

Pope Benedict XVI and the “Reform of the Reform”¹

Helen Hull Hitchcock

We might say that ... [in the early twentieth century] the liturgy was rather like a fresco. It had been preserved from damage, but it had been almost completely overlaid with whitewash by later generations. In the Missal from which the priest celebrated, the form of the liturgy that had grown from its earliest beginnings was still present, but, as far as the faithful were concerned, it was largely concealed beneath instructions for and forms of private prayer. The fresco was laid bare by the Liturgical Movement and, in a definitive way, by the Second Vatican Council. For a moment its colors and figures fascinated us. But since then the fresco has been endangered by climatic conditions as well as by various restorations and reconstructions. In fact, it is threatened with destruction, if the necessary steps are not taken to stop these damaging influences. Of course, there must be no question of its being covered with whitewash again, but what is imperative is a new reverence in the way we treat it, a new understanding of its message and its reality, so that rediscovery does not become the first stage of irreparable loss.²

This striking visual metaphor appears in the preface of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's millennial publication, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, as he describes the task before us of the authentic renewal of the liturgy – sometimes called “the reform of the reform.”³ Ratzinger wrote this

1 This essay, presented at the International Liturgical Conference “Benedict XVI and the Sacred Liturgy” held on Fota Island, Cobh, Ireland, 12 July 2008, is a revised and updated version of a paper presented at Christendom College Summer Symposium, 29 July 2006. It appears in *Antiphon* by the kind permission of the Committee of the International Liturgical Conference “Benedict XVI and the Sacred Liturgy” which includes it among its Proceedings without prejudice to the copyright.

2 Joseph Ratzinger, Preface, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000) 7-8.

3 For a convenient thumbnail sketch of the proposed agenda known as the “reform of the reform” see M. Francis Mannion, “The Catholicity of the New Liturgy: Shaping a New Agenda,” *Masterworks of God* (Chicago IL: Hillenbrand, 2004) 208-11.

book, among the most important of his works on the liturgy, in 1999, more than eighty years after Romano Guardini's seminal work of the same name saw publication in 1918. Although, as Cardinal Ratzinger acknowledges, he is addressing "a totally different historical situation ... in the context of our present-day questions, hopes, and dangers," his book nonetheless has a similar purpose: "an aid to the understanding of the faith, and to the right way to give the faith its central form of expression in the liturgy." He hopes to encourage something like the Liturgical Movement of the early twentieth century: "a movement toward the liturgy and toward the right way of celebrating the liturgy, inwardly and outwardly."⁴

The Spirit of the Liturgy presents a compendium of Ratzinger's profound insights on the liturgy. Its focus remains the true meaning of the sacramental mystery of the Eucharist – a cosmic liturgy, as he describes it – the culmination of which is nothing less than the union of God with man, with all that this implies. No author has written more extensively, compellingly, or clearly on the subject of the sacred liturgy. This body of writing and teaching has acquired even greater significance for the Church, indeed for every Catholic and for all believers, ever since its author was elevated to the See of Peter as Pope Benedict XVI in April 2005. It seems altogether fitting that Joseph Ratzinger ascended to the papacy during the Year of the Eucharist (October 2004-2005).

Deep concern over the liturgical reform and critical analysis of its principles, directions, and fruits hardly constitute recent developments in the thought of the Bavarian priest and theologian who now reigns as pope. As early as 1966, Father Joseph Ratzinger published a series of essays written after each of the council sessions. In the epilogue, he raises questions about the difficulties in implementing the council's liturgical reforms and of internal conflicts, noting among the dangers that some participants "seem to demand not so much truth as modernity." He identifies, in particular, a certain

tendency to picture everything in black and white. A positive summation of the Council almost inevitably leads to this, by emphasizing the Council's progress and contrasting the new gains made with the much less satisfactory state of affairs prior to the Council.⁵

Moreover, according to Ratzinger,

4 Ratzinger, Preface, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 8-9.

5 Joseph Ratzinger, "Epilogue," *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, trans. Werner Barzel (New York: Paulist Press/Deus Books, 1966) 184.

