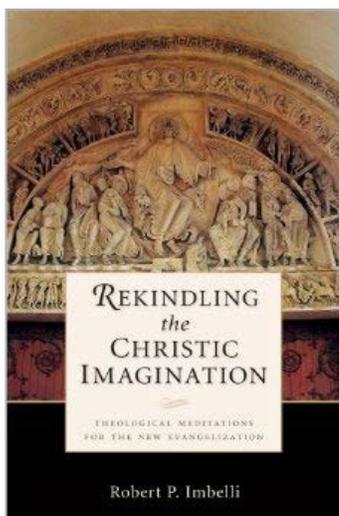


BOOKS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization

Robert P. Imbelli
Liturgical Press (2014)
152 pages, \$19.95

Partisans of the mistakenly competing narratives of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* have been known to hijack (selectively, of course) the texts produced by the Second Vatican Council in order to craft an interpretive account that supports and represents their own agenda. Not unlike Irenaeus's opponents in the late second century, who would rearrange the beautiful stones that form a mosaic of the king on the basis of their own hypothesis to craft a menacing image of something altogether different, such procrustean interpretations do no service to the Church.

Robert Imbelli, emeritus professor of theology at Boston College, has written a book beautiful to read and ponder, both literally (in its prose) and artistically (in its use of literature, music, and the arts). Recognizing the impasse of opposing *ressourcement* to *aggiornamento*, Imbelli offers instead a compelling reading of the “event” of the Second Vatican Council (following Joseph Komonchak’s insight) as including its ongoing reception, interpretation, and appropriation. Guided by what he suggests is the “creative tension” between *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* at the Council itself—creative precisely because it does not permit

the corrosive “centrifugal” pull in one direction or the other—Imbelli argues that *prima inter pares* of the four *Constitutiones* crafted at the Council must be *Dei Verbum*, which teaches the definitive revelation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Often playing second- or third-fiddle to *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* or *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (all of which are more familiar to ecclesial ears, even if never actually read), *Dei Verbum*, in Imbelli’s view, offers the hermeneutical lens for the Council itself and the various texts it produced: Jesus Christ as the definitive revelation of God. This Christic lens, offered by *Dei Verbum*, enables the proper reading of the other *Constitutions* and, in fact, all of reality.

The book’s subtitle aptly captures the spirit in which Imbelli’s work proceeds: its four chapters are indeed four “meditations”—on Jesus Christ, the Trinity, the Eucharist, and the Church—each unfolding themes found in the others, demonstrating the organic nature of the mysteries of Catholic faith. Throughout, a conversation partner and guide, so to speak, is Dante, whose “Divine Comedy is the greatest and most poetic expression of the Catholic vision of reality,” at once “intensely personal” and “audaciously cosmic in scope” (23).

While it is not uncommon to hear scholars suggest that notions of Jesus’ divinity were later reconstructions and interpretations “read back” into the Gospel narratives, Imbelli subverts this silliness by pointing to Pliny’s epistolary description of early Christian behavior offered to the emperor Trajan. The oddity of such practices as early morning singing “to Christ as to a god,” as characterized by the consummate outsider witness just how seriously, already on the cusp of the second century, Christians took this Galilean. Further, the hymn employed by the Pauline writer in Colossians (thus likely predating the letter itself) indicates the fully *cosmic* significance of the figure of Jesus Christ. In short, Jesus is not merely the greatest of prophets, or an individual who shared a deeply intimate and privileged relationship with God, but as the (Balthasarian) “concrete universal,” Christ is the center-point of all creation, time, and space, the lens through which all things are, by faith, conceived, encountered, and evaluated; Jesus is the *logos* which makes sense of and gives meaning to all things (a construal of the Johannine *Logos* favored by Pope Benedict XVI). But this Christic hermeneutic, rather than floating perilously free of any form or content, is itself normed by its distinctly kenotic shape: the self-emptying love

revealed both in the Incarnation and on the Cross is rendered actual and effective as Christians offer and participate in the Eucharist, which extends this *agape* in space and time. Thus concrete and particular events within human history *are themselves the revelation* of divine love and the human vocation as response to this love in Christ.

