ruff presented yesterday that I hadn't named in my earlier writings on this issue. I believe that these realities concerning the new missal provide some groundwork (and justification) for how to answer one of the questions he raised: What can be done?

This is what **I** heard him saying - and how I interpreted the details and flow of his presentation. Please don't read my comments as directly attributable to Father Ruff or that he would completely endorse (all) my proposals and recommendations.

The issues or problems concerning the quality, appropriateness, or desirability of this new missal translation are not just translation issues by themselves -- rather these involve **power** issues: how church leadership (especially in Rome) exercises its authority and how Rome has been increasingly taking back the authority of local bishops and regional bishops' conferences to regulate aspects of liturgy (given to them by Vatican 2's liturgy constitution). Some other areas that likely involve "power play" issues concern the mishandling of the abuse scandal, resolving the priest shortage, and women's equality - to name a few.

The previous (1974) translation that we used until last December was a good translation (prepared according to the translation rules of 1969 approved by a post-Vatican 2 commission and Pope Paul 6). It

was seen to be temporary and would need to be revised in the near future. The International Commission for English in the Liturgy (ICEL) began a 15+ year project to prepare such a newer, more exact and loftier-sounding English translation (that also used more gender-inclusive language) which was ready for approval by the English-speaking bishops in 1998 (all done according to the norms of Vatican 2). It was sent to Rome merely to be "certified" (again, according to Vatican 2). Rome ignored the request for certification - and tabled it. This is what's often referred to as the 1998 ICEL translation - or the 1998 Sacramentary.

Unknown to most bishops (except some favored "insiders") - and of course, totally unknown to the great body of the laity - Roman authorities (behind the scenes!) were engineering a major reversal of the 1969 translation rules. The new rules were announced in 2001 - with the directive that all vernacular missal translations had to *redone from scratch* according to these rules. Secrecy and diminished initiative by bishops' conferences in preparing the new translation became the process. Instead of just "certifying" translations by ICEL and approved by the bishops, Rome now reserved the right to change submitted translations or to draft its own texts and require that they be used. The result of all this is the New English Missal!

What can be done? Father Ruff identified several solutions floating around, including two strategies that he personally favors: doing our honest best with the new missal for (the time being) - and - working to support a revision of the new missal to correct its "mistakes".

Besides what varying numbers of priests are doing (carefully "tweaking" awkward or unclear texts in the new missal), or occasionally slipping back into using parts of the previous 1974 missal, and in some cases, not insisting that the people use the new texts in their parts in the Ordinary of the Mass -- I'm informed that a few priests have been using the 1998 missal texts in varying degrees.

Here's how I'm "acting according to conscience" (*if* I were a priest). However, as layman active in a canonical parish - and also belonging to an independent/alternative parish - I would do the same -- advocate for using the 1998 Missal (in whole, preferably -- or in part, to substitute for the really poor sections of the new missal). My basis for doing this?

- The 1998 Missal was properly (legitimately) developed and approved according to Vatican 2.
- The 1998 Missal followed the 1969 translation rules, which were still in effect (until replaced by the 2001 rules).
- What about the 1998 missal not being "certified" by Rome (as required by Vatican 2)? **Remember:** Rome's "certifying" basically means acknowledging that the translations were prepared & approved by legitimate bishops' conferences, according to official translation rules -- it does not mean that Rome created the texts.
- Since some? (or many?) Roman authorities subverted the legitimate procedures established and approved in Vatican 2's Liturgy Constitution -- usurping the bishops' responsibilities for creating & approving vernacular translations (by unilaterally engineering and mandating the new missal), changing the translation rules of 2001 secretly and without consultation (thereby disregarding Vatican 2's principle of "collegiality" - shared authority/responsibility between bishops and the pope):

I propose that these actions (by Rome), namely: the "trashing" of the 1998 missal without "due process" along with the subsequent re-engineering of the new missal and its imposition, represent an abuse of authority a misuse of power -- blatantly at variance with the **letter and spirit** of Vatican 2 and detrimental to the vitality of the whole body of the church in the spirit of the Gospel. As I see it, such actions discredit - or dare I say "nullify"? the resulting process responsible for the new missal.

*Therefore, I believe that sound pastoral judgement would justify the use of the 1998 missal - along side of, or in place of the 2011 missal.*

(I realize that my appeal to "due process" is laughable - since we are reminded that "the church is not a democracy." However, I believe that this names a truth in this situation - and I stand by my assertion).

