

QUAESTIO DISPUTATA SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM AND THE MEANING OF VATICAN II

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The article contributes to the debate about the relationship between the liturgical reform and the hermeneutics of Vatican II. The author seeks to develop a critical understanding of the ongoing debate about the need for a “reform of the reform.” A study of the connections between Vatican II and the theology of the liturgical reform shows that any attempt to undermine Vatican II’s liturgical reform reveals a reductionist view of the council itself.

VATICAN II HAS A THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY; minimizing one document minimizes all the documents. That is especially true of the liturgical constitution, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the council’s chronological and theological *incipit*. In what follows, I argue that any attempt to relativize the liturgical debate at the council, the liturgical constitution, and the liturgical reform originating from the constitution entails diminishing the significance of Vatican II and its role in the life of the Catholic Church.¹

The hermeneutics of Vatican II’s *Sacrosanctum concilium* in the Church’s life is far from purely theoretical. In the endless debate over the meaning of the constitution in recent years, it is difficult to distinguish the debaters who are aware of what is at stake, from the theologians who deal with liturgical reform as just one issue among many. In this respect,

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¹ This article is part of a project for a book entitled “Reforming the Liturgy—Reforming the Church at Vatican II: The Deep Implications of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*” (Liturgical, projected for 2013). The project began with a fellowship at the Jesuit Institute at Boston College, 2008–2009.

the awareness of the ongoing debate on liturgy is now, 50 years after John XXIII's announcement of the council, not very different from the state of awareness of most bishops and theologians regarding this issue on the eve of Vatican II.² Nonetheless, the 40th anniversary of the solemn approval of *Sacrosanctum concilium* had stirred debate about the role of liturgy in the Church of Vatican II.³ More recently, Benedict XVI's motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum* (July 7, 2007) concerning the liturgy has revived interest in the destiny of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the first document debated and approved by the council on November 22, 1963—with a majority vote of 2162 to 46 after a debate that featured 328 oral interventions.

THE NEMESIS OF THE LITURGICAL REFORM

Although it may sound peculiar, looking at the spectacular effects of *Sacrosanctum concilium* in the Catholic Church during the last 40 years places the observer before a sort of tragic destiny of the liturgical constitution. In the history of the hermeneutics of Vatican II, the liturgical reform seems to have a *nemesis*, a kind of retribution for having overlooked the connections between the liturgical constitution and the overall hermeneutics of Vatican II. This neglect was not shared by Joseph Ratzinger, whose attention to the theological and ecclesiological implications of the liturgical reform characterized some of his major works, first as a theologian, then as Roman pontiff.⁴

Theologians and historians have somehow taken for granted: the long history of the liturgical movement before Vatican II, the fact that Vatican II was the only council to approve a doctrinal document on liturgy, the undeniable truth that “something happened” for liturgy at Vatican II, the

² See Rita Ferrone, *Liturgy: Sacrosanctum Concilium* (New York: Paulist, 2007) esp. 19–50; Alberto Melloni, “Sacrosanctum Concilium 1963–2003: Lo spessore storico della riforma liturgica e la ricezione del Vaticano II,” *Rivista liturgica* 90 (2002) 915–30; and Andrea Grillo, *La nascita della liturgia nel XX secolo: Saggio sul rapporto tra movimento liturgico e (post-) modernità* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2003).

³ See Massimo Faggioli, “Concilio Vaticano II: Bollettino bibliografico (2002–2005),” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 26 (2005) 743–67; and Massimo Faggioli, “Concilio Vaticano II: Bollettino bibliografico (2005–2007),” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 29 (2008) 567–610.

⁴ “Als mich nach eigenem Zögern entschlossen hatte, das Projekt einer Ausgabe meiner Gesammelten Schriften anzunehmen, war für mich klar, dass dabei die Prioritätenordnung des Konzils gelten und daher der Band mit meinen Schriften zur Liturgie am Anfang stehen müsse”: Joseph Ratzinger—Benedikt XVI, “Zum Eröffnungsband meiner Schriften” (Joseph Ratzinger, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11, *Theologie der Liturgie* [Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2008²] 6).

interconnections between the liturgical reform and ecclesiological issues, and the patent fact that the council's liturgical reform is the only major *reform* in the post-Tridentine Catholic Church after the reform of church discipline between the 16th and 17th centuries. Theologians and historians seem increasingly inclined to forget the tight associations between the liturgical debate at Vatican II, the reform of the liturgy, the striving for *aggiornamento*, and the updating and reform of the Catholic Church; but most of all some interpretations of the conciliar documents seem to have forgotten that Vatican II has a deep, internal coherence—as John O'Malley has recently stressed.⁵

No matter what the new generations of deniers of the historical fact of “change” in the history of the Church might say, the Church's liturgical life changed after Vatican II and *Sacrosanctum concilium*, even if the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the “history of the effects” of the liturgical reform, in both the local churches and the universal church, remains to be written.⁶

The sometimes self-referential debate about Vatican II sidesteps and obscures the profound significance of *Sacrosanctum concilium*. The interconnections between liturgy and the council, seen not as a collection of documents but as a coherent reality, must emerge if we want to understand the council's impact on global Catholicism: “the state of the liturgy is the first and fundamental test of the extent to which the programme, not merely of the decree *Sacrosanctum concilium*, but of all the council's constitutions and decrees, is being achieved.”⁷

What is needed is a reflection on the relationship between *Sacrosanctum concilium* and the council that seeks to understand *whether and how* the liturgical debate and the resulting liturgical constitution were received by the council in its unfolding and final documents. In particular, it will be revealing to see how much of *Sacrosanctum concilium* is present in Vatican II, and how much of Vatican II is present in the first constitution, *Sacrosanctum concilium*. The real stakes are not the recovery of an esthetics of the rites under the “reform of the liturgical reform.” As John

⁵ For a thorough appreciation of the intertextual character of the issues at Vatican II see John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2008) 309–12.