Very much indeed did the Church need renewal from within in the new situation of today. Yet it must not be forgotten that the Church has always remained the Church, and that at any time in history the way of the Gospel could be found and was found in it.... It seems to me of first importance, especially in the time after the Council, never to forget this fact. In the final analysis the Church lives, in sad as well as joyous times, from the faith of those who are simple of heart. This is the way that Israel lived even in the times when Pharisaic legalism and Sadducean liberalism defaced the countenance of the chosen people. Faith remained alive in those who were simple of heart. It was they who passed the torch of hope on to the New Testament. Their names are at once the last names of the old People of God and the first names of the new People—Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary. The faith of those who are simple of heart is the most precious treasure of the Church. To serve and to live this faith is the noblest vocation in the renewal of the Church.⁶

Again, in 1975, the necessity of an authentic restoration of the "fresco" appeared in the writings of Joseph Ratzinger:

It must be clearly stated that a real reform of the Church presupposes an unequivocal turning away from the erroneous paths whose catastrophic consequences are already incontestable.⁷

A decade later, though, in his now famous interview with Vittorio Messori on the state of the Catholic Church (1985), Ratzinger also clarified the essential distinction between the actual teachings of the Second Vatican Council and what posed as the "spirit" of that council:

Vatican II in its official promulgations, in its authentic documents, cannot be held responsible for this development which, on the contrary, radically contradicts both the letter and the spirit of the Council Fathers.... I am convinced that the damage that we have incurred in these twenty years is due, not to the 'true' Council, but to the unleashing *within* the Church of latent polemical and centrifugal forces; and *outside* the Church it is due to the confrontation with a cultural revolution in the West ... with its liberal-radical ideology of individualistic, rationalistic and hedonistic stamp.⁸

6 Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights*, 184-185.

7 Joseph Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius 1985) 30.

8 Ratzinger-Messori, *Report*, 30: emphasis in original.

The cardinal is equally emphatic that the council, far from representing a rupture, actually expressed continuity with the history of the Church:

There is no “pre-” or “post-” conciliar Church: there is but one, unique Church that walks the path toward the Lord....⁹

RESTORATION, RECOVERY, OR REFORM?

To the question whether he is calling for restoration, Ratzinger replies with characteristic clarity:

If by “restoration” is meant a turning back, no restoration of such kind is possible. The Church moves forward toward the consummation of history, she looks ahead to the Lord who is coming. ... But if by *restoration* we understand the search for a new balance after all the exaggerations of indiscriminate opening to the world ... well, then a *restoration* ... is altogether desirable....¹⁰

If, however, by the term “restoration” is understood “a recovery of lost values, within a new totality,” continues Ratzinger,

then I would like to say that this is precisely the task that imposes itself today in the second phase of the post-conciliar period. ... In reality it [restoration] literally means the same as the word “reform.”¹¹

He notes, by way of illustration, that the bishop and cardinal St Charles Borromeo (1538-1584) remains

the classic expression of a real reform, that is to say, of a renewal that leads forward precisely because it teaches how to live the permanent values in a new way, bearing in mind the totality of the Christian fact and the totality of man.

Ratzinger points out that Cardinal Borromeo, owing to the vitality of his faith and his pastoral zeal, truly rebuilt (“restored”) the Catholic Church which in and around Milan had suffered near collapse:

He was able to exist with his certitudes amid the contradictions of his time because he himself lived them. And he could live them

9 Ratzinger-Messori, *Report*, 35.

10 Ratzinger-Messori, *Report*, 37-38.

11 Ratzinger-Messori, *Report*, 38, n. 5.

because he was a Christian in the deepest sense of the word ... he was totally centered on Christ. What truly counts is to reestablish this all-embracing relation to Christ....¹²

A few years earlier, in his acclaimed study of the theological foundations of the liturgy, *Feast of Faith* (1981), Cardinal Ratzinger had commented on the difficulty presented by the view that the council itself had actually intended a radical rupture with the past. This erroneous view of the council characterizes, paradoxically, both extremes: those who reject the authority of the council (e.g., the followers of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre who went into formal schism in 1988, plus various sedevacantist groups and individuals), and radical "progressives" who reject everything that had come before Vatican II.

Ratzinger himself emphatically denies any radical distinction, allegedly introduced by Vatican II, between the "old belief" and "the new":

The Council has not created any new matter for belief, let alone replaced an old belief with a new one.... [T]he really serious thing, in my view, is this fundamental breakdown in liturgical consciousness [wherein] distinctions between liturgy and conviviality, liturgy and society, become blurred.¹³

He points out that "liturgy can only be liturgy to the extent that it is beyond the manipulation of those who celebrate it," and that the new books "occasionally show far too many signs of being drawn up by academics and reinforce the notion that a liturgical book can be 'made' like any other book."¹⁴

But if those in the "progressivist" camp are in error when they claim that the council somehow authorized them to "create" a new liturgy based on their own reading of the "pastoral needs" of contemporary believers, Ratzinger is equally forceful in his critique of the opposite end of the liturgical spectrum, namely, those who reject the *Novus ordo Missae* or "new rite of Mass." Concerning the "so-called Tridentine liturgy," he argues that no such thing exists. The Council of Trent, after all, neither created *de novo* nor "made" a liturgy. Ratzinger points out that the Roman Missal of 1570¹⁵ actually constitutes a

12 Ratzinger-Messori, *Report*, 38-39, n. 5.

13 Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981) 84-85.

