NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Trautman says change on 'pro multis' may confuse teaching that Christ died for all

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New York

Whenever I speak or write on my ?mega-trends in Catholicism? project, I never tire of repeating that in some ways it?s an exercise in over-generalization. At 1.1 billion members spanning every ethnic, cultural, linguistic and ideological divide on earth, Catholicism is infinitely complex, and for every thrust in one direction, one can normally find boundless exceptions cutting in others.

tFor example, I list ?consolidating Catholic identity? among the mega-trends, referring to the broad movement towards a defense of Catholic distinctiveness in thought, speech, and practice. If the signature question of the immediate post-Vatican II period was ?how do we open up to the world?? today the question that drives policy is more often, ?how do we avoid assimilating to the world?? The concern is that the modernization which followed the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) went too far, that the church too often uncritically adopted the values and worldview of secular modernity ? that *aggiornamento* sometimes became, in the memorable phrase of Jacques Maritain, a form of ?kneeling before the world.?

tYet if identity questions are the order of the day, that doesn?t mean there?s anything like a consensus on what to do about it. Last week brought a classic case in point with the meeting of the Catholic Academy of Liturgy in Toronto, Canada, prior to the annual meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, an ecumenical and inter-religious association of liturgical scholars founded in 1973.

tThe Catholic Academy of Liturgy was founded in January 2002 as a scholarly body, but also to some extent as an advocacy group, designed to promote the liturgical vision associated with Vatican II of ?full, conscious and active participation.? In concrete, that has meant critiquing much recent liturgical policy from Rome, especially the new cycle of liturgical translations currently being produced by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, whose hallmark is a more formal syntax and vocabulary based on fidelity to the Latin originals. The liturgists who make up the academy contend that the new translations are sometimes too awkward, too distant from the experience of average Catholics, and in some cases they reflect doctrinal options difficult to reconcile with Vatican II.

tSuch concerns were heard at the Toronto meeting in the form of an address by Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pennsylvania, chair of the U.S. bishops? Committee on the Liturgy and a longtime champion of liturgical reform.

tAccording to a press release issued by a member of the academy?s Executive Committee, Jesuit Fr. Keith Pecklers of Rome?s Gregorian University, Trautman ?contended that the new translations do not adequately meet the liturgical needs of the average Catholic,? and he ?expressed fears that the significant changes in the texts no longer reflect understandable English usage.?

?Trautman argued that the proposed changes of the people?s parts during the Mass will confuse the faithful, and predicted that the new texts will contribute to a greater number of departures from the Catholic Church,? the release stated.

Trautman also challenged a recent ruling from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments that the Latin phrase *pro multis* in the formula for the consecration of the Precious Blood should be rendered as ?for many? rather than the current English phrase ?for all.?

The translation of *pro multis* has long been a key concern of liturgical conservatives, who see it as emblematic of how post-Vatican II translations sometimes left the actual meaning of the original texts behind in their quest for relevance.

Trautman, however, said that altering the translation of *pro multis* now could give a misleading impression of what the church teaches about the significance of Christ shedding his blood on the Cross.

?That change easily could be misinterpreted as denying the faith of the Roman Catholic Church that Christ died for all people,? the press release quoted Trautman as saying.

Trautman encouraged members of the academy to speak out in opposition to such changes.

?Bishop Trautman challenged Catholic liturgical scholars of North America to assist the bishops in promoting a liturgy that is accessible and pastorally aware,? the release said. ?He urged them, in a spirit of respect and love for the Church, to be courageous in questioning those developments that would render the liturgy incomprehensible and betray the intention of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).?

Given that the instruction on *pro multis* came in the form of an Oct. 17 letter from Cardinal Francis Arinze to presidents of the world?s episcopal conferences asking that the change to ?for many? be made in the next one to two years, it?s difficult to imagine, at least on this specific issue, that the handwriting is not on the wall.

Nevertheless, Trautman?s address, and the enthusiastic reception it received from Catholic liturgists in North America, suggests that the ?liturgy wars? are not over, and that debates over what ?Catholic identity? entails in the domain of liturgical speech and practice will be with us for some time to come.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/30/2016 - 21:33*): http://ncronline.org/news/trautman-says-change-pro-multis-may-confuse-teaching-christ-died-all