⁶ For two studies of the reception of the liturgical reform, see Angel Unzueta, “L'action liturgique, expression de la Pentecôte” (about the liturgical reform in the Basque region of Spain); and Rémy Kurowski, “La messe dominicale comme creuset de la réception de la réforme liturgique en Pologne: Le cas de la diocèse de Gniezno,” in *Réceptions de Vatican II: Le Concile au risque de l'histoire et des espaces humaines*, ed. Gilles Routhier (Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 91–129.

⁷ Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2008) 226–28.

Baldovin observed, “serious critique of the reform—both in its formulation in the Liturgy Constitution and in the subsequent reformed liturgical books and their implementation—needs to be attended to.”⁸

In the 40 years after Vatican II, it has become clear that forgetting the theological and ecclesiological background of the council’s liturgical reform condemns *Sacrosanctum concilium* to be quickly filed away with other documents dealing with some of the practical adjustments of the Catholic Church. More gravely, forgetting the relations between liturgy and ecclesiologies (plural) at the council condemns Vatican II to the destiny of a council debated on the basis of a political-ideological bias, which overlooks the basic fact that the liturgical debate at Vatican II was the first and most radical effort of modern Catholicism to cope with the dawn of the “secular age” and the “expanding universe of unbelief.”⁹

APPROACHES TO SACROSANCTUM CONCILIIUM

The profound ecclesiological meaning of the liturgical movement and liturgical reform has been lost. The transformation—or maybe extinction—of the “reform movements” (biblical, liturgical, patristic, ecumenical) as such within the Catholic Church after Vatican II,¹⁰ the development in theology of single field-centered theological research, and the fragmentation of theological debate and research on the council documents have all undoubtedly contributed to the disconnect of liturgy from ecclesiology and pastoral theology. The growing lack of trust between theologians and the Church’s magisterium has presented the field of research within Catholic theology with a specific and far-reaching task, especially for the relationship between liturgists and the magisterium.¹¹

One of the most insightful books on the significance of liturgy was first published in 1957, a few years before the announcement of Vatican II. Dom Cipriano Vagaggini opened his *Il senso teologico della liturgia* by underscoring two basic elements in the new understanding of liturgy on the eve of Vatican II: the need to study liturgy against the general

⁸ John Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2008) 1.

⁹ See the masterful work by Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard University, 2007) 352–418.

¹⁰ See Massimo Faggioli, *Breve storia dei movimenti cattolici* (Rome: Carocci, 2008).

¹¹ See André Naud, *Le magistère incertain* (Montréal: Fides, 1987); and Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 1983).

background of sacred history and in relation to the concept of *sacramentum*.¹² How Vatican II developed shows the importance of these two ideas for the debates on the Church, *aggiornamento*, and the modern world.

The issue of *Concilium* (2/1964) devoted to *Sacrosanctum concilium* was published prior to the fall 1964 ecclesiological debate. In his editorial Johannes Wagner stressed that “with the discussion of the schema on the liturgy the Council was from the first day dealing with its proper object: *De Ecclesia*.”¹³ In the opening essay about the bishop and the liturgy, Vagaggini once more demonstrated that the liturgical approach was the fullest way to give “completion and equilibrium” to the ecclesiology of the bishop and of the local church, and to the overall ecclesiology that became prevalent after Vatican I.¹⁴

Vagaggini’s prediction about the Council Fathers’ grasp of the profound implications of *Sacrosanctum concilium* turned out to be overly optimistic. After the council, commentators began reading the relationship between *Sacrosanctum concilium* and *Lumen gentium* to reframe an ecclesiological equilibrium centered far more on the outcomes of the main battlegrounds of ecclesiology (chap. 3 of *Lumen gentium* on the papacy and the episcopate) than on the eucharistic ecclesiology of *Sacrosanctum concilium*.

In 1967 an important volume dedicated to the liturgy in the “Unam Sanctam” series made important points on the positioning of the constitution on the liturgy within the corpus of Vatican II. Yves Congar’s contribution to the volume emphasized that the ecclesiology of *Sacrosanctum concilium* had moved forward when compared to Pius XII’s *Mediator Dei* (1947). Congar also noted that some time elapsed between the liturgical and the ecclesiological debates, and that therefore there was a difference—at least a gap in the chronology of the final approvals—between the ecclesiologies of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and *Lumen gentium*.¹⁵ Competing ecclesiologies of Vatican II also emerged in Pierre-Marie Gy’s essay that stressed the need to read *Sacrosanctum concilium* in light of the whole corpus of Vatican II documents in order to understand the key issues. More importantly,

¹² See Cipriano Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy: A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1976) esp. 3–32; trans. of *Il senso teologico della liturgia: Saggio di liturgia teologica generale*, 4th ed. (Rome: Paoline 1957). See also Cipriano Vagaggini, *Liturgia e pensiero teologico recente* (Rome: Sant’Anselmo, 1962).