14 Ratzinger, *Feast*, 85.

15 See *Missale Romanum editio princeps (1570)* ed. Manlio Sodi and Achille Maria Triacca, Monumenta Liturgica Concilii Tridentini 2 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998).

revised version of the Roman Missal of nearly a century earlier,¹⁶ and differed from it only in minor details. Pope St Pius V (reigned 1566-1572) promoted the exclusive use of the newly revised missal in order to “get rid of the uncertainties which had arisen in the confusion of liturgical movements in the Reformation period.”¹⁷ An exception was made at that time for liturgies older than two hundred years, which were permitted to co-exist with the “new” revised missal. Ratzinger, therefore, cautions against the delusion of a liturgy somehow frozen like an insect in amber:

We must say to the ‘Tridentines’ that the Church’s liturgy is alive, like the Church herself, and is always involved in a process of maturing... The Missal can no more be mummified than the Church herself.¹⁸

In *The Feast of Faith*, Joseph Ratzinger expresses his regret that after Vatican II the “new Missal was published as if it were a book put together by professors, not a phase of a continual growth process. Such a thing has never happened before. It is absolutely contrary to the laws of liturgical growth.”¹⁹ While admitting that this in itself is disturbing, Ratzinger nevertheless strongly affirms that “as far as its contents are concerned (apart from a few criticisms) I am very grateful for the new Missal,”²⁰ noting especially that it contains more prayers, and permits the vernacular. “In my view,” he continues,

a new edition [of the Missal] will need to make it quite clear that the so-called ‘Missal of Paul VI’ is nothing other than a renewed form of the same Missal to which Pius X, Urban VIII, Pius V and their predecessors have contributed, right from the Church’s earliest history. It is of the very essence of the Church that she should be aware of her unbroken continuity throughout the history of faith, expressed in an ever-present unity of prayer. This awareness of continuity is destroyed just as much by those who ‘opt’ for a book supposed to have been produced four hundred years ago as by those who would like to be forever drawing up new liturgies. At bottom, these two attitudes are identical. ... The fundamental issue is

16 See *Missalis Romani editio princeps Mediolani anno 1474 prelis mandata*, reprinted and edited with introduction and notes by Anthony Ward and Cuthbert Johnson, Bibliotheca “Ephemerides Liturgicae” Subsidia, Instrumenta Quarreriensia Supplementa 3 (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano-Edizioni Liturgiche, 1996).

17 Ratzinger, *Feast*, 85.

18 Ratzinger, *Feast*, 86.

19 Ratzinger, *Feast*, 85-86.

20 Ratzinger, *Feast*, 87.

whether faith comes about through regulations and learned research or through the living history of a Church which retains her identity throughout the centuries.²¹

In *God is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life* (German ed., 2001; English ed., 2003), Ratzinger revisits this caution about imprisoning the Church's worship in any particular moment of her history – past or present – here employing another striking image:

There is a great danger today of our churches becoming museums and suffering the fate of museums: if they are not locked, they are looted. They are no longer alive. The measure of life in the Church, the measure of her inner openness, will be seen in that she will be able to keep her doors open, because she is a praying Church. I ask you therefore from the heart, let us make a new start at this. Let us again recollect that the Church is always alive, that within her evermore the Lord comes to meet us. ... The Eucharist means, God has answered: the Eucharist is God as an answer, as an answering presence. Now the initiative no longer lies with us, in the God-man relationship, but with Him. ... Indeed, it is now not just two-way, but all-inclusive: whenever we pray in the Eucharistic presence, we are never alone. Then the whole of the Church, which celebrates the Eucharist, is praying with us.²²

In an address given in 1998 at Rome to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the promulgation by Pope John Paul II of the *motu proprio Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, Cardinal Ratzinger comments on problems involving "attachment to the old liturgy" and the reason for distrust of the continuation of the old liturgical forms. In this address, he identifies two major objections to the council: first, that it reformed the liturgical books, and second, that it disrupted Church unity.

