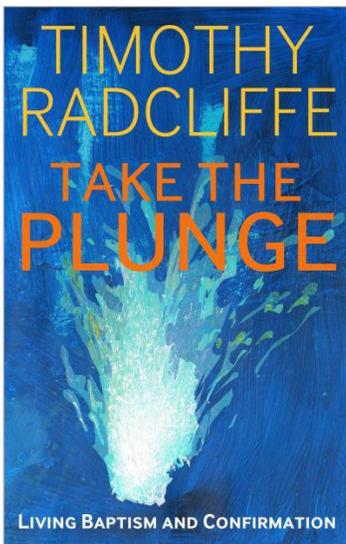


BOOKS FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

BY TIMOTHY P. O'MALLEY, PH.D.



Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation by Timothy Radcliffe

New York
Bloomsbury Press, 2012

Mystagogy (if it is practiced at all), in the post-conciliar era, has at times been dedicated exclusively to promoting a deeper understanding

of the rites of initiation performed at the Easter Vigil. While such an approach is intrinsic to the R.C.I.A., mystagogical catechesis is often lacking for those Catholics who are baptized in their infancy (that is, most of us). Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P.'s *Take the Plunge* is, in some ways, a response to the dearth of mystagogical texts on the sacraments of baptism and confirmation in Catholic liturgical spirituality. Simultaneously, Radcliffe's robust liturgical spirituality is a model for a renewed approach to mystagogy in the life of the Church.

In some ways, the structure of *Take the Plunge* is traditional to the art of mystagogical catechesis.

The seventeen chapters of the text move slowly through the rite of baptism and confirmation,

presuming infant initiation as the pastoral norm. While there has been a renaissance in recent years in the liturgical and theological normativity of the rite of infant initiation (see Kimberly Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement: Sacramental Participation in the Trinitarian Mystery*), Fr. Radcliffe's reflections on this rite are a further contribution to assisting Christians to reflect more deeply upon their own experience of infant initiation. In fact, infant initiation is viewed positively as a response to an individualism that operates in much present religious discourse. Fr. Radcliffe writes in his reflection upon the questions directed to parents at the beginning of the rite:

It is often asserted that faith is only authentic if it is grasped in a mature, adult

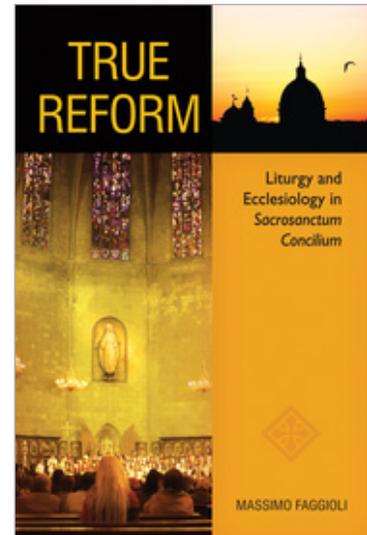
and individual way. In some traditions, the crucial moment is when you confess Jesus Christ to be your personal saviour. But our appropriation of our faith may take the form of innumerable small decisions to walk in the light of the gospel. My acceptance of divine life may be as gradual and imperceptible as my acceptance of my human life, beginning long before I am mature or adult. My mother was raised in a profoundly Christian home. She never had, to my knowledge, a Damascus experience. That did not make her faith inauthentic. Her ‘Yes’ to God consolidated slowly as she grew in the free atmosphere of a Christian home, beginning even before she could speak a word (11).

Consistently throughout *Take the Plunge*, one’s theological imagination is enriched as poetry, literature, the Scriptures, the experience of liturgical rites shapes one’s understanding of the sacrament as carried out in the context of the modern world.

And this use of poetry and literature is not accidental. Mystagogy is not simply our personal reflection upon the experience of the rites; rather, it

is coming to see how the sorrows and joys of the human condition are taken up and transfigured in the context of the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. The evocative language, the stories interspersed throughout the book, demonstrate the bodily and historical nature of baptism in our lives. Simultaneously, the words and gestures of the rites of initiation through the contemplative eye of Fr. Radcliffe become signs, revealing the depths of divine love to the human person, an invitation to join with the saints in a common pilgrimage toward holiness of life. Fr. Radcliffe, in particular, meditates upon the sacrament of confirmation, not simply as a historical anomaly in which the rite of baptism and confirmation are separated, but as the sacrament of maturity, of growth into the virtues of the saints themselves (261).

Take the Plunge should be required reading for all those involved in preparing Christians for initiation; for confirmation students as they move toward receiving the sacrament; for parents of newly-baptized infants; for preachers seeking to practice mystagogy throughout the liturgical year; and for all those Christians in the world whose lives have received a radical re-orientation through the sacramental life of the Church.