¹³ See Johannes Wagner, “Preface,” *The Church and the Liturgy, Concilium*, vol. 2 (Glen Rock N.J.: Paulist, 1965) 3. See also Frederick R. McManus, *The Revival of the Liturgy* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963).

¹⁴ See Cipriano Vagaggini, “The Bishop and the Liturgy,” in *The Church and the Liturgy* 7–24, at 11.

¹⁵ See Yves Congar, “L’Ecclesia ou communauté chrétienne, sujet intégral de l’action liturgique,” in *La liturgie après Vatican II; bilans, études, prospective*, ed. Jean-Pierre Jossua and Yves Congar (Paris: Cerf, 1967) 241–82.

Gy rightly emphasized that “the Constitution did not set a balance, but created a movement.”¹⁶ Vagaggini, under the telling heading, “Leave the Door Open,” expressed the very same idea of the liturgical reform as a spark for the renewal of the Catholic Church and therefore for the interpretation of Vatican II: “the council has wished to affirm a spirit, open a road, and so it was on its guard against an attitude that could have consisted in making a few concessions and then again hermetically sealing all doors.”¹⁷

A similar take, but less rich in direct insights on the hermeneutics of Vatican II, was Josef Jungmann’s commentary. Although Jungmann saw *Sacrosanctum concilium* as a beginning, not a final word, it is to be regretted that he did not develop a broader analysis of the importance of *Sacrosanctum concilium* for what he called the “renewal of the concept of the Church” (*Erneuerung des Kirchenbegriffes*).¹⁸

While the liturgists provided contributions about the specific significance of the constitution on the liturgy for the life of the Church, Giuseppe Dossetti, an Italian canon lawyer and private *peritus* at Vatican II, suggested that *Sacrosanctum concilium* was the real ecclesiological heart of the council. On the basis of the Eucharist as the *norma normans* of the Church’s life, Dossetti opposed the eucharistic ecclesiology of *Sacrosanctum concilium* to the juridical aspects of *Lumen gentium*. He saw in *Sacrosanctum concilium* not only a chronologically earlier ecclesiology but also a theological priority of *Sacrosanctum concilium* in the overall corpus of Vatican II.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Pierre-Marie Gy, “Situation historique de la Constitution,” in *La Liturgie après Vatican II* 111–26, at 122.

¹⁷ See Cipriano Vagaggini, “Fundamental ideas of the Constitution,” in *The Liturgy of Vatican II: A Symposium*, ed. Guilherme Baraúna, English edition ed. Jovian Lang (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1966) 95–129, at 119.

¹⁸ See Josef Andreas Jungmann, “Kommentar zur Liturgiekonstitution,” in *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Konstitutionen, Dekrete, und Erklärungen lateinisch und deutsch Kommentare*, vol. 1 of *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1966) 10–109, at 16 (English translation by Lalit Adolphus, Kevin Smyth, and Richard Strachan: “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns & Oates; New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) 1–87. For a similar approach see Hermann Schmidt, *La Costituzione sulla Sacra Liturgia: Testo, genesi, commento, documentazione* (Rome: Herder, 1966).

¹⁹ See Giuseppe Dossetti, *Per una “chiesa eucaristica”: Rilettura della portata dottrinale della Costituzione liturgica del Vaticano I; Lezioni del 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Giuseppe Ruggieri (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002). Dossetti is still largely unknown to English-speaking theologians, but see Nicholas Lash, *Theology for Pilgrims* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2008) 263–67; and Alberto Melloni, ed., *Giuseppe Dossetti: Studies on an Italian Catholic Reformer* (Zurich: LIT 2008).

The 1970s were the age of the liturgical reform's completion: Paul VI's pontificate is still now much identified—especially by the anti-Vatican II component of Catholicism—with that era of decentralizing, pro-laity and innovative reforms.²⁰ The election of John Paul II meant not only a new attitude toward Vatican II but also the beginning of a new indulgence toward the tiny minority of Catholic traditionalists who rejected liturgical reform as a device for rejecting Vatican II. The traditionalists grasped better than many advocates of the council's reforms the theological force of *lex orandi, lex credendi* for Vatican II.