After reflecting on the person of Christ, Imbelli turns to the revelation of the triune God, made progressively to and through Israel, culminating in the Son who was sent by the Father, who himself imparts his Spirit to his followers. In fact, as Imbelli makes clear by the very structure of his meditation, the Way to this Trinitarian reflection is Christ, who alone makes possible a fuller understanding of the life of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. Rather than beginning with reflection on the Trinity and then moving to a consideration of the Son Incarnate, Imbelli correctly and wisely begins with Jesus, whose advent in the flesh renders the invisible God visible; in Irenaean terms, “what is visible of the Father is the Son.” Attentiveness to dogma, far from being a rigid constraint on the intellect, actually opens up vistas of understanding, for it makes accessible and “proclaims the church’s unique experience and understanding of the God of Jesus

Christ” (39). As God is revealed not as a stolid monad but as a dynamic communion of Persons, so too the human vocation becomes clearer, not as a matter of fulfilling private desires or aspirations (no matter how noble), but as being, by grace, adequated to or capacitated for the communion of knowledge and love shared by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, offered to humanity in the economy of grace; Imbelli refers to this as “Christification,” the configuration to Christ which brings one to share in his communion with the Father in the Spirit.

It is the Eucharist that is the efficacious sign of this agapic communion offered through the Incarnate One to those who by Baptism have become members of his Body. Noting that reflection on the Paschal Mystery can too often omit the Ascension or treat it as a theological afterthought, Imbelli points to the “dialectic of presence and absence” (49), the fact that sacraments simultaneously reveal and conceal; the Kingdom, fully present in Christ, is not yet fully present in us, and the author observes that this is the experience of the Christian captured so to speak, and embodied in the liturgy. Christ, more present now that he is glorified and with the Father (as Ignatius of Antioch

first averred), offers an intense and intimate communion to believers in the sacrament of the altar. The Eucharist both signifies and effects that communion for which humanity is created (whose “seeds” can be discerned whenever the utter gratuity of existence is recognized and wherever agapic love is manifested) and for which it often unreflectively longs.

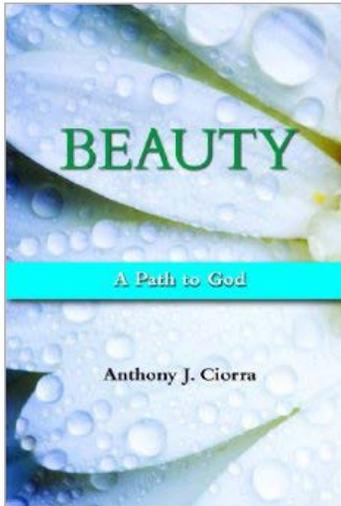
Imbelli’s meditation on the Church offers a reading of both *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* which, faithful to the hermeneutic he established, is given proper focus by *Dei Verbum*’s Christic lens. The Church’s vocation as the “universal sacrament of salvation” is the extension of Christ’s work of reconciling all things to the Father. The Church cannot exist as an inward-looking collection of individuals preening themselves about their salvation; rather, by its very nature as Christ’s Body it lives, not for itself, but for the life of the world. All grace, all vocation is gift, and as such, is meant precisely to be given away. The moment the gift becomes possession, it loses its quality as gift and ceases to bear fruit; forms of ecclesial imperialism have their origin in just such a mis-reception of the gift. The Church’s vocation can never be self-referential, much less a point of pride, but rather a source

of unceasing gratitude (Eucharist) and an impetus toward continued self-donation (*agape*) for the life of the world.

Imbelli’s very method in these meditations—drawing on art, music, literature, and the experience of the saints—reveals the central importance of imagination and hence the work’s title: the *metanoia* of the Gospels involves not merely behavioral or attitudinal change, but even more deeply the conversion of the imagination itself. One who is a new creation in Christ can come to perceive the world through the eyes of the Savior, to see as he sees and to love as he loves. All genuine and fruitful evangelization begins here.

Robert Imbelli has given us all a gift: not only is this book a pleasure to read, but it offers the reader much to consider, ponder, and meditate upon in his or her own life as a disciple.

