Beyond Pius V
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Beyond Pius V

Conflicting Interpretations of the Liturgical Reform

Translated by Barry Hudock

Revised Edition

A PUEBLO BOOK

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To the great-grandparents and
great-grandchildren
of the liturgical reform:
that those who are no longer with us,
in communion with those who are not yet
with us,
may teach us
not only the *unum necessarium*
but also the *quod superest*. 
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Preface to the American Edition

More than five years after it was first published in Italian, Beyond Pius V now appears in English. The first Italian edition was published in May 2007, two months before the promulgation of Pope Benedict XVI’s motu proprio Summorum Pontificum, based on hints and rumors about the coming document that had been circulating through Rome for many months. Now, with the hindsight of five years, it seemed necessary to update the text. The first four chapters here remain the same, with the exception of some minor revisions, and I have added a completely new fifth chapter, commenting on Summorum Pontificum (July 7, 2007) and the Ecclesia Dei Commission’s instruction, Universae Ecclesiae (April 30, 2011). These two documents offer ample and objective confirmation of the concerns I raised in my original text. They make clear the need for an adequate hermeneutic of the Second Vatican Council and of the liturgical reform, to which theology can and must make an important contribution.

This book contributes to a discussion already in progress in the American context, particularly in two notable and recently published works. Massimo Faggioli’s True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium and Patrick Regan’s skillful historical and theological study, Advent to Pentecost: Comparing the Seasons in the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms of the Roman Rite, both offer important scholarly evidence that the Catholic Church of the third millennium ought to understand itself not “according to Pius V” or
“against Pius V” but decidedly “beyond Pius V.” The fact that the same publisher now follows these two books with this English version of my own is surely a “sign of the times” worth noting.

Andrea Grillo
Rome
November 9, 2012
Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
Introduction

Nothing can ever happen twice.
In consequence, the sorry fact is
that we arrive here improvised
and leave without the chance to practice.

W. Szymborska¹

The reform of the liturgy is at risk. Indeed, at least in
its most authentic and prophetic aspects, it now seems
to be widely ignored.

Various developments, sometimes quite troubling,
have sown doubts and confusion within the eccles-
sial community. The restoration of the Missal of Pius
V and “liberalization” of the use of the preconciliar
rite, demands from the highest levels for the use of a
“dead” language, irresponsible and superficial com-
ments offered publicly by important officials of the
Roman Curia, unjustified crackdowns on the work of
translators, an inversion of priorities between mystery
and discipline, never-ending lists of abuses, and a dan-
gerous disregard for the meaning of liturgical “uses”:
these are only some of the signs of the serious threat
that faces the ideas that have inspired and sustained
the liturgical reform for nearly fifty years.

¹[From the poem “Nothing Twice,” by Nobel Prize–winning
poet Wisława Szymborska; English translation (ET) in Wisława
Szymborska, Poems New and Collected: 1957–1997 (New York:
Harcourt, 1998), 20.—Trans.]
While church authorities certainly pay attention to liturgy, their interventions—despite formal references to all the right documents—are “out of tune” with the foundational reasons for the reform. At the same time, it can be said that the quality of reflection carried on from “the other side” has also been inconsistent. “Historical” arguments—frequently positivistic in nature—are too often treated as the only kind that is legitimate or admissible.

The entire discussion is too often marked by biased presumptions, a sour nostalgia, and an antimodern and reactionary spirit, yet it is supported by surprisingly modern and ultraliberal arguments. It will suffice to mention, by way of example, the broad reintroduction of the Missal of Pius V, justified by an appeal to a “freedom of rite” that is offered with disregard for the unwanted consequences that such a development might bring in its concrete application. What might appear on the face of it to be a masterstroke of moderation risks becoming, more likely, a solemn mess for which no one is held accountable.