This development affected not only the focus of research on liturgical renewal and liturgical reform but also the very reception of *Sacrosanctum concilium* by the magisterium. The achievement of the codification of canon law in 1983 did not help the constitution on the liturgy consolidate a new role in the life of the Church. If we follow Thomas Stubenrauch's research on the reception of Vatican II in the *Codex iuris canonici*, we must note that, differently from *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the juridical concept *liturgia ab ecclesia* in the *Codex* takes the place of the theological rationale *ecclesia a liturgia*. It is clear that the new *Codex* failed to fully receive Vatican II, especially concerning the liturgical ministry of deacons and the laity.²¹

Scholars have been overly confident about the coherence and consistency between the ecclesiology of the liturgical reform and the ecclesiological renewal in post-Vatican II Catholicism. In 1982 Franziskus Eisenbach noted the substantial continuity between the liturgical constitution and *Lumen gentium*. Moreover, he expressed regret over the lack at the council of a tighter connection between liturgy and ecclesiology, because “the constitution on the liturgy could not take advantage” of the debate on *Lumen gentium*.²² Eisenbach's approach to the ecclesiology of the local church according to *Sacrosanctum concilium* nos. 41–42 did not save him from a self-reassuring harmonization between the ecclesiologies of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and *Lumen gentium*.²³

²⁰ See Heribert Schmitz, “Tendenzen nachkonziliarer Gesetzgebung: Sichtung und Wertung,” *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht* 146 (1977) 381–419.

²¹ See Thomas Stubenrauch, *Wer ist Träger der Liturgie? Zur Rezeption des II. Vatikanischen Konzils im Codex Iuris Canonici von 1983* (Trier: Paulinus, 2003) esp. 343–52.

²² See Franziskus Eisenbach, *Die Gegenwart Jesu Christi im Gottesdienst: Systematische Studien zur Liturgiekonstitution des II. Vatikanischen Konzils* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1982) 587.

²³ See Franz Frühmorgen, *Bischof und Bistum—Bischof und Presbyterium: Eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Studie zu den Artikeln 41 und 42 der Liturgiekonstitution des Zweiten Vatikanums* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1994).

Twenty years after the approval of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and shortly before the extraordinary synod of 1985, the largely accomplished but still ongoing reform of liturgy contributed to the disappearance of any fruitful debate about the relationship between the liturgy and Vatican II as such.²⁴ Furthermore, the emphasis on collegiality and church reform in the theological debate in the 1970s and the 1980s contributed to an increasingly technical-liturgical reading of *Sacrosanctum concilium*.²⁵ The indult from the Holy See of 1984 and the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei* of 1988 granted permission to celebrate “the old liturgy,” and, as such, this permission could not but weaken the theological impact of *Sacrosanctum concilium* on the living ecclesiology of Catholicism.

The five-volume *History of Vatican II* edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak provided new information about the key role of the liturgical debate within the council and about the dynamics in the preparatory and conciliar liturgical commissions.²⁶ Nevertheless, studies on *Sacrosanctum concilium* published almost concurrently with the *History* focused on an “ideological” continuity between the early 20th-century liturgical movement and *Sacrosanctum concilium*, and thus they overlooked the impact of the constitution on Vatican II as such.²⁷

The many studies published for the 40th anniversary of *Sacrosanctum concilium* offered nothing really decisive.²⁸ The Tübingen-based five-volume *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, edited by Peter Hünemann and Hans-Jochen Hilberath, contributed to a

²⁴ See Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948–1975*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1990); originally published as *La riforma liturgica, 1948–1975* (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano-Edizioni Liturgiche, 1983).

²⁵ As can be seen also in Giuseppe Alberigo et al., eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1987).

²⁶ See Mathijs Lamberigts, “The Liturgy Debate,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, *The Formation of the Council’s Identity, First Period and Intercession, October 1962–September 1963* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 107–66; and Reiner Kaczinsky, “Toward the Reform of the Liturgy,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 3, *The Mature Council, Second Period and Intercession, September 1963–September 1964* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis 2000) 192–256.

²⁷ See, e.g., Maria Paiano, *Liturgia e società nel Novecento: Percorsi del movimento liturgico di fronte ai processi di secolarizzazione* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2000).

²⁸ See, e.g., in *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 53 (2003): Joseph Ratzinger, “40 Jahre Konstitution über die Heilige Liturgie: Rückblick und Vorblick” 209–21; Jürgen Bärsch, “Von grösstem Gewicht für die Liturgiefeier ist die Heilige Schrift” (SC 24): Zur Bedeutung der Bibel im Kontext des Gottesdienstes” 222–41; and Andreas Odenthal, “Häresie der Formlosigkeit durch ein ‘Konzil der Buchhalter’: Überlegungen zur Kritik an der Liturgiereform nach 40 Jahren ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’” 242–57.

new appreciation of *Sacrosanctum concilium*.²⁹ In the volume of *Kommentar* devoted to *Sacrosanctum concilium* and in the *History of Vatican II*, Reiner Kaczynski stressed the novelty of the constitution in the context of the history of the councils and of the liturgy.³⁰ More profoundly, he emphasized the function of *Sacrosanctum concilium* no. 5—the centrality of the paschal *mysterium*—not only as a center of the constitution but also as a “heart-word” (*Herzwort*) for Vatican II.³¹

But it seems that many commentaries on *Sacrosanctum concilium* are outrun by the haste and aggressiveness—more than by the intellectual command—of the advocates of a revision of the liturgical reform of Vatican II. In the last ten years the influential calls for a “reform of the reform” of the liturgy have fueled a “political-theological” debate about the fortunes and misfortunes of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and have called forth defenses of the historical memory of that postconciliar period³² rather than defenses of the deep theological implications and ecclesiological depth of the constitution. The political-ecclesiological debate on the council has compelled the advocates of Vatican II to defend the liturgy. However, they have failed to emphasize that liturgy was not only the chronological starting point of Vatican II but also the theological starting point. Perhaps more importantly, it was the first and most undisputed common ground of the Council Fathers.

