

THE SOCIETY FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES

***Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Ormond Rush, Paulist Press, New York 2004)**

Mark Woodruff

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This is a superb tool for understanding what the Council Fathers thought they were doing and experiencing, how the documents should be understood in relation to each other, how the constitutions and decrees relate to the Catholic tradition as a whole, and how this was the first Council to grasp and be affected by modern means of communication - and its context within a rapidly altering world, moving the Catholic Church through its “ad intra” priorities (reflection on the Word of God, reform of the Liturgy and focus on the doctrine and structure of the Church) and beyond into the “ad extra” (the Church in the Modern World, human freedom, relations with other faiths).

The book ends with a reflection on what the awareness that the Holy Spirit was signally at work in the renewal of the Catholic Church through Vatican II can mean, where the Council definitively taught authority lies in the Church, in those instances of the unfailing faithfulness of the Spirit’s activity in the Church’s constant development and witness before the world. In answer to the question, “What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?”, he looks to scripture, tradition, magisterium, theological scholarship and the *sensus fidelium* (which is more than a *sensus laicorum*) as the means to discerning the signs of the times as we continue to pray for that New Pentecost. He understands that no one strand of authority is sufficient for discernment and that the Spirit makes himself heard when all of them converse among each other – not to prevail, but to listen and discover what it is that is true of the Church to say in the face of those signs of the times – ‘receptive ecclesiology’.

This is especially true when the instinct is to ‘go back’ (even renewal, reform, and *ressourcement* hint this – “reform of the reform” especially so). Instead, we are provided with a very useful response to current talk for and against Vatican II as ‘rupture’: no, there was not a great rupture with the old Catholic tradition; yes, there were “micro-ruptures” from the Pian era, just as the Pian reigns brought their own

micro-ruptures from the great Catholic tradition of the many previous centuries. The micro-rupture of Vatican II was real, but it was to establish continuity with the Catholic Church's tradition overall, not discontinuity from it as some believe (on both sides of the debate). So it was not about going back, any more than it was about changing course. It was about life in the Spirit which brings forth treasures old and new.