In closing, I fully empathize with many of our pastorally progressive "Vatican 2" priests (many of whom belong to Elephants) who feel that they are "walking a tight rope" and are concerned about "repercussions" for not enthusiastically promoting and not implementing the new missal *as directed*. In talking off-line with several of you, I know of your difficulties and serious reservations about the new missal. Granted, it's easier for me as a layman to hold and openly express these kinds of views -- although in previous letters to the archbishop on the new missal and other hot-button issues, I was politely dismissed with *pro forma* replies!

Father Ruff mentioned the need for further surveys of priests (and the laity) on the reception of the new missal - to be used for future planning. Maybe pastors need to survey their parishioners (not by show of hands, but rather secret ballot) in regard to the new missal, the previous missal, or to perhaps retrieving the 1998 missal. We might learn some interesting things about the new missal and its related issues!

Peace,

*Richard Novak*

# NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

## Bar is set low in acceptance of year-old English missal

[Anthony Ruff](#) | Dec. 1, 2012

The first Sunday of Advent, Dec. 2, marks one year since the new translation of the Roman Missal was implemented in parishes in the United States and much of the rest of the English-speaking church. Here's the good news: The transition to the new English missal has gone better than many of us expected. After a month or two of awkward and hesitant liturgical exchanges, the people in the pews seem to have gotten used to the new texts. By now the responses mostly come automatically, as ritual texts should. New musical settings are starting to become familiar. Despite the misgivings many of us had about the missal, we labored mightily to make it work, and we pulled it off.

I suppose a bishop who had wondered how much flak he'd get can heave a sigh of relief a year later and say to himself, "It worked." I suppose a curial official intent on "reforming the reform" can say to himself, "We got away with it." The people are putting up with it, the clergy didn't rise up in revolt. Call it a success.

But do we really want to set the bar that low?

What about building up the church in love and peace? What about a buzz of excitement around a widely welcomed liturgical improvement? What about strengthening the bonds of mutual respect between the hierarchy and liturgical scholars? What about having church leaders we're proud of?

I don't see much evidence of that.

Anecdotal reports suggest that many people in the pews don't embrace the new missal very warmly and still don't see the reason for the change. "Why?" is the question I hear most often. "Why did they do this?" When the dental assistant at my last appointment learned I'm a priest, she told me that some things don't make sense to her now, "like 'consequential,' or whatever it is, in the creed."

The reaction to the new missal mostly seems to be mild bemusement or irritation or confusion, but not protest or outrage. When it comes to liturgy, Catholics are quite patient. Most Catholics have no reason to track the dirty politics behind the scenes of how the Vatican centralized and micromanaged the translation process beginning in 2001, threw away 17 years of transparent and collegial work on a very fine revised English translation, and botched the new missal by making some 10,000 mostly ill-advised changes at the last moment.

And when they're attending liturgy, most Catholics are probably also not tracking the convoluted and inelegant language of the new missal. I haven't heard anyone report they've detected more scriptural allusions in the revised priests' prayers. It's rather easy to tune out what lacks appeal, and people's reduced attention to liturgical texts is a significant piece of why "it worked."

There is some heartfelt and enthusiastic support for the new missal. It is limited to a small band of the church, as anyone who spends much time in the Catholic blogosphere can attest. These are the traditionalist conservatives most upset with the direction of liturgical renewal since the Second Vatican Council and most anxious to "reform the reform." From this quarter, and only from there, comes the claim that the new texts are beautiful and poetic. One wonders whether this small group isn't increasingly the bishops' base of support, whether it's the missal or any other church controversy.

In the discussion of liturgical translation at the November meeting of the U.S. bishops' conference, Bishop Robert H. Brom of San Diego and Bishop Salvatore R. Matano of Burlington, Vt., offered contrasting visions of leadership, church unity, collaboration, and the relationship between bishops and priests. This is significant, for the new missal isn't just about texts -- it's also about power.

Brom expressed opposition to retranslation of the Liturgy of the Hours and other liturgical books because of negative reactions to the new missal on the part of priests. "I have listened to priests," he said. They have difficulty with "complicated and awkward phrasing" and "strange vocabulary" that make the new prayers "aggravating." The priests

expressed "in something of a unison" that the new missal "is more of a burden than a blessing." Priests are anxious that they will not be heard by bishops. "We should be asking, how is the new translation being received?" Brom advised not rushing headlong into further translations until work is done on improving the missal.