The Council did not itself reform the liturgical books, but it ordered their revision, and, to this end, it established certain fundamental rules. Before anything else, the Council gave a definition of what liturgy is, and this definition gives a valuable yardstick for every liturgical celebration. ... It is in the light of these criteria that liturgical celebrations must be evaluated, whether they be according to the old books or according to the new. ... An orthodox liturgy ... which expresses the true faith, is never a compilation made according to the pragmatic criteria of various ceremonies, handled in a positivist and arbitrary way, one way today and another way

21 Ratzinger, *Feast*, 87.

22 Joseph Ratzinger with Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnur, *God is Near Us*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003) 90.

tomorrow. The orthodox forms of a rite are living realities, born out of the dialogue of love between the Church and her Lord. They are the expressions of the life of the Church, in which are distilled the faith, the prayer and the very life of whole generations, and make incarnate in specific forms both the action of God and the response of man. ... The authority of the Church has the power to define and limit the usage of such rites in different historical situations, but she never just purely and simply forbids them! Thus the Council ordered a reform of the liturgical books, but it did not prohibit the former books.²³

Because in many places “creativity” with the new *ordo Missae* “has often gone too far,” the cardinal observed that, ironically,

there is often a greater difference between liturgies celebrated in different places according to the new books than there is between an old liturgy and a new liturgy when both are celebrated as they ought to be, in accordance with the prescribed liturgical texts. An average Christian without special liturgical training finds it hard to distinguish between a Mass sung in Latin according to the old Missal and a Mass sung in Latin according to the new Missal.²⁴

Moreover, Ratzinger suggests that the “aversions” to one or the other “are so great because the two forms of celebration are thought to reflect two different spiritual attitudes, two different ways of perceiving the Church and the whole of Christian life.”

He continues, in this decennial address on *Ecclesia Dei*, his own analysis of the dichotomy of expectations held by those favoring one form of the liturgy over another:

The average Christian considers it essential for the renewed liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular and facing the people; that there be a great deal of freedom for creativity; and that the laity exercise an active role therein. On the other hand, it is considered essential for a celebration according to the old rite to be in Latin, with the priest facing the altar, strictly and precisely according to the rubrics, and that the faithful follow the Mass in private prayer without having an active role. From this viewpoint, a particular set of externals (*phénoménologie*) is seen as essential to this or that liturgy, rather than what the liturgy itself holds to be essential. ... The contradictions

23 Joseph Ratzinger, Address “Ten years after the publication of *Ecclesia Dei*,” delivered at the Ergife Palace Hotel, Rome, 24 October 1998, translated from original French by Ignatius Harrison, accessible online <www.unavoce.org/tenyears.htm>.

24 Ratzinger, “Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*.”

and oppositions which we have just enumerated originate neither from the spirit nor the letter of the conciliar texts.

Hence the need to return to the actual texts of Vatican II in order to determine what the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* really teaches and mandates, and what it neither states nor prescribes:

The actual Constitution on the Liturgy does not speak at all about celebration facing the altar or facing the people. On the subject of language, it says Latin should be retained, while giving a greater place to the vernacular "above all in readings, instructions, and in a certain number of prayers and chants" (SC 36:2). As regards the participation of the laity, the Council first of all insists on a general point, that the liturgy is essentially the concern of the whole Body of Christ, Head and members, and for this reason it pertains to the whole Body of the Church "and that consequently it [the liturgy] is destined to be celebrated in community with the active participation of the faithful." And the text specifies, "In liturgical celebrations each person, minister or lay faithful, when fulfilling his role, should carry out only and wholly that which pertains to him by virtue of the nature of the rite and the liturgical norms" (SC 28). "To promote active participation, acclamations by the people are favoured, responses, the chanting of the psalms, antiphons, canticles, also actions or gestures and bodily postures. One should also observe a period of sacred silence at an appropriate time" (SC 30).²⁵

Having thus identified the authentic directives of the council, Ratzinger urges everybody to reflect on them with profit. He concedes that "a number of modern liturgists" have tended towards a one-sided development of the directives, which results not only in "reversing the intentions of the Council" but also in "a dangerous tendency to minimize the sacrificial character of the Mass, causing mystery and the sacred to disappear" on the pretext of making the liturgy more easily understood. He cautions against fragmenting the liturgy by emphasizing only its communal character, and allowing the "assembly" to determine the way a given liturgy should be celebrated.

In spite of the deficiencies just cited, Ratzinger nevertheless notes in this 1998 address that "one can see evidence of a return to mystery, to adoration, to the sacred and to the cosmic and eschatological character of the liturgy" in recently established initiatives. He mentions, for example, "The Oxford Declaration on the Liturgy," issued in 1996 by the Liturgy Forum of the Centre for Faith and Culture,

25 Ratzinger, "Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*."

Westminster College, Oxford, at the conclusion of the center's 1996 conference "Beyond the Prosaic."²⁶ Perhaps in 1996 he may not yet have been aware also of *Adoremus* and the Society for Catholic Liturgy, both of which had been organized in 1995 in the United States, with essentially these same objectives.

