

## Books

# Praying with the Council

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### Vatican II

#### **The Battle for Meaning**

Massimo Faggioli

*Paulist Press*, \$14.95, 144 pp.

### True Reform

#### **Liturgy and Ecclesiology in *Sacrosanctum concilium***

Massimo Faggioli

*Liturgical Press*, \$19.95, 168 pp.

The fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council has produced a flurry of publications, programs on college campuses, and events in parishes to celebrate, review, and evaluate the council and its effects. Within this full array of appraisals, memoirs, and analyses, some stand out as contributions of lasting value. Two books by Massimo Faggioli belong in this category: *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, and *True Reform: Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum concilium*.

Faggioli is an Italian scholar who studied church history under a renowned expert in the history of Vatican II, Giuseppe Alberigo of the University of Bologna. (Faggioli's doctorate is from the University of Turin.) Since 2009 Faggioli has taught at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. A prolific writer, he has published many articles, but these are his first books in English. *The Battle for Meaning* will appear also in Italian (Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna) and Portuguese (São Paulo, Editora Paulinas Brasil). *True Reform* will be published in Italian as well.

*The Battle for Meaning* is a thoughtful, nuanced, and wonderfully documented presentation of the history of interpretation of Vatican II. The story itself supplies plenty of drama, as the past fifty years have seen any number of conflicting interpretations arise. Faggioli organizes his observations under several headings: interpretations which question the legitimacy of the council, interpretations which see the council as a point of departure, the conflicting assumptions of neo-Augustinians and neo-Thomists, and the "clash of narratives" ("event" versus text, continuity versus discontinuity). The final chapter identifies some overarching issues, such as whether the council represents an end or a beginning, how the texts of the various documents interact, and how change and historicity have been integrated into our understanding of theology and church.

Finally, there is an epilogue in which he argues for the continuing importance of Vatican II and its interpretation both for the internal life of the church and for its relations with the world outside. He notes a certain "underestimation" of the council's value at the present time. "What is disturbing, especially in the last few years, is that younger generations of Catholics have been credited by theological pundits with a detached or even skeptical view of Vatican II that symbolizes polarization, culture wars, and division in the church—something these younger generations allegedly feel the need to take distance from, as if the common ground they seek could only be a ground as distant as possible from Vatican II." He contests this claim from his experience as a teacher, but more importantly the book itself is an antidote to any attempts to write off the council as yesterday's news.

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The book will surprise and delight a wide range of readers, from those who know little about the council to those who have studied it and reflected on it over time. I was interested, for example, to read his illuminating description of the 1985 synod, and his account of “Vatican II beyond Rome,” which included ecumenical dialogue, feminist and liberation theologies, and Catholic theology in Asia, Africa, and Australia. His notes and bibliography provide ample resources for further reading and study.

The more ambitious work—and ultimately the more important contribution to the discussion of Vatican II—is True Reform. The title alludes to Yves Congar’s True and False Reform. The thesis of the book, however, is inspired by Giusseppe Dossetti, who claimed that the council’s Constitution on the Liturgy enjoys not only chronological priority as the first document issued by the bishops, but also theological priority because of the ecclesiology it embodies.

Faggioli takes this insight and develops it vigorously and in depth. The resulting work lays out the connections between liturgy and the fathers of the church, liturgy and ecumenism, liturgy and rapprochement with the outside world, and—not least—between liturgy, life, and mission. The eucharistic ecclesiology of Sacrosanctum concilium, the first document of the Second Vatican Council, is more radically resourced, he argues, than the ecclesiology of Lumen gentium, which sought to balance Vatican I with Vatican II. The liturgy constitution changed the landscape of our imagination concerning who we are by how it framed our act of worship. Scripture, baptism, and Eucharist became central. The liturgy as it is reformed expresses a self-understanding that serves as the springboard for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Without the liturgical reform, in short, you don’t have Vatican II.

I was particularly struck by the richness and multifaceted dynamism of the liturgical reform that Faggioli describes. True Reform could be read as an introduction to the layers of meaning implicit in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, within the context of the whole of the council.

Given recent developments (specifically, the reintroduction of the unreformed Missal for unrestricted use, and the overtures to the Society of Saint Pius X) that seem to suggest that the liturgical reform is “disposable,” this work is both thought-provoking and timely. It also questions the way the Constitution on Liturgy has been discussed and understood by liturgists. Technical, political, and aesthetic issues have predominated, at the expense of a deep appreciation of the eucharistic ecclesiology of the reform. Faggioli argues that, ironically, the only people who have grasped the deep implications of the liturgical reform are the ones who have opposed it.