True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium by Massimo Faggioli

Collegetown, MN
The Liturgical Press, 2012

In the subsequent years since the Second Vatican Council, interpretations of the four major constitutions have tended to isolate theological treatments of the Church to either *Lumen Gentium* (the Constitution on the Church) or *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). Such an approach, as Massimo Faggioli (an assistant professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul) ably argues, fails to acknowledge the centrality of ecclesiology in the liturgical document *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Faggioli writes, “only a hermeneutic based on the liturgy

and the Eucharist, as developed in the liturgical constitution, can preserve the riches of the overall ecclesiology of Vatican II without getting lost in the technicalities of a ‘theological jurisprudence’” (16). *Sacrosanctum Concilium* makes available to the Church a Eucharistic ecclesiology, one that manifests the true genius of the Second Vatican Council.

Faggioli’s unfolding of this argument is a work of solid scholarship, attentive to a vast array of Italian, English, German, and French literature. According to Faggioli, the liturgical reforms enacted by the Council are not simply aesthetic but rather a return to liturgical sources intended “to reset the cultural and ideological garment of Catholicism in the modern world in order to start over from the core essence of Christianity, closer to the ancient liturgical traditions of the Eastern Churches and of the Roman Church” (57). *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was fundamentally a “conservative” document, restoring “the simplicity and the splendor of the rites on the basis of a more biblical set of readings and a patristic concept of celebration” (47). The reforms are not antiquarian but instead are an exercise in listening to the Fathers, one that influences the present work of liturgical renewal.

The liturgical reforms enacted by the liturgical constitution also offered a specific theology of the Church. Faggioli comments:

It is therefore clear that the ecclesiology of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not contradict but ushers in and anticipates the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II as a pillar of the liturgical reform: the Church as a communion of life thanks to the grace, the expression of the communion in the life of the Trinity; the power of the grace, received in faith and through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that unifies Christians as the people of God and Mystical Body of Christ; a people of God, walking toward the kingdom of God, but also active witnesses of Christ in the world, visible in its ecclesial institutions and led by the bishops in the local churches and the pope (84-85).

Importantly, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* does not succumb to a stark differentiation between a “people of God” and “mystical Body” ecclesiology, but rather presents a vision of the Church as a sacrament of Christ’s own Eucharistic love for the life of the world, especially within the context of the local Church. Such

a liturgical ecclesiology affects the Church’s own understanding of her relationship to the world, ecumenism, and Judaism itself (chapter 3).

Therefore (as Faggioli concludes) the recent arguments against the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council are not simply aesthetic in structure but an implicit dismissal of the ecclesiology enacted by the Council (chapters 4 and 5 in particular). In some sense, Faggioli is correct. The liturgical rites renewed by the Second Vatican Council offer a performed vision of the Church’s ecclesiology, including “a new life for lay ministers in the Church, a new discovery of the liturgical assembly, concelebration as a sign of unity in the priesthood, the new role for the Word of God in the eucharistic celebration” (143). Those that argue for a reform of the reform, understood as an exclusive restoration of the 1963 Missal of John XXIII at the expense of the Missal of Paul VI, are inattentive to the ecclesiology implicit in the reformed rites. Revisionist narratives of the Council (such as found in Nicola Bux’s *Benedict XVI’s Reform: The Liturgy Between Innovation and Tradition*) ignore the genuine ecclesial renewal that has occurred in light of the liturgical

rites promulgated through the Second Vatican Council. And such revisionists often employ a naïve use of history itself, whereby the purpose of liturgical reform is to “re-enact” what has occurred in the past, rather than to think with the Fathers about how liturgical prayer can function in the present (see John Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics*, 135).

Yet, is it really the case that many of those attracted to the 1963 Missal of John XVIII (the extraordinary form) are dismissive of the ecclesiology brought about by the Second Vatican Council? Or is it not often true that those fascinated by “the reform of the reform” are disenchanted with certain features of the implementation of the reform itself? Liturgical rites and music, which focus almost exclusively upon the community gathered in a particular space but are blind to the interrupting and transcendent presence of the Triune God. Liturgical spaces that look more like gymnasiums than places of worship. A desperate fear of silence in liturgy, in addition to preaching that focuses almost exclusively upon the priest’s own narrative at the expense of the Gospel. A wide swath of undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame (whose liturgical sensibilities ranged from the now classical repertoire of folk music to