Matano was of a different mind. He thinks it would be "counterproductive" to critique the new missal, when "so many of us are doing everything possible ... to create unity in our dioceses." Critique "only opens the door for further criticism and disunity." We should simply accept the missal, support and encourage it, and use it to "communicate again the awesome and transcendent nature of the liturgy." With proper preparation for the Mass, the new texts "can be prayed in a very beautiful manner."

In this second view, bishops promote unity by stifling criticism, with the expectation that everyone accept their decisions in obedience. The new missal is but one among an increasing number of instances in which church leaders are pushing this second view of authority more strongly.

The problem that keeps coming up and won't go away is the credible exercise of authority. It is a structural issue that has to do with power and accountability. The new missal has shown us how a secretive central authority, absent mechanisms of accountability, can impose its will. Of course, top-down absolute monarchy need not malfunction in this way. In the Catholic model of governance at its best, the ruling class is accountable to the Gospel and exercises authority humbly and lovingly, with a listening ear and a view to consensus, though the institutional structures do not require this.

The proper response to the new missal is not to storm the Bastille and topple the monarchy (though it is interesting that the small group inclined to this view seems to be growing). Most Catholics are merely disappointed and irritated, which is hardly the basis for a revolution. Most of us who see the deeper problems represented by the missal are committed to working collaboratively with our leaders to make a constructive contribution to the renewal and reform of our church. It is not unreasonable to hope that voices like Brom's will grow louder, with a revision of not just the missal but also the misguided translation principles that made it possible. And let it be said, there are certainly some good things in the new translation worth retaining.

To frame the question accurately is one of the most important services we can offer. There are issues of collegiality and the violation of Vatican II's explicit stipulation that approving translations belongs to bishops (not the Holy See); ecumenism and the abandonment of liturgical texts formerly held in common with our Protestant brothers and sisters; inculturation and the imposition of a liturgical aesthetic from above onto widely diverse cultures; and collaborative leadership and the rejection of input from experts in liturgical translation. There is much to face up to.

Short term, we must all work together to make our current church structures work as well as possible. Longer term, we must be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit when the time is right to change structures. Let us hope and pray that our response to the new Roman Missal, and so many troubling issues like it, truly contributes to the renewal of our church.

[Benedictine Fr. Anthony Ruff, a monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minn., teaches theology, liturgical music and Gregorian chant at St. John's University]

# *America Magazine*

## An Open Letter to the U.S. Catholic Bishops on the Forthcoming Missal

[Anthony Ruff](#) |  
Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,

FEBRUARY 14, 2011

With a heavy heart, I have recently made a difficult decision concerning the new English missal. I have decided to withdraw from all my upcoming speaking engagements on the Roman Missal in dioceses across the United States. After talking with my confessor and much prayer, I have concluded that I cannot promote the new missal translation with integrity. I'm sure bishops want a speaker who can put the new missal in a positive light, and that would require me to say things I do not believe.

I love the Church, I love the sacred liturgy, I love chant in Latin and English, and I treasure being involved with all these as a monk and priest. It has been an honor to serve until recently as chairman of the music committee of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) that prepared all the chants for the new missal. But my involvement in that process, as well as my observation of the Holy See's handling of scandal, has gradually opened my eyes to the deep problems in the structures of authority of our church.

The forthcoming missal is but a part of a larger pattern of top-down impositions by a central authority that does not consider itself accountable to the larger church. When I think of how secretive the translation process was, how little consultation was done with priests or laity, how the Holy See allowed a small group to hijack the translation at the final stage, how unsatisfactory the final text is, how this text was imposed on national conferences of bishops in violation of their legitimate episcopal authority, how much deception and mischief have marked this process—and then when I think of Our Lord's teachings on service and love and unity...I weep.

I see a good deal of disillusionment with the Catholic Church among my friends and acquaintances. Some leave the Catholic Church out of conviction, some gradually drift away, some join other denominations, some remain Catholic with difficulty. My response is to stay in this church for life and do my best to serve her. This I hope to do by stating the truth as I see it, with charity and respect. I would be ready to participate in future liturgical projects under more favorable conditions.

I am sorry for the difficulties I am causing others by withdrawing, but I know this is the right thing to do. I will be praying for you and all leaders in our church.

Pax in Christo,

*Fr. Anthony Ruff, O.S.B.*

Anthony Ruff, O.S.B., is a Benedictine monk of Saint John's Abbey and a professor of liturgy and Gregorian chant. He was on the committee which drafted the 2007 document "Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship" for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He is founder of the National Catholic Youth Choir and blogs at [Pray Tell](#). His letter above to the U.S. bishops is printed in its entirety.