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Beauty: A Path to God

Anthony J. Ciorra
 Paulist Press (2013)
 128 pages, \$14.95

In his short work developing a spirituality of beauty, Fr. Anthony Ciorra invites his reader into a new perspective. Instead of offering a definition of the book's main topic, he begins with the assumption that each person knows what beauty is, even if she cannot define it. In this way, he ensures that this spirituality can be developed by anyone, providing a useful tool for the New Evangelization.

Ciorra's spirituality of beauty proposes that the recognition of beauty can help us to "wake up to the presence of the divine" (5). Using examples from Scripture, he shows how our idea of beauty in art can be expanded to help us understand Christ's Incarnation and his actions. From this, he is able to show how

recognizing beauty moves us into God's presence. This is due to the Incarnation, since in it the "Word was abbreviated so the human eye and heart could be expanded to embrace beauty beyond imagination" (13). This is the underlying premise to the spirituality of beauty that Ciorra proposes. Simply put, Christ became man to teach us to see beauty beyond the obvious: to see the beauty in the human condition. In the end, it is being able to recognize this beauty in our daily lives that will enable us to develop spiritually, bringing us closer to God.

In developing this spirituality, Ciorra focuses on three particular aspects of the human condition as pivotal: the present moment, forgiveness, and gratitude. Perhaps the simplest, and also the most difficult to understand, is his call to see the beauty of the present moment. In pointing out how the human being is continually tempted to focus on either the past or the future, rather than appreciating the moment he is given, Ciorra highlights a deep problem of modern times. In his attempt to combat this attitude, Ciorra highlights Jean Pierre de Causaude's classic ideas in *Spiritual Abandonment*, asking modern man to "be satisfied with the present moment," which is to "relish and adore the divine will

moving through all we have to do" (35). In doing so, modern man can find his true self and appreciate who he is, rather than being caught up in the trap of always trying to be someone different.

After explaining this concept, Ciorra turns to give concrete examples of how appreciating beauty in the present moment can become a spiritual practice. He uses examples from art to show how basic raw materials become "powerful expressions of the spirit" (44). Drawing a parallel to ordinary life, where the raw material of an encounter with another person can be either an inconsequential happenstance or a window into the soul of another creation of God, Ciorra gives his reader important tools for putting this spirituality into practice. Thus he avoids the risk of presenting what could have essentially been a collection of interesting recycled material and instead provides a highly valuable tool for anyone who wishes to make progress in the spiritual life.

Ciorra then turns to present the actions of forgiveness and gratitude as ways a person can bring beauty into her life. He points out how through a process of forgiving oneself and others, one can move from brokenness, anger, and resentment to a place of peace and unity with others. In doing so, the one forgiving

brings beauty into her life that can be appreciated individually and collectively. Ciorra again does an excellent job of weaving in concrete examples and practical advice to show how forgiveness can bring about beauty, encouraging his reader to make this spirituality a reality in her own life, rather than leaving it as an abstract concept.

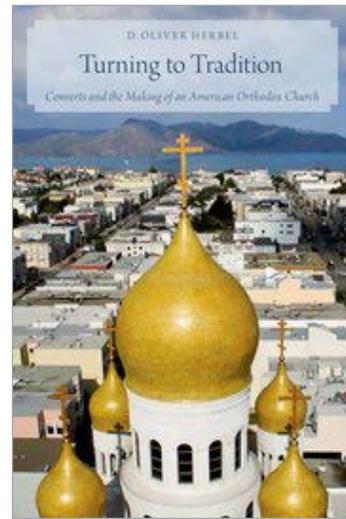
In speaking of gratitude as a final spiritual practice related to the appreciation of beauty, Ciorra shows how gratitude for something naturally leads to praise of that thing. Encouraging everyone to make “a decision” (86) to be grateful, Ciorra notes that this attitude “opens the door to seeing beauty in all things” (90). In this way, a person’s initial move to notice the beauty in his life can eventually move him to see the Source of all beauty.