It is significant, of course, that the address "Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*" does not overlook the well-known flaws of the "old liturgy":

On the other hand, it must be admitted that the celebration of the old liturgy had strayed too far into a private individualism, and that communication between priest and people was insufficient.²⁷

Noting that in many places before the council people had privately recited prayers from their prayer books during most of the Mass, Ratzinger suggests that this factor probably accounted at least in part for the indifference of most Catholics when the old liturgical books disappeared. Many Catholics, he argues, simply had never been "in contact with the liturgy itself." Exceptions to this deplorable indifference, the cardinal observes, were found in places where "the Liturgical Movement had created a certain love for the liturgy, where the Movement had anticipated the essential ideas of the Council, such as for example, the prayerful participation of all in the liturgical action...."²⁸

Cardinal Ratzinger concludes this reflection on the liturgical situation concerning the "old" and "new" Mass, with a cautionary note:

When, some years ago, somebody proposed "a new liturgical movement" in order to avoid the two forms of the liturgy becoming too distanced from each other, and in order to bring about their close convergence, at that time some of the friends of the old liturgy expressed their fear that this would only be a stratagem or a ruse, intended to eliminate the old liturgy finally and completely. Such anxieties and fears really must end! If the unity of faith and the oneness of the mystery appear clearly within the two forms of the celebration, that can only be a reason for everybody to rejoice and to thank the good Lord. Inasmuch as we all believe, live and act with these intentions, we can also persuade the Bishops that the presence of the old liturgy does not disturb or break the unity of

26 For the proceedings of this conference, see *Beyond the Prosaic: Renewing the Liturgical Movement*, ed. Stratford Caldecott (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

27 Ratzinger, "Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*."

28 Ratzinger, "Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*."

their diocese, but is rather a gift destined to build up the Body of Christ, of which we are all the servants.²⁹

The final appeal to trust and fidelity reflects Ratzinger's own hopeful disposition:

So, dear friends, I would like to encourage you not to lose patience – to keep trusting – and to find in the liturgy the force needed to give our witness to the Lord for our time.³⁰

Obviously, I have quoted rather extensively from this important speech of Cardinal Ratzinger, given ten years ago, in 1998, to a group of supporters of the more ancient form of the Roman-rite Mass gathered in Rome. That occasion, as mentioned earlier, marked the decennary of *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, the document by which Pope John Paul II established the Ecclesia Dei Commission to address the concerns of Catholics attached to the "old Mass."³¹ I have quoted the address at great length because I think that it encapsulates, in a clear schematic form, what Joseph Ratzinger means when he refers elsewhere to the "reform of the reform," and explains why this is, and ought to remain, a major concern. In fact, Pope John Paul's 1988 Apostolic Letter *Ecclesia Dei adflicta* itself alludes to this task of "reforming the reform" of the liturgy through a "renewed commitment" to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The first two subsections of the fifth article are worth citing *in extenso*:

a) The outcome of the movement promoted by Archbishop Lefebvre can and must be, for *all the Catholic faithful, a motive for sincere reflection concerning their own fidelity to the Church's Tradition*, authentically interpreted by the ecclesiastical Magisterium, ordinary and extraordinary, especially in the Ecumenical Councils from Nicaea to Vatican II. From this reflection all should draw *a renewed and efficacious conviction of the necessity of strengthening still more their fidelity by rejecting erroneous interpretations and arbitrary and unauthorized application of doctrine, liturgy, and discipline.*

29 Ratzinger, "Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*."

30 Ratzinger, "Ten Years of *Ecclesia Dei*."

31 On 2 July 1988, by the *motu proprio* *Ecclesia Dei adflicta*, Pope John Paul II instituted the Ecclesia Dei Commission "for the purpose of facilitating full ecclesial communion of priests, seminarians, religious communities or individuals until now linked in various ways to the Fraternity founded by Archbishop Lefebvre, who may wish to remain united to the Successor of Peter in the Catholic Church while preserving their spiritual and liturgical traditions, in light of the Protocol signed on May 5 last by Cardinal Ratzinger and Archbishop Lefebvre." *Ecclesia Dei adflicta* [ED] 6a, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [AAS] 80 (1988) 1495-98. English translation: <www.adoremus.org/EcclesiaDei.html>.

To the bishops especially it pertains, by reason of their pastoral mission, to exercise the important duty of a clear-sighted vigilance full of charity and firmness, so that this fidelity may be everywhere safeguarded.