Somewhere between nostalgia for the pre-Vatican II era and the undeniable contribution of *Sacrosanctum concilium* to the liturgical life of the Catholic Church, some scholars have underscored the continuity between Pius XII’s encyclical *Mediator Dei* and Vatican II, and between Pius X’s *motu proprio Tra le sollecitudini* (1903) and Vatican II.³³ The bizarre mix

²⁹ See Hans Jochen Hilberath and Peter Hünemann, eds., *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, 5 vols. (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2004–2005).

³⁰ See Reiner Kaczynski, Reiner Kaczynski, “Toward the Reform of the Liturgy,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 3, *The Mature Council, Second Period and Intercession, September 1963–September 1964* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis 2000) esp. 220–34.

³¹ See Reiner Kaczynski, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Konstitution über die Heilige Liturgie Sacrosanctum Concilium,” in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar* 2:9–227, esp. 63 where he quotes Angelus A. Häussling, “Pascha-Mysterium: Kritisches zu einem Beitrag in der dritten Auflage des Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche,” *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 41 (1999) 157–65.

³² See Piero Marini, *A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal, 1963–1975*, ed. Mark R. Francis, John R. Page, and Keith F. Pecklers (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2007).

³³ See Aidan Nichols, *Looking at the Liturgy: A Critical View of Its Contemporary Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996); Martin Mosebach, *Häresie der Formlosigkeit: Die römische Liturgie und ihr Feind*, new, exp. ed. (München: Hanser, 2007); Italian trans., *Eresia dell’informe: La liturgia romana e il suo nemico* (Siena: Cantagalli,

of tradition and *ressourcement* in theological discourse has generated ambiguity in the debate on Vatican II that John O'Malley recently analyzed in his *What Happened at Vatican II*.³⁴

THE AGENDA OF THE COUNCIL AND THE LITURGICAL DEBATE

John XXIII's announcement of Vatican II caught everyone by surprise: on January 25, 1959, less than three months after his election, he symbolically threw open the windows of the Vatican in order to—in his very words—“let in some fresh air.” However, the liturgy had been on the agenda of Catholicism for quite some time. The call for liturgical reform was no surprise.³⁵ The last years of Pius XII had already seen some decisions made in this direction. The novelty of the council benefited from the riches of the early-20th-century liturgical movement; but the liturgical reform could develop its deep theological assumptions only in a council where the issue of change clearly met one of the key points of the liturgical movement: the notion of *ressourcement*.³⁶

This is why, far from being an issue of concern only to liturgists, Vatican II's liturgical reform was clearly a path-opening debate. John XXIII's choice to inaugurate the debates with the schema *De liturgia* was grounded not just on the better shape and reception of this schema compared with the other seven schemas sent to the Council Fathers immediately before the beginning of the first session in the fall of 1962.

Interpretations of John XXIII's decision underscored the propaedeutic function of the liturgical debate for the council as a whole, and commentaries on *Sacrosanctum concilium* have again ventured interpretations of this decision.³⁷ Nevertheless, in recent years Catholic theologians and

2009); Pamela Jackson, *An Abundance of Graces: Reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Mundelein, Ill.: Hillenbrand 2004); and Pamela Jackson, “Theology of the Liturgy,” in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (New York: Oxford, 2008) 101–28.

³⁴ See O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* 300–301.

³⁵ See Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni, eds., *Verso il concilio Vaticano II, 1960–1962: Passaggi e problemi della preparazione conciliare* (Genoa: Marietti, 1993).

³⁶ See Marie-Anne Vannier, ed., *Les Pères et la naissance de l'ecclésiologie* (Paris: Cerf, 2009); and Etienne Fouilloux, *La Collection “Sources chrétiennes”: Éditer les Pères de L'Église au XXe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1995).

³⁷ “Il primato della *Sacrosanctum Concilium* è ascrivibile non semplicemente alla precedenza cronologica, ma al fatto che essa è stata punto di riferimento e fonte d'ispirazione per i testi conciliari che l'hanno seguita. . . . L'accordo è consistito anzitutto nell'assunzione della Sacra Scrittura come norma e giudizio dell'intelligenza della liturgia e della riforma della sua prassi. La Costituzione liturgica ha in questo modo realizzato ciò che simbolicamente veniva espresso dal rito di intronizzazione dell'Evangelario all'apertura di ogni assemblea conciliare”

historians have been much more focused on the “technical” outcomes of the liturgical reform and its direct effects, rather than on its profound meaning for Vatican II and the Church. Benedict XVI’s decisions have indeed promoted this feature of the post-Vatican II ecclesiological debate, boosting the impact of a political-esthetic standpoint on liturgy and making it easier to overlook the ties between the liturgical reform and Vatican II as an agent of change or, as O’Malley insists, Vatican II as a “language event.”³⁸

