

Book Review Of:

A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal. 1963-1975. Piero Marini. Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007. Pages xxi+205. Paper, \$15.95. ISBN 978-0-8146-3035-8.

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We take today's liturgy for granted: mass in the vernacular, concelebration, communion under both forms, weddings at mass, confirmation at mass, the catechumenate in stages, a simplified Order of Mass, the omission of the prayers at the foot of the altar and the Last Gospel, the prayers of the faithful, the variety of eucharistic prayers. The list can go on and on. The liturgy changed dramatically after the Second Vatican Council. In the short term, a tremendous upheaval resulted. But today, we take these changes for granted.

The Second Vatican Council had a vision for the reformed liturgy, but somebody had to make that vision a reality. The responsibility fell to a group called the *Consilium ad exsequendam Constitutionem de sacra Liturgia* (The Council for Implementing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) – or, more popularly, the Consilium. Pope Paul VI created this body to be distinct from the Roman Curia. He wanted an independent group of experts to manage this challenging reform, and he invested them with a staggering authority. Predictably, the Sacred Congregation of Rites resisted the Consilium. The reform happened, but it was born of strife, positioning, suspicion, and polite but pointed reproach.

Piero Marini tells this story in an eye-opening narrative, *A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal (1963-1975)*. He is well equipped for the job. Among insiders, he is well known for his work as Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations from 1987-2007, the man responsible for the liturgies at home and abroad at which Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI presided. But Marini's previous job is what equips him for this book. He became the personal secretary for Archbishop Annibale Bugnini in 1975, shortly before Bugnini became the apostolic pro-nuncio to Iran. Marini therefore received firsthand recollections from the man who was a secretary of the Second Vatican Council's Pontifical Preparatory Commission on the liturgy, and later the secretary of the Consilium.

Marini's story of the Consilium is not unbiased. But he makes a convincing case that Pope Paul VI set the stage for some conflict by creating an independent authoritative body for implementing the reform, and that he charged the Consilium, not the Sacred Congregation of Rites, with the vision of Vatican II's liturgy. The distrust between the two groups is palpable in Marini's book. The Consilium advanced the many liturgical renewals that we now take for granted, yet it convened only for 5 years. After that, its work was absorbed into the Congregation. Perhaps one reason why Marini tells this story today is to offer some context for the emotional issues that can still arise when the Congregation speaks on liturgical matters. There is nothing new under the sun.

A conflict narrative should make a good read, but Marini's book is a page-turner only for those most obsessed with the details of the postconciliar years. One wades through many pages of agendas, minutes, and progress reports. This makes the book tedious at times, but it also lends the necessary credibility for the author's arguments. This is no educated reconstruction of conspiracy theories; this is solid reporting from a man who heard it from the man who was there. Bugnini, of course, wrote his own account, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, but Marini's book is a timely updating and a more slender companion to the work of his mentor.

Consider, for example, Marini's candid description of the state of affairs in April 1964: "The secretariat was fast becoming a dynamic catalyst for the reform, stimulating the work of the study groups and prioritizing decisions regarding the work schedule. Moreover, having received delegation from the plenary members to confirm decisions made by the bishops' conferences, it had received an extraordinary amount of authority for directing the reform in each country. Nevertheless, the efforts of the secretariat were by no means unobstructed. It was all too evident from the discussion during the meeting held on the morning of April 20 that the problem of the relationship between the Consilium and the Congregation for Rites had yet to be resolved" (57).

There is much to praise here. The prehistory of the council is succinctly told. Clear paragraphs offering "conclusions" close each chapter. An appendix presents primary documentation translated into English. Two indices help make quick references back to the main text. It's a book-lover's book. Editors Mark R. Francis, John R. Page, and Keith F. Pecklers deserve our thanks for bringing this work to an English-reading audience.

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