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No smoke without fire: Benedict XVI and true liturgical reform
David Birch

I read the recent comments on Pope Paul VI and the 'smoke of Satan' (July AD2000) with interest not long after I had finished re-reading the massive work by the late Archbishop Annibale Bugnini, generally considered to be the main architect of the liturgical reforms prior to, during, and after Vatican II.


Archbishop Bugnini died in 1982, having completed the manuscript ready for publication. The final book, which runs to almost 1000 pages, is a remarkable, though highly personalised, defence of the inner workings of the then Consilium which was responsible for implementing the Council documents on reform of the liturgy, led, for the most part, by Archbishop Bugnini himself.

The level of detail is extraordinary with thousands of people involved overall including those invited to give feedback at every stage of the reform.

But this was no democratic process that we might know of from contemporary secular politics. At the heart of the operation was a relative handful of powerful individuals driving the final reforms, as Archbishop Bugnini did, to the absolute limit - well beyond anything most of the Council Fathers had agreed to.

The amount of work carried out, and the fact that every single liturgical stone that could be turned over, was turned over, is mind blowing.

As a young student I read the Vatican II documents as they variously appeared at the time. I experienced first hand, from the earliest stages of liturgical reform, to the initial temporary localised (and often initially unapproved) translations, through interim Rites of Mass and the Roman Breviary, to the final versions approved in 1969 (Mass) and 1970 (Breviary); and then of course the changes since, including the liturgical abuses as they developed.

But what finally appeared to us in the abbeys, friaries, convents, seminaries, colleges, schools and churches at the time was just the tip of the iceberg of documents and reforms that Fr Annibale (later Archbishop) Bugnini took to Pope Paul VI for approval.

Every one of these submissions for approval is listed in Archbishop Bugnini's book in one way or another in incredible detail. There are minutes of highly secret meetings, Curial intrigues and scandals, political in-fighting, back-stabbing and career assassinations, voting statistics for every major part of the reforms, rejected reforms and ideas that never saw the light of day, and so on.
If we think parliamentary politics is intriguing, it cannot hold a candle to some of the ecclesiastical politics that has gone on in the name of the Church over the years.

**Council Fathers**

It all, quite simply, demonstrates, with precious little theological, let alone Conciliar justification by Archbishop Bugnini and others, what a massive undertaking all of this liturgical reform was, although its vast scope had never been requested by the Council Fathers in any of their deliberations and final documents.

It reveals also that the so-called 'smoke of Satan' was not just a post-conciliar phenomenon, including the dreadful abuses that went on to the genuine sadness of Pope Paul VI and others even up to today, especially after the fully approved reformed liturgy finally appeared. The 'smoke' was already swirling around long before Cardinal Montini was elected Pope and took the name Paul VI.

Pope Blessed John XXIII was aware of it and in his wisdom, and as part of his concerns no doubt, had actually removed Annibale Bugnini from any responsibilities for liturgical reform (what Archbishop Bugnini refers to as his 'first exile') in 1962. John XXIII died in 1963 and it was Pope Paul VI who returned Fr Bugnini to senior office in liturgical reform and with a promotion, eventually making him an Archbishop.

The rest, as they say, is history.

To be fair to Pope Paul VI, who nevertheless approved every change, Popes are subject to politics, good and bad. How they handle that politics will differ from Pope to Pope, and we currently see a Pontiff in Benedict XVI who clearly knows good politics from bad and is prepared to act upon that knowledge, even retrospectively. And with that we are seeing more and more bishops, clergy and laity, speaking out. *Sancto Spiritu gratias.*

In many ways, Pope Paul VI, anxious to complete the work of his predecessor in putting greater unity and understanding of all Christians more firmly onto the agenda of the Church - the main reason the Council was called as well as to formally close the unfinished Vatican I (1869-1870) - fell victim, not just to some of that bad politics, but to the silence of many around him who could have spoken out, but didn't.

It has taken over forty years, for example, for Cardinal Noe now to speak out (see July *AD2000*), post *Summorum Pontificum*, Benedict XVI's 2007 Apostolic Letter lifting all restrictions on celebrations of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass.

**End to silence**

Suddenly, it seems, after decades of silence and inactivity, the episcopacy around the world is speaking out. Increasingly bishops are censuring the many abuses which have disfigured the Church post Vatican II, and which Paul VI, according to Cardinal Noe, saw as 'the smoke of Satan'. At the same time they are calling for the liturgy to be celebrated with 'reverence and careful respect'.

It has taken Pope Benedict XVI to bring an end to this silence and inability to act out of the torpor that has marked, and still does, various bishops around the world (including here in
Australia). Some had misguided theological (and political) motivations, but most, to be charitable, were apparently too preoccupied with other matters to effect serious returns to proper liturgy (both Ordinary and Extraordinary).

Contrary to what many may now think, the contemporary liturgical reform process had started long before the Council was actually called in 1959. But the fact that liturgical reform was the opening debate of the Council, was not because it was a major reason for Blessed John XXIII calling the Council, but because it was thought likely by most at the time to be the least contentious of the Schema to be discussed. It would, therefore, set a positive path for the difficult debates of the Council to come.

That is not, of course, how it worked out in the end. Much of the value of the non-liturgical deliberations of Vatican II has been overshadowed by the liturgical consequences, including some continuing gross abuses still ignored by various bishops, which went far beyond Council recommendations on reform.

It is therefore important that new generations of Catholics, who deserve the opportunity to understand what the Holy Father has now called the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, can better understand the context - even politics - of where the Ordinary Form of the Roman Rite, and subsequent abuses noted by Cardinal Noe and others, including the current Pope, originated.

They need also to understand that the 'smoke of Satan' had considerable help, both before the Council, and especially after it, sad to say, not only from some of the initial vested interest politics within the Church itself, but more widely since, from the episcopal silence and inactivity of some which allowed so many abuses to develop and proliferate. Thank God that the silence is being replaced with a strong Papal voice now.

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