We can say, in fact, that while it may be hard to find many effective or serious attempts to attack the liturgical reform directly, it is no less difficult today to find defenses of the reform that don’t amount to pretty much the same thing. Indeed, if there are enemies of the liturgical reform to speak of, they rarely attack it head-on. Instead—with cunning and more than a little wordplay—they prefer to weaken the very terrain on which the reform stands. *Reintroducing old meanings of “participation in the liturgy” or inventing new theories of “freedom of rite,” these authors suggest that the need for reform is long past, downgrade it to merely one possibility among many, and so effectively overcome it.*
For this reason, it is urgent that the church today refresh its collective memory of the essential meaning of the liturgical reform. I suggest there are at least four dimensions of this task, each absolutely fundamental for the life of the church today and tomorrow. Neglecting them would mean allowing the very foundations of the reform to crumble.

First and before all else, the meaning and significance of the Second Vatican Council in the history of the church in the twentieth century must be clearly grasped. Various reductive readings of Vatican II acknowledge only the “continuity” of that Council and its documents while completely ignoring their profoundly innovative aspects, the developments and changes that can be seen only with difficulty as a pure continuation of recent ecclesial tradition. This contraposition between hermeneutic of reform and hermeneutic of discontinuity, authoritatively proposed as the authentic interpretation of the Council, bears a certain ideological character, especially in the way it dismisses the differences between “before” and “after,” for fear of acknowledging the slightest discontinuity.

Second, the key concept of “active participation”—as the true objective to which the entire liturgical reform was oriented and the fundamental motive that continues to nourish it—deserves a profound reconsideration today, especially because it is now often disregarded in favor of ideas that are proposed and received initially to great effect but are unable, in the long run, to bear the weight of common sense. The participation of the entire assembly in the single liturgical action is the fundamental purpose of the reform. If we forget the clarity and centrality of this decisive fact, the reform itself is rendered superfluous, almost effortlessly.
Third, we must thoroughly reconsider the themes of the early liturgical movement in order to understand how it played such a decisive role, not only before, but also during and after the reform of the liturgy. This will make it possible to identify above all in this “first” liturgical movement—which extends from the end of the 1800s to the 1950s—a surprising focus not primarily on liturgical reform but on the movement’s “participative” and “formative” intentions.

Finally, it is essential that we distinguish between, on the one hand, what the liturgical reform could and still can do and, on the other, what it had to and still must discover about itself in the work of the generations that preceded and followed it. This conclusion should help to explain the tension between reformative act and formative act in light of the concrete liturgical experience of the church.

A thorough consideration of these problems and themes will provide the essential foundation for a contemporary rereading of the great reformation phase through which the Catholic liturgy has passed in the past fifty years. This is the task of the little book I offer here. I hope to clarify (for myself and for my readers) the prophetic and unsurpassed meaning of the period we have come to call the liturgical reform, which constitutes—in the context established by the Council’s magisterium—a “beginning of a beginning” (K. Rahner). We can appropriately explore this meaning in only one way: by responsibly receiving the gift that has been handed on to us and discovering in it our particular task, which is not in all ways the same as that of those who came before us.

Perhaps what is most lacking today is a strong awareness of this generational and pedagogical dimen-
sion of the Second Vatican Council, which was even then aware of being in need of “children and grandchildren” so that the tradition might have a future and so that it could therefore consider its own munus to be not simply the continuation of a traditum but the “beginning of a beginning”—never claiming a “beginning ex novo,” obviously, but also never presuming to be a continuation completely as before.

