

Marini's book on liturgy: The future of the liturgy is the future of Christianity

John L. Allen Jr. | Dec. 14, 2007 All Things Catholic

When I'm on the lecture circuit, there's a story I like to tell to illustrate the sometimes surprising diversity inside the Vatican. It's set in the summer of 2002, when Pope John Paul II was in Mexico City to canonize Juan Diego, the Aztec visionary in the Our Lady of Guadalupe devotion.

At the moment in the canonization Mass when John Paul read out the Latin formula declaring Juan Diego a saint, pandemonium broke out in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Confetti fell from the ceiling, drums beat and horns blared, and a knot of indigenous dancers began to gyrate down a catwalk. Inside, it felt like Michael Jordan had just hit the winning shot in Game Seven of the NBA Finals; an American TV correspondent standing next to me, who happens to be Jewish, shouted in my ear, "If they did it this way every Sunday, even I would show up!"

The next day, when John Paul beatified two indigenous martyrs, the atmosphere was equally electric. Once again, confetti fell, music rang out, and native dancers did their thing. The dancers in this case were Zapotec Indians from the State of Oaxaca, but there was a notable difference from the day before. In their midst was an elderly female shaman carrying a cluster of burning herbs. She performed a purification ritual known as a *limpia*, believed to drive off evil spirits. The shaman ritualistically brushed the herbs first on Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, and then on John Paul II himself.

In effect, the shaman performed an exorcism on the pope.

Watching this surreal scene play out, I couldn't help but wonder what the personnel in the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the Vatican office responsible for policing the liturgical rules, were thinking. I took out my cell phone and dialed the number of a friend who, at the time, worked in the congregation. I asked if he had seen the ceremony on Vatican TV, which he had, and then I asked for the reaction in the office.

Summoning his deepest baritone, the official thundered back a three-word reply: "Marini must go!"

The reference was to Archbishop Piero Marini, at the time the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations -- in other words, the pope's personal liturgist. Marini was responsible for organizing liturgical events presided over by the pope, whether in Rome or on the road, and hence he got either the blame or the credit, depending upon one's point of view, when something pushed the envelope -- such as the exorcism in Mexico City, or the scantily clad Pacific islanders who danced for the pope in St. Peter's Basilica during the opening of the 1998 Synod for Oceania.

Marini is regarded as perhaps the leading advocate of progressive reform in Catholic liturgy, which has long

made him a bane of the church's traditional wing. He believes deeply in the hallmarks of the reform movement: active participation by the faithful, decision-making by bishops' conferences and local churches rather than centralized Roman control, and "inculturation," allowing the rites of the church to reflect the idiom and traditions of local cultures. (That was the logic by which Marini approved the exorcism in Mexico City -- that this indigenous purification rite could be infused with a Christian significance.)

My Vatican friend's disapproval notwithstanding, Marini did not go. Appointed to the post by John Paul in 1987, he remained with the pope until the very end in April 2005, and held the same position for the first two and a half years of Benedict XVI's pontificate. Over those 20 years, Marini was more or less joined to the pope's hip whenever he appeared in public; the Italian state TV service RAI estimates that Marini's face has been seen by more people around the world than virtually any other living figure, even if the vast majority of those viewers have no idea who he is.

In October, Marini stepped down as Master of Ceremonies to become President of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses.

It sometimes struck outside observers as incongruous that John Paul appointed fairly hard-nosed traditionalists to the Congregation for Worship, yet kept at his side a liturgist who clearly was not on the same wavelength. In fact, however, this was a characteristic John Paul touch. He made Cardinal Agostino Casaroli his Secretary of State in 1979, even though Casaroli did not always see eye-to-eye with the pope on relations with the Soviet bloc, and he appointed both Joseph Ratzinger to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Walter Kasper to the Council for Promoting Christian Unity, despite the fact that those two eminent German theologians clashed on some important issues. (Notably, Kasper has remained in that position after Ratzinger became Benedict XVI.)

What critics might see as incoherence, John Paul seemed to regard as creative tension. To some extent, of course, all popes govern this way, since they are elected not to push the agenda of one ideological faction or another, but to be the supreme pastor of the entire church. As John XXIII memorably put it, "I have to be the pope both of those with their foot on the brake, and those with their foot on the gas."

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All this by way of introducing Marini's new book, *A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of the Liturgical Renewal* (published by Liturgical Press). I'm in London today for the book's first formal presentation, which took place in the Throne Room of the residence of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster.

Marini's book tells the story of the Consilium, the body created during Vatican II to oversee the implementation of the council's decree on liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The Consilium was always an anomaly in the Vatican: it had no juridical authority of its own, yet at the peak of its influence it enjoyed virtually unchallenged sway over liturgical policy; it was led by a wide international assortment of bishops and liturgical experts, most of them not part of the Roman Curia; and it consulted widely with bishops' conferences, national liturgical organizations and publishers of liturgical texts, usually backing their views over opposition from the dicasteries of the Vatican. (Historians will especially appreciate the way Marini lifts the veil on behind-the-scenes tussles between the Consilium and the Congregation for Rites, at the time the official organ of liturgical policy in the Vatican, which had been established in the 16th century to oversee implementation of the liturgy approved by the Council of Trent.)