The liturgical debate opened Vatican II and became “an event within the event,” because it ignited a motion stretching beyond the dreams of the “progressive” majority at the council. Starting with the liturgy—with the liturgical debate and with the celebration of liturgy in different rites every morning in St. Peter’s Basilica—helped bishops rediscover the potential of liturgy as a tool for a Church facing an increasingly secular and globalized world.³⁹ But this debate also gave voice to the call for church reform more generally.⁴⁰ Even in the preparatory phase, the preparatory commissions and especially the Central Commission for overall coordination of the council discussed the function of the liturgical debate and its scheduling in addressing the main issues on the conciliar agenda. The decision of the Council of Presidents on October 15, 1962, to reschedule the debates and put the liturgical schema before the other schemas highlights the rise of the main division within the council concerning the way of addressing the issue of change was greeted with John XXIII’s positive response.⁴¹ The relationship between *libro e calice* (book and chalice) had emerged as a key element in Roncalli’s theology already in his years as apostolic delegate in Bulgaria from 1925 to 1934; it was a salient point of his homily when he took possession of the Lateran Basilica on November 23, 1958.⁴²

At the beginning of the preparatory phase of Vatican II, it became clear even to the Roman Curia that the liturgical reform would play a major role, but they hoped it would do it as an “icebreaker” for a quick and smooth

(Piero Marini, introduction to *Concilii Vaticani II synopsis in ordinem redigens schemata cum relationibus necnon patrum orationes atque animadversiones: Constitutio de sacra liturgia Sacrosanctum concilium*, ed. Francisco Gil Hellín [Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003] x–xi).

³⁸ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* 306.

³⁹ See Schmidt, *La Costituzione sulla Sacra Liturgia*.

⁴⁰ See especially Yves Congar and B.-D. Dupuy, eds., *L’épiscopat et l’église universelle* (Paris: Cerf, 1962).

⁴¹ See Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, Giovanni XXIII, *Pater amabilis: Agende del pontefice, 1958–1963*, ed. Mauro Velati (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2007) 443.

⁴² See Giuseppe Ruggieri, “Appunti per una teologia in papa Roncalli,” in *Papa Giovanni*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Roma: Laterza, 1987) 245–71.

council, not as a “path-opener.”⁴³ The history of the council shows that the debates went all but smoothly, and that the debate on the liturgical constitution between October 1962 and November 1963 turned out to be much more than an “icebreaker.”

The Roman Curia and the so-called “minority” rejected the comprehensive and programmatic reform of the liturgy laid out in the schema prepared by the liturgical preparatory commission, while the “majority” accepted the reform and long-awaited renewal of liturgy as the best possible interpretation of the pastoral character of the council. The outcomes of the debate and the almost unanimous final vote on the constitution on November 22, 1963, left no doubt as to the step taken in the direction of liturgical renewal.⁴⁴

THE LITURGICAL CONSTITUTION: A FORGOTTEN HERMENEUTICS OF VATICAN II?

A contribution regarding Vatican II as a “Constitution” for the Catholic Church came between 2005 and 2006 from Peter Hünemann in the conclusions to the five-volume *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* edited by Hünemann himself and B. J. Hilberath. Hünemann develops aspects of his lecture given at the Bologna Conference in 1996 about the “pragmatics of the conciliar texts,”⁴⁵ but also includes and substantially supports Ormond Rush’s suggestion about the hermeneutical principles⁴⁶ (hermeneutics of the authors, texts, and recipients) of Vatican II.

In a long and boldly reasoned essay,⁴⁷ Hünemann designates the corpus of conciliar texts as a “Constitution” for the Catholic Church:

⁴³ See Antonino Indelicato, *Difendere la dottrina o annunciare il Vangelo: Il dibattito nella Commissione centrale preparatoria del Vaticano II* (Genoa: Marietti, 1992) 171–98; and Andrea Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II* 2:1–67.

⁴⁴ See Lamberigts, “Liturgy Debate” 107–66.

⁴⁵ See Peter Hünemann, “Il concilio Vaticano II come evento,” in *L’evento e le decisioni: Studi sulle dinamiche del Concilio Vaticano II*, ed. Maria Teresa Fattori and Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997) 63–92.

⁴⁶ See Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Paulist: New York, 2004). For the relationship between “letter” and “spirit” in the interpretation of *Dei Verbum* see Ormond Rush, “Dei Verbum Forty Years On: Revelation, Inspiration, and the Spirit,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 83 (2006) 406–14.

⁴⁷ See Peter Hünemann, “Der Text: Werden—Gestalt—Bedeutung: Eine hermeneutische Reflexion,” in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar* 5:5–101, esp. 11–17, 85–87.

As a kind of first approach to the shape of the text of the Second Vatican Council, if one looks for an analogy by which to characterize the council's decisions, one can see a certain similarity to constitutional texts as drawn up by representative constitutional assemblies. This similarity is expressed in a particular way in the texts of Vatican II.⁴⁸

For Hünemann, the designation of Vatican II as a "Constitution" surely does not mean placing the conciliar texts above the Gospel: "The legitimation of a council and its authority is essentially different from that of a constitutional assembly of a modern state. . . . For this reason the conciliar text possesses an authority essentially different from that of a constitutional text."⁴⁹ In his conclusion, Hünemann precisely states the proposal to consider the texts of Vatican II as a "constitutional text for the faith":