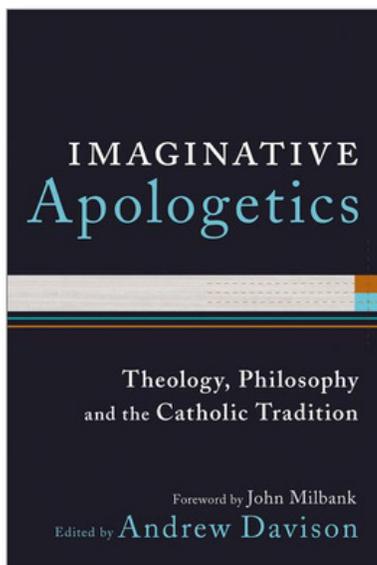
Renaissance polyphony) recently expressed to me the fear that Eucharistic celebrations in the dorm are so centered upon the community, upon entertaining music, upon the charism of the priest, upon a sign of peace that lasts ten minutes, that students have grown forgetful about the remarkable encounter with Christ that takes place in receiving the Eucharist itself. Remarkings upon this phenomenon, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) notes:

True liturgical education cannot consist in learning and experimenting with external activities. Instead one must be led toward the essential *actio* that makes the liturgy what it is, toward the transforming power of God, who wants, through what happens in the liturgy, to transform us and the world” (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 175).

I have found that undergraduates in particular, who begin to attend the extraordinary form of the Eucharist, do not do so out of a disdain for local councils of bishops, for lay forms of ministry, but rather because they experience within the extraordinary form “the transforming power of God”. Is not such diversity of liturgical rites itself a consequence of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican

Council? If the extraordinary form of the Eucharist is practiced in a different theological and cultural environment, will it necessarily communicate the same theological vision to the participant as it once did? These are questions which are not treated by Faggioli.

Thus, Faggioli’s work is important for discerning the subtle and theologically pivotal function of the Church in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, as well as the manner in which the ecclesiology of this document comes to inform later conciliar developments. Simultaneously, it is an articulate, clear response to those that seek to reject the liturgical renewal of the Council as inauthentic, antiquarian, and modernist. Nonetheless, the work is not always attentive to the various gradations of liturgical critique, and the ecclesiological consequences of these concerns. Despite this gap, Faggioli’s text is a must read for all those seeking a deeper understanding of the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical renewal of the Church.



**Imaginative Apologetics:
Theology, Philosophy, and the
Catholic Tradition**
edited by Andrew Davison

Grand Rapids, MI
Baker, 2012

Often when Catholics speak about apologetics, they mean a series of rational arguments intended to buttress faith claims to a world that is incapable of accepting the particularities of Catholic faith at face value. While there is undoubtedly a rational aspect of the art of apologetics, *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy, and the Catholic Tradition* outlines a more substantive, culturally engaged, and theologically sophisticated form of apologetics, one essential to the Church's work of the New Evangelization. John Hughes, providing the first essay in the collection, writes:

Christian faith can articulate itself only through an engagement with culture. All God-talk, from formal theology, to the liturgical proclamation of the Word, to the conversations in pubs and cafes, should be apologetic; not in the sense of establishing common neutral foundations for faith, but in setting forth the Christian faith in a way that engages with, criticizes and responds to the other views that are current in our world, and that is attractive and persuasive in itself (10-11).

The project of a culturally sensitive, theologically suasive apologetics is the ribbon that connects each of the essays in this collection. Andrew Davison contributes an essay discerning how Christianity elevates and transfigures human reason, through engagement with the patterns of thought and practices in the Christian community. Alison Milbank situates the imagination in apologetics as that faculty of the human person that awakens her to a religious sensibility, to the wonder proposed by the mysteries of Christian faith. Graham Ward proposes a process of cultural interpretation, intrinsic to the

work of apologetics, one that analyzes both popular and intellectual culture as "...systems of interpretable signs, gestures, and behaviours..." (118). Each essay in the volume enables the catechist or preacher to perceive anew how "apologetics" as the shaping of a world view is intrinsic to cultivating Christian faith in a postmodern, post-Christian context.

What makes the volume particularly attractive, beyond the intelligent and clear writing of the authors, is the extensive bibliography provided at the end of the text. Professors looking to teach courses in apologetics would do far worse than beginning with this bibliography, assigning students foundational works, such as Henri deLubac's *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* or Dorothy L. Sayers' *Creed or Chaos*. Through this engagement with an imaginative, affective, and reasonable apologetics, one may begin to discern how catechesis in the present is more than an intellectual persuasion toward the particularities of Christian doctrine; it is an act of wooing the imagination to sense the extraordinary gift offered to what it means to be human in the doctrines and practices of Christian faith.