After examining these practices, Ciorra shows his wisdom and awareness of modern times: he considers the power of darkness. Up until this point, much of what he has said seems simple enough to put into practice, especially when life is going as it should. However, in pausing to consider how the greatest works of beauty often come out of a struggle with darkness, Ciorra extends his spirituality to apply to all people, no matter the difficulties they face. In recognizing that “creative energies emerge in

the midst of darkness when you are forced to rely on a power beyond yourself” (105), Ciorra admits that this spirituality is dependent upon God, who always reveals himself to those who seek him. Though Ciorra does again provide helpful advice for those who are struggling with the darkness, this spirituality ultimately hinges on the decision to surrender to God and seeing the beauty in doing so.

In choosing to highlight the idea of beauty as a path to God, Ciorra shows his understanding of modern culture. Though this book is in many ways a simple reminder of the ideas that have been developed before his time, Ciorra outlines a spirituality that will appeal to the mind of modern man. Through his practical advice and suggestions for further reflection, Ciorra ensures that the transition is made from nice idea to spiritual practice. With this book, he provides a great tool for anyone just beginning their spiritual journey or wishing to go beyond a superficial faith, as he guides his reader to move from her common life experiences to seeing the true Beauty that underlies all creation.

*Review by Teresa Hodgins, M.T.S.,
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Turning to Tradition: Converts and the Making of An American Orthodox Church

D. Oliver Herbel
Oxford University Press (2014)
256 pages, \$27.95

In *Turning to Tradition*, Fr. D. Oliver Herbel investigates the phenomenon of conversion to Orthodoxy in America by narrating the stories of four prominent converts. Herbel looks at these figures against the backdrop of American restorationism (“those movements that seek to restore, or re-embody, an ancient order” [159 n.3]), and the American “tradition of change,” or “anti-traditional tradition” (3). For Herbel, these four converts were exemplars since they established patterns of conversion for others (2, 6–7). By examining these four, Herbel investigates “how through this turn to tradition converts to Orthodoxy are making what may seem to be a

very un-American conclusion (the Eastern Orthodox tradition [*sic*] in a very American way (by means of restorationism)” (10).

Herbel’s first example is Fr. Alexis Toth, a former Greek Catholic priest who came to the United States in 1889 in order to serve Greek Catholic communities in Minneapolis. After he arrived, Archbishop John Ireland, the Roman Catholic bishop who was to oversee his activities, refused to recognize Toth’s ministry because he was a widower. This incident helped to lead Toth to convert to Orthodoxy, thus bringing to fruition a decision that he had been considering even before his arrival in the U.S. (26–27). His conversion in turn began a movement within Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant communities that spread rapidly and led many Greek Catholics into Orthodox jurisdictions (28). But, Herbel notes, Toth’s conversion was not primarily *negative* (a conversion away from Catholicism in light of being rejected by Ireland), but rather *positive* in character: it was above all a matter of reclaiming his forebears’ Orthodox tradition and theology (37ff, 58–59).

Herbel’s second exemplar is Fr. Raphael Morgan, “a black Jamaican immigrant” to America who was ordained as a priest in Constantinople in 1907 (61). Like

Toth, Morgan’s conversion to Orthodoxy was brought about, in part, because of restorationist tendencies (cf. 62). In his Protestant Episcopal tradition, Morgan encountered issues of racism that, he thought, had to be addressed theologically (65). Eventually, Morgan saw in Orthodoxy a tradition that did so successfully (67–70). During a visit to Russia, Morgan experienced something that he “had not experienced in America,” namely, “a church that truly loved him” (70). Upon returning to the U.S., he converted to Orthodoxy through the Greek Orthodox Church (71–72). For him, Orthodoxy was the true religion because it was “untainted, as even prior, to [*sic*] the racially segregated Christianity of the West” (76). Morgan’s conversion in turn started a movement within the African American community (76–83), which eventually led to the development of Orthodox missions in Africa.

The third exemplar is Fr. Moses Berry, whose conversion experience began when he was incarcerated and saw guards beating a man senseless (85). Like Morgan’s, Berry’s conversion included concern for issues of race. Predominant in his decision, however, was the desire for a form of Christianity that preserved its “otherworldly”

character, and that continued the tradition of the early (specifically, the Egyptian) Church (86). For Berry, the fundamental failure of African American Christianity was that it lost focus on the otherworldly nature of Christianity (88). Therefore, in the mid-1970s Berry joined an organization with Orthodox tendencies that, he believed, operated beyond the racial divisions felt elsewhere in Christianity (88–92). Eventually, Berry felt the tension between the officially recognized Orthodox Churches and his own non-canonical group too overwhelming, so he entered into a canonical jurisdiction in 2000 and started the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black.