The conflict of interpretations in liturgical matters that dangerously marks the life of the church today exists in large part because this authentic traditional concern “for the children and grandchildren” has been forgotten. We can recover it today by rediscovering accurately the principles that guided the original liturgical movement and the liturgical reform: that the Christian liturgy can still “generate faith” and can still be the fons of the church’s life and of personal spirituality. This was the singular hope and objective of the reform, and we may not ignore or dismiss it. It will continue to challenge and provoke us, provided that we have not decided—desperately and boastfully—that we are the last Christians, faithful to a great and (merely) ancient tradition, which we have reduced to a precious past closed up in a museum, with air conditioning and security systems but without life and without children.
Chapter 1

Vatican II and the “New Forms” of the Primacy of Mystery

Yes, the Church of the council has been concerned, not just with herself and with her relationship of union with God, but with man—man as he really is today: living man, man all wrapped up in himself, man who makes himself not only the center of his every interest but dares to claim that he is the principle and explanation of all reality. Every perceptible element in man . . . has, in a sense, been displayed in full view of the council Fathers.¹

Reconstructing the authentic meaning of the liturgical reform and offering an accurate hermeneutic demands that we first recover the historical and ecclesial context from which the liturgical movement—of which we are all the children and grandchildren—emerged. It is a task we must approach serenely, without anxiety or hesitation, without remorse or regrets.

The Second Vatican Council was, in effect, an occasion on which the Catholic Church profoundly rethought its own identity, its own relationship with itself and

with the world. Fifty years later, we need to think again about this rethinking, aware, in doing so, not only that the Council becomes the object of our study but also that we must know how to continue to receive it as a subject able to rouse the mind, enflame the heart, and give a new vitality to the body.²

In speaking here of the body, we mean not only the mind and the heart, since our own bodies and the body of the church meet and are gathered up in the Body of Christ, where they come together as one. Therefore, it is from the body—from my own living body—that I start, beginning my reflections on an autobiographical note, as discussion of the Council so often does. Many who reflect on the Council do so with great excitement and emotion, noting the connections between their own lives and the Council, between their bodily age and the events of Vatican II: “When I was sixteen years old . . .”; “When I visited Rome . . .”; “When I saw the altar turned around for the first time . . .”; and the like.

For me, the Second Vatican Council is a bit like my baptism: having been born in 1961, I lived it before I was aware of it. For me, and for all Catholics born in the past fifty years, the Council is simply the ecclesial context upon which the story of our lives—our bodies, 

²It is therefore useful to recall that “our” rethinking risks much (or, one might say, risks everything) if we forget the rethinking that has already happened and that we are living. Otherwise we can easily fall into the danger and the temptation of reducing the Council to our criteria of understanding, thereby losing much of the specificity of the conciliar method, which consists not so much in changing the “objects” of ecclesial attention as changing the forms of life through which these objects are experienced and expressed!
our hearts, and our minds—is written. This is truly
the strength of the tradition, and it should not surprise
us; indeed, it compels us to discover that for younger
generations a different principle prevails than for those
who preceded them: for them, the Council is—unavoid-
ably and providentially—a historical event. They can
and must “rethink” the Council, but they never faced
the considerable challenge of “thinking it” for the
first time, at the beginning. Our ability to rethink it,
therefore, presupposes that others before us thought
the Council, without us but for us and in a sense with us in
mind, in the hope that we might have the benefit of a new
perspective, another way of approaching and understanding
the church and the world, the human person and God.

In going about this rethinking apres coup, these new
generations—those who are not “fathers” or “broth-
ers” of the Council but rather its children—will neces-
sarily have new questions, different needs, sometimes
different or even opposite priorities. For this reason,
I want briefly to consider three questions. First, what
does it mean for new generations of Christians to re-
think the Council? Second, what is implied by the fact
that this rethinking involves not only the content but
also the very experience of faith? And finally, what can
all of this tell us about both the “anthropological ques-
tion” and the “liturgical question,” which stand at the
heart of contemporary theological reflection, that will
help us understand and recover the conciliar approach
as we consider the reception of the liturgical reform in
today’s context?
1. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL
AND OPENNESS TO THE OTHER:
A QUESTION OF METHOD

It is often rightly said that the Second Vatican Council brought about within the Catholic Church a new attitude of openness to the world and to modern society. This openness is expressed clearly in the constitution Gaudium et Spes, but it also marks the other three conciliar constitutions, Sacrosanctum Concilium, Lumen Gentium, and Dei Verbum. Taking into consideration all four documents not only offers richer content for reflection on this topic but, more importantly, also suggests a decisive methodological choice.