The Consilium's crowning achievement was the *Novus Ordo*, the new Mass, issued by Pope Paul VI in 1969 to replace the Tridentine rite codified five centuries earlier as the normal way Catholics worship.

Based on a manuscript written by Marini some years ago in Italian, *A Challenging Reform* is edited by a

triumvirate of English-speaking liturgists, as it happens all Americans: Jesuit Fr. Keith Pecklers, Viatorian Fr. Mark Francis, and John Page, former executive secretary of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy. It carries endorsements from several figures regarded as leading lights among Catholic progressives, including Cardinal Godfried Danneels of Brussels, emeritus Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco, and Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, former Master General of the Dominicans. Reflecting Marini's ecumenical thrust, the book also has blurbs from Anglican Bishop David Stancliffe and Geoffrey Wainright of Duke University, a Methodist liturgical theologian and co-chair of the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue.

Marini served as personal secretary of Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, the man who spearheaded Vatican II's liturgical reform, and in some ways Marini's book is intended as a supplement to Bugnini's monumental work *The Reform of the Liturgy: 1948-1975*. (It's a credit to American editing that Marini's book does not resemble Bugnini's in at least one respect -- verbosity. *The Reform of the Liturgy* weighed in at 976 pages, and Marini's original manuscript ran to over 600. Now, even with appendices, it's a crisp 205.)

Marini makes no effort to hide his sympathies. From the start, his is a tale of courageous and resourceful reformers, particularly Bugnini and Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro of Bologna, struggling against an intransigent Roman Curia determined to defend its own power as well as the liturgical patrimony of Trent. In the early phases, from 1964 to 1975, Marini suggests, the Consilium and Bugnini had the strong support of Pope Paul VI, allowing reform to move forward at breakneck speed by ecclesial standards. Later Paul VI soured on Bugnini, whom even Marini describes as driven by "single-mindedness, even stubbornness," shipping him off to Iran as the papal nuncio in 1975. That same year Pope Paul also restructured the Congregation for Divine Worship, born from the Consilium in 1969, putting it more in line with traditional Vatican mentalities and procedures.

Reading Marini's account is a reminder both of how much things have changed, and how much they've stayed the same. Marini chronicles major rows in the early years over concelebration and communion under both species, by now settled questions. Today's hot-button liturgical issue, the fidelity of vernacular translations to the Latin originals, wasn't really on the radar screen. The debate was over the wisdom, and the extent, of the vernacular itself.

On the other hand, then as now, ferocious battles raged over power -- whether the primary decisions about liturgical policy should be made on the local level, by bishops' conferences and mixed commissions from various countries sharing a common language, or whether the important choices should be made in Rome. The triggering incident that led to Bugnini's downfall concerned just this point; he was in favor of allowing the Belgian and Dutch bishops to approve their own Eucharistic prayers, which was a bridge too far even for some of the reform-minded officials in the Vatican.

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Clearly disenchanted with the direction of recent Vatican liturgical policy, Marini calls Bugnini's exile in 1975 "one of the first signs of a tendency to return to a preconciliar mindset that has for years now characterized the Curia's approach." While Marini does not quite suggest that the clock has been rolled back, he charges that the contributions of Vatican II "seem to be increasingly questioned."

It's this aspect of the book that has led some to read it as an attack on the liturgical philosophy of Pope Benedict XVI. English Catholic journalist Damian Thompson went so far in a recent blog entry as to assert that "Marini's book sticks two fingers up to the pope," quoting an unnamed source, identified as "one of Benedict's top advisors," to the effect that the book "is part of a campaign against the pope."

Other Catholic bloggers in England have been equally acerbic, with one asserting that by hosting the event, Murphy-O'Connor is "fostering/promoting a media revolt," and another charging that Marini's decision to publish the book so soon after he left office "smacks of Cherie Blair cashing in on having been the prime

minister's wife.?

Quite probably, Thompson and other denizens of the blogosphere associate Marini with opposition to Benedict XVI's July *motu proprio* widening permission for celebration of the Tridentine rite that Bugnini and the Consilium labored so mightily to replace. Marini obviously views the new Mass as a significant improvement. "For the first time in the history of the church," he writes, "we have a liturgy today which, rather than being an expression of a particular church, responds to the concept of the church universal."

In fact, however, Marini's book is mute about the *motu proprio* or any other move by Benedict XVI, who isn't even mentioned since the account ends in 1980. If there is a bad guy in Marini's tale, it's not any given pope but the Curia itself. (One could fairly point out that Marini himself has been part of that world for his entire priestly career, suggesting that his characterization of "the Curia" *tout court* may be overly sweeping, but that's another subject.)