However, it is necessary that all the Pastors and other faithful have a new awareness, *not only of the lawfulness but also the richness for the Church of a diversity of charisms, traditions of spirituality and apostolate, which also constitutes the beauty of unity in variety; of that blended "harmony" which the earthly Church raises up to Heaven under the impulse of the Holy Spirit.*

b) Moreover, I should like to remind theologians and other experts in the ecclesiastical sciences that they should feel called upon to answer in the present circumstances. Indeed, the extent and depth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council *call for a renewed commitment to deeper study in order to reveal clearly the Council's continuity with Tradition*, especially in points of doctrine which, perhaps because they are new, have not yet been well understood by some sections of the Church.³²

Later that same year, Pope John Paul reaffirmed the fundamental importance of the council's Constitution on the Liturgy, in an apostolic letter marking its twenty-fifth anniversary *Vicesimus quintus annus*,³³ which explicitly urged a "renewal in accord with Tradition," emphasizing the historic continuity of the Roman Missal, and reaffirming the "guiding principles" of the constitution. He also noted "difficulties" and "erroneous applications":

It must be recognized that the application of the liturgical reform has met with difficulties due especially to an unfavorable environment marked by a tendency to see religious practice as something of a private affair, by a certain rejection of institutions, by a decrease in the visibility of the Church in society, and by a calling into question of personal faith. It can also be supposed that the transition from simply being present, very often in a rather passive and silent way, to a fuller and more active participation has been for some people too demanding. Different and even contradictory reactions to the reform have resulted from this. Some have received the new books with a certain indifference, or without trying to understand or help others to understand the reasons for the changes; others, unfortunately,

32 John Paul II, ED 5a and b; emphasis added.

33 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter on the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Vicesimus quintus annus* [VQA], 4 December 1988, AAS 81 (1989) 897-918.

have turned back in a one-sided and exclusive way to the previous liturgical forms which some of them consider to be the sole guarantee of certainty in faith. Others have promoted outlandish innovations, departing from the norms issued by the authority of the Apostolic See or the bishops, thus disrupting the unity of the Church and the piety of the faithful, and even on occasion contradicting matters of faith.³⁴

Pope John Paul II expressly called for a stability of liturgical books and a diagnostic and corrective review of vernacular translations:

For the work of translation, as well as for the wider implications of liturgical renewal for whole countries, each episcopal conference was required to establish a national commission and ensure the collaboration of experts in the various sectors of liturgical science and pastoral practice. *The time has come to evaluate this commission, its past activity, both the positive and negative aspects, and the guidelines and the help which it has received from the episcopal conference regarding its composition and activity.*³⁵

Furthermore, by means of this letter issued in 1988, John Paul II called for genuine liturgical renewal – a “reform of the reform” as it were:

The time has come to renew that spirit which inspired the Church at the moment when the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was prepared, discussed, voted upon and promulgated, and when the first steps were taken to apply it. The seed was sown; it has known the rigors of winter, but the seed has sprouted, and become a tree. It is a matter of the organic growth of a tree becoming ever stronger the deeper it sinks its roots into the ‘soil’ of tradition.³⁶

There is, I note, a rather striking similarity between the perspective of Pope John Paul II on the liturgy and that of his chief theological collaborator, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for most of John Paul’s lengthy pontificate. These passages just cited reveal the undeniable unity of their views on the need for a thorough re-evaluation of the post-conciliar liturgical reform, and to make any necessary corrections, which themselves must grow organically from authentic tradition. As Pope John Paul stated in a 1984 address to a Congress of Liturgical Commissions in Rome, the objective of this effort is so that the “Liturgy on earth will

34 VQA 11, AAS 81 (1989) 909.

35 VQA 20, AAS 81 (1989) 916; emphasis added.

36 VQA 23, AAS 81 (1989) 918.

fuse with that of heaven where ... it will form one choir ... to praise with one voice the Father through Jesus Christ."³⁷

These same themes emerge repeatedly throughout Joseph Ratzinger's copious writings on the liturgy: in his books *The Feast of Faith* (1981), *The Ratzinger Report* (1985), *A New Song for the Lord* (1995-96), his memoir *Milestones* (1997-98), *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (1999), and *God is Near Us* (2001), as well as in countless talks and essays. This impressive list scarcely begins to exhaust his work on the sacred liturgy, all of it published, it ought to be stressed, during his energetic tenure as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

It would be simplistic to reduce Ratzinger's profound teaching on the liturgy and his call for the renewal and reform of the liturgy to merely a few concrete examples. Nevertheless, several areas immediately come to mind, most notably: the restoration of beauty and nobility to the *ars celebrandi*, particularly in liturgical music, no less than in sacred imagery and church architecture; the accurate and dignified translation of liturgical texts; the increased use of Latin during the celebration of Mass; a revival of devotion to the Eucharist in adoration; or a return to the tradition of the priest offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice *ad orientem* (liturgical east) together with, and at the head of, the people; a review of bodily posture and reverent silence as necessary forms of "active participation" of the lay faithful. About all of these matters, Joseph Ratzinger has spoken and written compellingly, often in much detail.