The corpus of texts of this council recalls a similarity to the texts of a Constitution. At the same time, there are profound differences between the two, beginning with the authority and specificity of the material of conciliar texts. For this reason the text of Vatican II can be prudently defined as a "constitutional text of faith." If this assumption about the text of Vatican II is valid, then what follows is a whole series of problems and questions, criticisms, and, not least of all, unfounded ways of interpreting Vatican II, since they do not conform to the literary genre of the text.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ "Sucht man im Sinne einer ersten Annäherung an das Profil des Textes des II. Vatikanischen Konzils nach einer Analogie, um die Beschlüsse zu charakterisieren, so ergibt sich eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit Verfassungstexten, die von repräsentativen verfassungsgebenden Versammlungen ausgearbeitet werden. Diese Ähnlichkeit ist bei den Texten des II. Vatikanums besonders ausgeprägt und zeigt sich lediglich in stark vermittelter, abgestufter Form auch im Blick auf das Trienter Konzil und das I. Vatikanum" (Hünemann, "Der Text: Werden—Gestalt—Bedeutung" 12 [my trans.]). Hünemann outlined the analogies between a "constitution" and Vatican II's final documents: (1) the situation of "crisis or historical necessity" (in a state as well as in the Catholic Church) which calls for a Constitution; (2) the quality of the final texts as texts discussed and approved by large assemblies, representative of different if not opposite political stands; (3) a similarity in the process (committees, subcommittees, plenary assemblies); (4) the relationship between the issues at hand and the texts describing and influencing the ongoing situation; and (5) the relationship between the final approval of a constitution and the act of reception of Vatican II.

⁴⁹ "Die Legitimation eines Konzils und damit seine autorität eine wesentlich andere ist als die einer verfassungsgebenden Versammlung in staatlichen Sinne. . . . Der Konziltext besitzt von daher eine wesentlich andere Autorität als ein Verfassungstext" (Hünemann, "Der Text: Werden—Gestalt—Bedeutung" 15–16).

⁵⁰ "Das Textcorpus dieses Konzils weist eine Ähnlichkeit mit den Texten einer verfassungsgebenden Versammlung auf. Dabei ergeben sich zugleich tiefgreifende Differenzen aus der anderen Autorität und der Eigentümlichkeit der Sache, die in den Konziltexten zur Sprache kommt. Auf Grund dieses Befund kann der Text des II. Vatikanischen Konzils vorsichtig als 'konstitutioneller Text des Glaubens' bezeichnet werden. Ist dieser *Vorbegriff* vom Text des II. Vatikanischen Konzils triftig, dann ergibt sich daraus, dass eine ganze Reihe von Problemstellungen und Anfragen, Kritiken und nicht zuletzt Auslegungsweisen in unbegründeter, weil dem Textgenus

This definition of the nature of the texts of Vatican II establishes the council as a corpus of hermeneutical principles for the life of the Church that is capable of establishing what is “constitutional,” and hence what is “unconstitutional,” in the ecclesiology of the postconciliar Church.⁵¹

Sacrosanctum concilium constitutes one of the pillars of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The liturgical constitution presents a way to defend the council’s ecclesiology on the basis of eucharistic ecclesiology, without making the option between juridical and eucharistic ecclesiology the first and last word on the Church of Vatican II.

The definition of *Sacrosanctum concilium* as “le parent pauvre de l’hermeneutique conciliaire” (the forgotten element in the hermeneutics of Vatican II) is correct because, as we have seen, its hermeneutical function has been consistently downplayed.⁵² The dire need for a hermeneutics of Vatican II once again centered on *Sacrosanctum concilium* is justified on the basis of a chronologically rooted relationship between the liturgical constitution—the first document approved at the council—and Vatican II as such. The necessity of and opportunity for a hermeneutics of the council based on *Sacrosanctum concilium* becomes clear if we take into account that it opens the way for a new balance between the “clash of ecclesiologies” at the council, and the gravitational center of the Church of Vatican II: Scripture and the Eucharist.

Sacrosanctum concilium has been approached differently by the two hermeneutical and historiographical traditions on Vatican II—the pro-majority (pro-reform) and the pro-minority (nostalgic) traditions. Most pro-majority interpreters of Vatican II have looked at *Sacrosanctum concilium* as the first reform of Vatican II, the beginning of the event, but seemed to entrust the defense of its profound message and implications to liturgists, who prefer an ecclesiological approach—based on *Lumen gentium* and the relationship between the papacy and the episcopate—for the implementation of Vatican II.

nicht entsprechender Weise an das II. Vatikanische Konzil herangetragen werden” (Hünemann, “Der Text: Werden—Gestalt—Bedeutung” 17).

⁵¹ “Läßt man sich vom ‘konstitutionellen’ Charakter dieses Textcorpus überzeugen, so ergeben sich allerdings erhebliche Auswirkungen für die theologische Auslegung und die Rezeption dieser Texte” (Peter Hünemann, “Der Text: Eine Ergänzung zur Hermeneutik des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,” *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 28 [2007] 339–58, at 358). See also Peter Hünemann, “Zur theologischen Arbeit am Beginn der dritten Millenniums,” in *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute: Anstöße zur weiteren Rezeption*, ed. Peter Hünemann with B. J. Hilberath and Lieven Boeve (Freiburg i.B: Herder, 2006) 569–93.