More specifically, Marini's book revives the turf wars between the Consilium and the Congregation for Rites, which crystallized the tension between liturgical reformers and conservatives during, and immediately after, Vatican II. In this rivalry, Marini, more than most, grasps that all four popes of the post-Vatican II period -- Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, and now Benedict XVI -- have never been completely identified with either side. For all of Paul's sympathy for the reformers, he's the pope who sent Bugnini packing; and for all of Benedict's traditionalism, he kept Marini by his side much longer than most observers expected.

The \$64,000 question left hanging by *A Challenging Reform* -- and one which is unfair to expect Marini to have answered, given the limited historical scope of the book -- is whether the way forward has to lie in one of these perspectives extinguishing the other, or whether it might not be "well, more catholic" to seek some new way to embrace both.

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A few notes from today's presentation at the Archbishop's House in Westminster, which was attended by a number of ecclesiastical dignitaries, including the papal nuncio in Great Britain, Archbishop Faustino Sainz Muñoz, as well as a personal representative of the (Anglican) Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds, chairman of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, the body responsible for translating liturgical texts into English, was on hand, along with Msgr. Bruce Harbert, executive secretary of ICEL.

Marini was welcomed by Murphy-O'Connor, who warmly praised Marini for the "meticulous care and great reverence" with which he organized papal liturgies over 20 years of service to both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In particular, Murphy-O'Connor recalled Marini's central role in organizing the rites surrounding the death of John Paul II, especially the funeral Mass.

"One of the perks of being a cardinal is electing a pope," Murphy-O'Connor said. "Those were wonderful days in Rome, especially for the cardinals, and I enjoyed it immensely." With his trademark wry sense of humor, Murphy-O'Connor added: "All the cardinals were treated with enormous respect in the Vatican -- you know, just in case!"

The funeral Mass that Marini put together, Murphy-O'Connor said, was the highlight of that period.

"So many people told me later that they were riveted to their televisions during the ceremonies," he said. In fact, Murphy-O'Connor said, not long afterwards, no less a figure than England's Prince Philip made a point of telling him how impressive he had found the experience.

Perhaps aware of the rumblings surrounding Marini's book, Murphy-O'Connor made a point of praising Marini's utter devotion to the Holy See, and his clear devotion to both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. He said both popes had recognized Archbishop Marini in the very fullest way.

Speaking in English, Marini said that recalling the story of the Consilium and the first wave of liturgical reform after Vatican II can shed light on today's liturgical debates.

Almost all the issues of the past remain issues today, Marini said, citing in particular tensions between conservation and progress, and between the center and the periphery. He described his book as an invitation to look to the future, to take up with enthusiasm the path traced by the council.

Marini said that four historical factors made the results achieved by the Consilium possible:

- The presence of the council fathers in Rome during the first two years of implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Vatican II's constitution on liturgy. The bishops themselves, he said, were the first guarantors of reform.
- The personal support of Pope Paul VI
- The rapid emergence of a network of competent scholars, led by Lercaro and Bugnini

The Consilium itself, a new office, international in character and working outside the norms of the Roman Curia, which was well-suited to the work of reform.

As the central figures from Vatican II pass from the scene, Marini said, it is important for the church to retain and renew the spirit that gave rise to the liturgical movement, and that inspired the council fathers to approve the constitution on the liturgy as the first fruit of that great grace of the 20th century which was the Second Vatican Council.

The council, Marini said, had four precise goals:

- Offering renewed vigor for Christian living
- Adapting ecclesial structures to meet the needs of the time
- Promoting the unity of all Christians
- Strengthening the church's mission of extending its embrace to all humanity

The liturgical reform was not intended or executed as merely a reform of certain rites, Marini argued, but as the basis and inspiration for the aims the council set.

The goal of the liturgy is none other than the goal of the church, he said, and the future of the liturgy is the future of Christianity and Christian life.

Marini said that the theological and pastoral principles at the heart of Vatican II remain perennially valid, and ended with an almost lyrical note: The Holy Spirit that inspired the liturgical movement and the council fathers still encircles us like a sacred cloud, and guides us like a column of fire, offering beauty ever new as well as joy and hope.

The crowd in the Throne Room responded to Marini's presentation with sustained applause.

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In coming weeks, Marini and company will be on the road in the United States to promote *A Challenging Reform*. Projected dates include:

- Feb 11-12: Boston College
- Feb 13: Catholic Theological Union in Chicago
- Feb 13-15: University of Notre Dame
- Feb 15-17: New York and the United Nations, with a luncheon hosted by America magazine

Most of these appearances, Pecklers said, will be "invitation-only" because of limited space or the nature of the event. Ironically, despite the fact that Marini has served in the Vatican for 40 years, there are no present plans for an event in Rome.

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