His views on the necessity for authentic liturgical reform surely did not change when on 24 April 2005 he became Pope Benedict XVI. In the months following the October Synod on the Eucharist that would close the Year of the Eucharist, therefore, speculation naturally began to build that Pope Benedict would soon state that no restrictions of any kind prevent the celebration of Mass according to the 1962 Missal and in particular that no priest needs the permission of his own ordinary or local bishop to do so.

In summer 2006, after a meeting with the committee of synodal chairmen (*relatores*), who presented their summary of the synod's final propositions, the Pope expressed the hope

that this text which is being drafted will be one such intervention to nourish the People of God with the food of the truth, to help them grow in truth and especially to make known the mystery of

37 John Paul II, Address to the Congress of Presidents and Secretaries of National Liturgical Commissions (27 October 1984) 6: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII/2 (1984) 1054, quoted in VQA 23, AAS 81 (1989) 918.

the Eucharist and invite them to an intense Eucharistic life.³⁸

Several months later, on the feast of the Chair of Peter, 22 February 2007, Pope Benedict released his Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission *Sacramentum caritatis*. Early in the exhortation, Benedict XVI presents the development of the eucharistic rite within the context of the continuity that marks the history of the Church herself:

If we consider the bimillenary history of God's Church, guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we can gratefully admire the orderly development of the ritual forms in which we commemorate the event of our salvation. From the varied forms of the early centuries, still resplendent in the rites of the Ancient Churches of the East, up to the spread of the Roman rite; from the clear indications of the Council of Trent and the Missal of Saint Pius V to the liturgical renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council: in every age of the Church's history the eucharistic celebration, as the source and summit of her life and mission, shines forth in the liturgical rite in all its richness and variety. ... In a particular way, the Synod Fathers acknowledged and reaffirmed the beneficial influence on the Church's life of the liturgical renewal which began with the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Synod of Bishops was able to evaluate the reception of the renewal in the years following the Council. There were many expressions of appreciation. The difficulties and even the occasional abuses which were noted, it was affirmed, cannot overshadow the benefits and the validity of the liturgical renewal, whose riches are yet to be fully explored. Concretely, the changes which the Council called for need to be understood within the overall unity of the historical development of the rite itself, without the introduction of artificial discontinuities.³⁹

Among the expressions of this historic continuity is the use of Latin, which Pope Benedict addresses, especially in the context of large-scale international gatherings:

In order to express more clearly the unity and universality of the Church, I wish to endorse the proposal made by the Synod of

38 Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the Eleventh Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 1 June 2006 (<www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060601_sinodo-vescovi_en.html>).

39 Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission *Sacramentum caritatis* (22 February 2007) 3, AAS 99 (2007) 106-07.

Bishops, in harmony with the directives of the Second Vatican Council, that, with the exception of the readings, the homily and the prayer of the faithful, it is fitting that such liturgies be celebrated in Latin. Similarly, the better-known prayers of the Church's tradition should be recited in Latin and, if possible, selections of Gregorian chant should be sung. Speaking more generally, I ask that future priests, from their time in the seminary, receive the preparation needed to understand and to celebrate Mass in Latin, and also to use Latin texts and execute Gregorian chant; nor should we forget that the faithful can be taught to recite the more common prayers in Latin, and also to sing parts of the liturgy to Gregorian chant.⁴⁰

On 7 July 2007, less than four months after the promulgation of *Sacramentum caritatis*, came the long-anticipated affirmation, in the motu proprio *Summorum pontificum*,⁴¹ that the celebration of Mass according to the older rite as provided in the 1962 Missal remains universally permissible.

In his letter to the world's bishops explaining *Summorum pontificum*, the Pope outlined his reasons for issuing the motu proprio, at the outset dismissing as "unfounded" the fear that the document would detract from the authority of Second Vatican Council, "one of whose essential decisions [was] the liturgical reform." He stressed that the use of the 1962 Missal constitutes an "extraordinary form" of liturgical celebration, that the use of both forms "is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite," and that use of the former missal "had never been juridically abrogated." Pope Benedict also observed that any fear that wider use of the 1962 Missal would lead to disarray or divisions also "strikes me as quite unfounded." Rather, the Pope expects that the two forms can be "mutually enriching":

The celebration of the Mass according to the Missal of Paul VI will be able to demonstrate, more powerfully than has been the case hitherto, the sacrality which attracts many people to the former usage. The most sure guarantee that the Missal of Paul VI can unite parish communities and be loved by them consists in its being celebrated with great reverence in harmony with the liturgical directives. This will bring out the spiritual richness and the theological depth of this Missal.⁴²

40 Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis* 62, AAS 99 (2007) 152.

41 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter on the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reforms of 1970 *Summorum pontificum* (7 July 2007), AAS 99 (2007).