⁵² See Patrick Prétot, “La Constitution sur la liturgie: Une herméneutique de la tradition liturgique,” in *Vatican II et la théologie: Perspectives pour le XXIe siècle*, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Laurent Villemin (Paris, Cerf: 2006) 17–34.

Surprisingly, pro-minority and essentially anticonciliar interpreters of Vatican II seem to have given up the effort for a direct reinterpretation of the council and its ecclesiology, and moved toward a downgrading of Vatican II through a dismissal of *Sacrosanctum concilium* and a trivialization of the deep theological meaning of the liturgical reform. Despite the trivialization, some pro-minority interpreters of the council seem to have a grasp of *Sacrosanctum concilium* that is richer than the grasp of the average defender of Vatican II.

That is why Vatican II interpreters need to attempt a more profound reading of the connections between Vatican II and *Sacrosanctum concilium*. Only a hermeneutic based on the liturgy and the Eucharist, as developed in the constitution on the liturgy, can preserve the riches of the overall ecclesiology of Vatican II without getting lost in the technicalities of a “theological jurisprudence.”

I would like to make the case for a strong relationship between *Sacrosanctum concilium* and the ultimate meaning of Vatican II. This relationship is not a standard defense of the post-Vatican II liturgical renewal, nor a criticism of the “liberalization” of the Tridentine liturgy. Nonetheless I assert that a deeper understanding of the new conception of liturgy developed at Vatican II and in the post-Vatican II liturgical renewal is the first step toward seeing the profound implications and the real implementation of Vatican II and of seeing what its implementation means.

It is time to demonstrate that *Sacrosanctum concilium* represents the early and, at the same time, mature outcome of a council grounded in the idea that:

- (1) *Ressourcement* is the most powerful source of updating and reform for global Catholicism in the modern world. The anti-Vatican II “new liturgical movement” is moved not by pure nostalgia; its theological and ecclesiological consequences reach far beyond nostalgia. The advocates of the anti-Vatican II “new liturgical movement” are indeed right as they identify in *Sacrosanctum concilium* the main target since this constitution is the most radical instance of *ressourcement* and the most obviously antitraditionalist document of the council. The principle of *ressourcement* affected *Sacrosanctum concilium* like no other conciliar document; it is hard to find in the corpus of the documents passages more expressive of the very essence of the Church and driven by the idea of *ressourcement*.
- (2) The liturgical reform as intended in *Sacrosanctum concilium* aimed at the rediscovery of the centrality of Scripture and the Eucharist. It is the most direct way to grasp Vatican II’s ecclesiology. *Sacrosanctum concilium* is aware that “the life of the Church cannot be reduced to the sole eucharistic moment” (nos. 9–10), and that liturgy has its role

in the Church as a *theologia prima* as *locus theologicus*, and as *culmen et fons*. The liturgical constitution sponsored a new awareness within the Roman Catholic Church that *things change*. That is why the liturgical reform of Vatican II and the most recent calls for a “reform of the reform” touch the whole essence of Vatican II. Changing worship sets off a rethinking of ecclesiology in a more profound and long-lasting way than the definition of the Church in *Lumen gentium*.

- (3) This eucharistic ecclesiology provides the grounds for the basic direction of Vatican II, that is, *rapprochement* inside and outside the Church. *Rapprochement*—a term used many times by the pioneer of ecumenism and liturgist Lambert Beauduin⁵³—is not part of the corpus of Vatican II in a material way, but it belongs fully to the aims of Vatican II. The council’s liturgical reform plays a significant role in developing (during Vatican II) and performing (after Vatican II) this key feature of the council, in a way that is not less important than other, better known, “*rapprochement manifestos*” of Vatican II, such as the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, the declaration *Nostra aetate*, and the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*. The main *rapprochement* carried out by *Sacrosanctum concilium* consists in a reconciled and unifying vision of the Church, of Christian life, of the existential condition of the faithful in the world.⁵⁴ Far from being a purely esthetic option, the theological starting point of the liturgical reform aimed at resetting the relationship between Christian liturgy, spiritual needs of the faithful, and Catholic theological reading of the modern world in its historical and social dimensions.
- (4) *Ressourcement*, eucharistic ecclesiology, and *rapprochement* require a drive for a full implementation of Vatican II and provide an unambiguous appraisal of the issue of Vatican II’s continuity and discontinuity and the role of liturgical reform in the Church of the 21st century. Any attempt to undermine the liturgical reform of Vatican II reveals a clearly reductionist view of the council and its epoch-making changes.

⁵³ See Raymond Loonbeek and Jacques Mortiau, *Un pionnier, Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873–1960): Liturgie et unité des chrétiens*, 2 vols. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Collège Erasme, 2001) esp. 1:907–9. See also Jacques Mortiau and Raymond Loonbeek, *Dom Lambert Beauduin: Visionnaire et précurseur (1873–1960); un moine au cœur libre* (Paris: Cerf, 2005).

⁵⁴ See Giuseppe Dossetti, *Per una “chiesa eucaristica”: Rilettura della portata dottrinale della Costituzione liturgica del Vaticano II; lezioni del 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Giuseppe Ruggieri (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002) 41.