The fourth exemplar comprises both a person and a movement: Fr. Peter Gillquist and the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC). Chapters four and five together narrate the story of the largest mass movement of evangelical Christians into Orthodoxy—and for some, back out again. The movement toward the formation of the EOC began in the 1970s and ’80s when several individuals associated with the Campus Crusade movement started to question the legitimacy of parachurch ministries (104). They wanted instead the Church of the New Testament (106), and a more liturgical form of worship

(110), even though their own use of Orthodox forms of worship was syncretistic (111–17). Although hoping that their EOC would eventually be acknowledged as a true Orthodox church (121), Gillquist and others eventually realized that this recognition would never be given. Therefore, they instead moved in the direction of converting to Orthodoxy outright, eventually being received *en masse* in the Antiochian Orthodox Church (123–29).

The relationship between the EOC and mainstream Orthodoxy, however, soon became rocky. Even after joining the Antiochian Archdiocese, the EOC preserved certain elements of its identity in coming into Orthodoxy, such as evangelical fervor (130–32). Although this fervor was not bad, of course, it “went hand-in-hand with the other anti-traditional elements of the EOC” (132), and thus contributed to the development of tension. A more definite break took place between the former EOC and the Antiochian Orthodox Church over the Joseph Allen affair. In brief: the clergy serving in churches with many former EOC members and clergy signed a letter against the Antiochian Archdiocese’s leader, Metropolitan Philip, in which they expressed their concern that Allen was allowed to exercise

priestly functions, despite the fact that he was remarried after ordination to a divorced woman whom he had counseled through her divorce (133–37). The situation provoked a crisis of identity for the former EOC leaders because they had become Orthodox, in part, over issues such as obedience to church leaders and a desire to inculcate a more moralistic form of Christianity (136–37). This incident seemingly brought these two issues into opposition. Soon thereafter the Ben Lomond crisis developed. This new incident raised numerous issues about differences of liturgical praxis between those formerly associated with the EOC and the larger Antiochian Archdiocese. These and other differences resulted in a further breakdown in relations, and eventually in the laicization of a number of Ben Lomond’s clergy (138–43). For Herbel, the Ben Lomond crisis shows that, with respect to issues like obedience to leaders and efforts “to foster a strict Christian moral life” (142), “the prior bonds of authority remained stronger” for the former EOC members (143).

Overall, Herbel’s study marks an interesting attempt to provide a new perspective on conversion to Orthodoxy in its American context by showing how a more

general American tendency toward restorationism helps us to understand certain common features among movements that otherwise seem quite different and difficult to explain as historical phenomena. There are, however, several issues with the work in applying this theory. For example, one might ask how paradigmatic Morgan’s conversion to Orthodoxy was, especially when considered in comparison with Toth’s conversion. Whereas the latter had a formative influence on the development of American Orthodoxy, the long-term effects of the former have, at least to my limited knowledge of Orthodox parish life, largely fizzled out today. I would also question some of the conclusions that Herbel makes about the case of the EOC. If it is true on the one hand that the response of the former EOC members to the Joseph Allen affair “was directly related to their journey grounded in the anti-traditional tradition” (143) of American religious experience, it is probably more accurate to say that their reversion had more to do with their absolute outrage over a situation that was uncanonical and unethical to an extreme degree. Finally, there are issues with some of the book’s historical narrative. The general overview of “Orthodox Christianity as Context” (17–24) leaves much to be desired. But even

if this oversight can be forgiven in light of its necessary generality, Herbel's comment, for example, that the inclusion of Josaphat in the service of the preparation of bread and wine in the Greek Catholic liturgy implied that "his actions and uniatism are on par with the actions and doctrinal writings of St. Basil the Great" (46) is simply fallacious. Still, the monograph has some real substance to it and brings together synthetically the stories of a number of prominent American Orthodox Christians.

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