42 Benedict XVI, Letter (*Epistula*) to the Bishops of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church to Present the Motu Proprio on the Use of the Roman Liturgy prior to the Reforms of 1970 *Con grande fiducia*, 7 July 2007,

The Pope's letter explains that the "positive reason" for issuing *Summorum pontificum* is to overcome divisions regarding liturgical practice (mentioning *Ecclesia Dei*), and he states emphatically:

There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place. Needless to say, in order to experience full communion, the priests of the communities adhering to the former usage cannot, as a matter of principle, exclude celebrating according to the new books. The total exclusion of the new rite would not in fact be consistent with the recognition of its value and holiness.⁴³

Pope Benedict's letter implies that an integral and important dynamic of the "reform of the reform" remains the repair, specifically through the recovery of the treasures of the Church's liturgical history, the rupture between the celebration of Mass according to the 1962 Missal and the missal revised by Pope Paul VI in 1970 and supplemented most recently by John Paul II in 2002.

THE POWER OF BEAUTY TO CONVEY TRUTH

In an address to an assembly of Communion and Liberation in August 2002, Cardinal Ratzinger focused on the power of beauty, and its necessary relationship to the truth of Christ. This beauty is to be found in the authentic heritage of liturgical music and art anchored in the Church's history and tradition, and which should help us to transcend our narrow and limited experience of the world, drawing us to the source of Truth:

Being struck and overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction. Of course we must not underrate the importance of theological reflection, of exact and precise theological thought; it remains absolutely necessary. But to move from here to disdain or to reject the impact produced by the response of the heart in the encounter with beauty as a true form of knowledge would impoverish us and dry up our faith and our theology. We must rediscover this form of knowledge; it is a pressing need of our time.... Nothing can bring us into close contact with the

AAS 99 (2007) 797.

43 Benedict XVI, *Con grande fiducia*, AAS 99 (2007) 798.

beauty of Christ Himself other than the world of beauty created by faith and light that shines out from the faces of the saints, through whom His own light becomes visible.⁴⁴

As pope, Benedict XVI focuses on God's love as the source of this light. In his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, he makes it clear that this link is essential to comprehend the meaning of the Eucharist and therefore it must profoundly inform the way we worship. Mentioning Jesus Christ as the incarnate love of God, Benedict again stresses the "co-penetration" of the Old Testament and the New Testament, wherein Christ gives flesh and blood to the concept of God's love:

His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against Himself, in which He gives Himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. ... Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through His institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. ... The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-donation. ... The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in His body and blood. The sacramental 'mysticism,' grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish."⁴⁵

At the conclusion of *Sacramentum caritatis* (94), Pope Benedict emphasizes this central meaning of our worship:

The celebration and worship of the Eucharist enable us to draw near to God's love and to persevere in that love until we are united with the Lord whom we love. The offering of our lives, our fellowship with the whole community of believers and our solidarity with all men and women are essential aspects of that *logiké latreía*, spiritual worship, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1), which transforms every aspect of our human existence, to the glory of God.⁴⁶

Even these brief quotations explain Pope Benedict's continuing insistence upon the authentic restoration of the endangered "fresco" (to return to his metaphor). It is through the Eucharist that we may be

44 Joseph Ratzinger, "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty," address to Comunione e Liberazione, August 2002.

45 Benedict XVI Encyclical on God Who is Love *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005) 13-14, AAS 98 (2006) 228-29.

46 Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis* 94, AAS 99 (2007) 178.

opened to God's love. Beauty and solemnity in the way we celebrate the liturgy, whether through expressions of music, gestures, visual art, or words, is profoundly important in order that we may at least approach an understanding of the real gift, Christ, who is the fullness of life and love. The Eucharist is the door, the entryway, through which we may encounter this overwhelming, changeless Truth, which does not conform to this world, yet penetrates our fallen and unstable world so that we may be transformed, renewed, and perfected.

"The Catholic liturgy is the liturgy of the Word made flesh – made flesh for the sake of the resurrection."⁴⁷ We do well to see, as Pope Benedict XVI so clearly sees, that whatever impedes the transmission of this Truth, this Beauty, this Love, through the divine action must be removed or re-formed. Similarly, whatever enhances it or makes it more transparent to our clouded minds must be recovered or renewed.

More than forty years ago, Father Joseph Ratzinger noted that "[t]he faith of those who are simple of heart is the most precious treasure of the Church. To serve and to live this faith is the noblest vocation in the renewal of the Church."⁴⁸ We are the beneficiaries of the faith of our fathers. The faith of our children, and our children's children, depends on each of us. We must therefore do our best to get it right.

Helen Hull Hitchcock is a cofounder of Adoremus and the editor of the Adoremus Bulletin. She is likewise the founding director for Women for Faith and Family and the editor of Voices.

47 Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 220.

48 Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 185.