In effect, the Council made a crucial rediscovery (though it did so initially without being completely aware of it—in some ways anticipating its intentions and its “mens” by its method of deliberation and its actions): revelation and faith can be experienced in many ways and by many paths. The Council refused to be frightened away from this plurality or to seek easy forms of reductio ad unum. Rather, it chose to travel the way of four different paths that, while arriving at the same point, follow different routes and disclose different horizons.

For this reason, to truly rethink Vatican II means first of all to reconsider, modify, and correct an understanding of its “teaching” that is too simple and too linear.3 The anthropology that emerges from the

Council is not limited to what is found in *Gaudium et Spes*. There is also much to glean from *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Dei Verbum*, and *Lumen Gentium*. Indeed, we can say that while *Gaudium et Spes* appears at first glance to be the document most “advanced” in its anthropology, its approach is the most linear and the least nuanced, since it employs a communicative style by which new ideas are presented in a classical form (that is, in a style drawn from the theological-philosophical tradition of the previous two centuries). On the other hand, the documents that might seem to be imbued with a less theoretically elaborate approach (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* or *Dei Verbum*) are anthropologically (and therefore theologically) far more provocative, because they repropose more “classical” ideas, but they do it in a renewed form. They affirm, in substance, that a definition of the human person, a metaphysics of being, and even a doctrine of mystery are not enough but that we must begin from even more fundamental (which is not to say less challenging or demanding) data: hearing the word, the celebration of rite, the lived relationships of ecclesial communion. These “forms of Christian life” merit priority of attention. For the anthropological question, still today, they emerge as the more radical and more decisive challenges.

2. “EVERY PERCEPTIBLE ELEMENT IN MAN” AND THE PERSISTENT TEMPTATION OF FORMALISTIC REDUCTION

As we have seen, the great project of the Council offers us not so much new articles of faith but a new methodological approach to the forms of life and fundamental experiences by way of which the church is united symbolically to its Lord. It is clear from this that the Council cannot be understood (or rethought) by substituting its particular method with another method or approach, and certainly not with the one that the Council specifically intended to move beyond.

To explain this idea more clearly, I offer two brief examples:

First, with regard to the relationship between reason and faith, there is no question that one thing necessary today is a renewed effort at research into the accessibility/plausibility of faith. An essential aspect of this exploration must be a conception of “reason” that acknowledges the ways that symbol, rite, and language “give rise to thought” (P. Ricoeur). It is important to resist the temptation of reducing experience to a monological and self-sufficient idea, which tries to answer the anthropological question without a willingness to take up the task of following the long way toward the authoritative word, the ritual symbol, and ecclesial communion. Here, frankly, the human and natural sciences not only are not “suspect”; what is extremely suspect is any attempt to get along without them.

Second, regarding an understanding of mystery, it is important today that a metaphysics of being and a doctrine of mystery are properly understood. While it is tempting to begin with a metaphysical or doctrinal definition of mystery, we must remember that the
Council asked us to understand “mystery” not only as an *enigma* or a *secret*, and not only as a *truth to be known*, but above all as *word* to hear and to proclaim, as *sacrament* to be celebrated and in which to participate, as *church* to live within and to love. What are the four conciliar constitutions if not a great exploration and unfolding of mystery—the mystery of Christ and of the church—not only on the doctrinal and intellectual level, but also in the symbolic corporeity of a rite, in the lucid obedience to a word, and in the articulated form of ecclesial relationships? I believe that if we insist on holding fast to recognizing only a strictly doctrinalistic definition of mystery in the teaching of the Council, not only will we be unable to rethink the Council accurately, but we risk convincing ourselves (and persuading others) that it was substantially *superfluous*.

3. THE LITURGICAL QUESTION BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: A CONCILIAR SYNTHESIS THAT REMAINS UNDONE

One conclusion of all of this must be a reformulation of the “liturgical question” that—following the conciliar methodology—takes into account all fields of knowledge. And this has not happened yet. It represents a response to a deep purpose, which must be expressed in rich and varied ways. It is the irrepressible drive for a “first philosophy” that is supported—and not threatened—by exteriority aimed at achieving interiority, by the institution reaching for spontaneity, by grace to recognize oneself as given in and to freedom.

We need to rediscover today the delicate and vital contribution of authoritative exteriority, of one’s body and the body of another. For this reason, even the most
unrelated sciences can prove to be not only helpful but even decisive for coming to a careful and thorough understanding of the structure and interrelatedness of the worshiping body, the confessing heart, and the believing intellect. An adequate elaboration of these relations would be able to show—among the fundamental preoccupations of both the liturgical movement and the Second Vatican Council—the need for a new understanding of the experience of faith that that holds together internal and external, “ratio et manus” (T. Aquinas), brain, mouth, and hand (G. Lafont).

Nevertheless, this taking up of a symbolic-ritual, scriptural, and ecclesial body is not identified with either that which is public or that which is private. It is rather the communitarian and intersubjective dimension—more than subjective and more than objective—to establish here the new point of departure, even for the contemporary “anthropological question,” in order to overcome the disfiguring absolutism of both sentimental freedom and political authority, and to obtain that felt and liberating authority that faith cannot fail to preserve, discreetly and, one might almost say, modestly.

But this discretion and modesty are the fruits of a great passion, stirred up by an accurate understanding of history. We find an example of this in a passage of Bernanos’s The Diary of a Country Priest when the curate of Torcy remembers Rerum Novarum in the same way we ought to remember the entire Second Vatican Council:

For instance, that famous encyclical of Leo XII, “Rerum Novarum,” you can read that without turning a hair, like any instruction for keeping Lent. But when it was published, sonny, it was like an earth-
quake. The enthusiasm! At that time I was curé de Norenfontes, in the heart of the mining district. The simple notion that a man’s work is not a commodity, subject to the law of supply and demand, that you have no right to speculate on wages, on the lives of men, as you do on grain, sugar, or coffee—why it set people’s consciences upside down!\(^4\)

Only when we can once again feel the earth trembling under our feet and our consciences being turned upside down—this time by the central affirmations of the Council—can we think meaningfully again about Vatican II, about its great and irrepressible reformulation of the church’s understanding of itself, and, above all, about the great mystery that pervades its origins and carries it faithfully through time.

All of this demands an inevitable reconsideration of the way that the *receptio* of the Council has in fact distorted the meaning of some of the most basic intentions of the Council itself.\(^5\) Regarding liturgy, we must carefully assess the responses offered to the “liturgical

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\(^5\) Some interesting consequences of the conciliar period, often quite different from the original intentions, include:

a) the “traditionalistic” effect of liturgical reform: the reform’s concentration on “data about the past” has generated an exaltation of the past that has brought a rebirth of traditionalism today

b) the “holy alliance” between Vatican I and Vatican II (and between them, the introduction of the Code of Canon Law): the union of the institutional centralization of the first council with the extraordinary decentralization backed by the second
question,” which relate first of all to the recovery of the key concept of *actuosa participatio* and which have been marked at times by both progress and regression.⁶ There has been significant difficulty surrounding the term, in identifying exactly what it ought to mean in terms of ritual activity and spiritual experience and in overcoming the inertia of deep-rooted ecclesial habits and spiritual styles.

c) the change of the concept of “magisterium” from negative to positive, with some undesired effects: from the anathema, which was a protector of pluralism, to a “monist” absorption of every competency by a centralized authority
d) the subordination of the local community as true subject of the liturgy to higher levels of hierarchical activity, which has only been increased by a concentration in the media on the “Roman” aspect of ecclesial matters
