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The American Liturgical Movement, Social Justice, and Architectural Change

Thomas Buffer

Introduction

If one were to ask a typical American Catholic who lived in the United States between 1965 and 1980 what the Second Vatican Council had accomplished, one of the most common responses would surely be "the Council changed the liturgy." Probe a bit more, and the respondent would cite the following: because of the Council, the Mass is now celebrated in English, facing the people. Probably, he would also report that his parish church had undergone architectural modifications to fulfill the Council's wishes, including the installation of a new free-standing altar close to the seating area of the church, the removal of the "old" high altar, and the removal of altar rails. In many cases, the respondent would mention the painting over of frescoes and murals, the removal of statues and other artworks, the moving of the tabernacle to a side altar or separate chapel, and the replacement of pews by chairs.

During the post-conciliar period, some American Catholics protested when their churches were remodeled in this fashion. They were frequently told that the Council had called for the changes to which they objected. Some of the objectors did a little research and found that the Council documents did not require Mass facing the people, or the removal of altar rails, or the whitewashing of murals, or the removal of the tabernacle to a side chapel. How, then, to explain these near-universal alterations?

Even today, when this question is posed, responses are many and varied. Taking only the case of the removal of altar rails alone, it is difficult to find a clear and cogent explanation of why this happened on so large a scale. One author's answer to the question "Why was the altar rail removed from the church" includes the observation, "In the revision of the liturgy after Vatican II no

prescription is made for altar rails in church design or sanctuary décor."[1] This response is somewhat confusing, since it also affirms that the same authorities who carried out the post-conciliar revision of the liturgy did not mention or call for the removal of existing altar rails. Other liturgical and architectural experts cite such causes as post-conciliar confusion, the social upheaval of the 1960s, democratic ideas, modernism in architecture, etc.[2]

While all of the above-mentioned realities were important factors in the post-conciliar Church in the United States, they do not adequately explain why so many Catholic church buildings were altered. Nor do they answer the question: why did some churches built or modified *before* the Council feature free-standing altars and lack communion rails, or even pews?

The real explanation is both simpler and surprising. All of the widespread architectural changes to Catholic churches in North America following the Council can be traced back to the foundational principles of the pioneers of the American Liturgical Movement, pioneers such as Virgil Michel, Reynold Hillenbrand, Gerald Ellard, Clifford Howell, Martin Hellriegel, William Busch, Hans Ansgar Reinhold, Donald Attwater, and Godfrey Diekmann. These pioneers, while themselves influenced by European predecessors, were caught up in the Catholic social justice movement of their time in a way that made the American Liturgical Movement distinctive. This overlap between the liturgical and social justice

1 Kevin W. Irwin, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Mass* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999) 37.

2 Many of these explanations are found in a 2011 article on the return of altar rails: "'Unfortunately, democratic ideas came into the situation after Vatican II,' [historian James] Hitchcock said. [Architect Duncan] Stroik points out some of these ideas: a general iconoclasm that rejected the past, a desire to make churches into gathering spaces more like Protestant meeting houses, and the argument that kneeling is a sign of submission, which is seen as disrespectful to the modern person—we didn't kneel before kings and queens, so it was more 'democratic' not to kneel. Added [Professor Denis] McNamara: 'Some people called [altar rails] "fences" which set up division between priest and people.' ... Just as there was confusion over the roles of ordained and laity at the time, so there was confusion about the architectural manifestation of those roles." Joseph Pronechen, "Altar Rails Return to Use," in *National Catholic Register*, 31 July, 2011, at http://www.ncregister.com/site/article/altar-rails-return-to-use.

movements is an indispensable key to understanding the changes to American church architecture that are commonly, but wrongly, attributed to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

In what follows, I will lay out the foundational theological principles of the American Liturgical Movement, noting their relationship to social justice, then show how these principles were used to justify architectural changes to churches.

1. The American Liturgical Movement and Social Justice

The twentieth-century liturgical movement began in Europe. Thanks to the brilliant and energetic work of Fr. Virgil Michel, O.S.B., a monk of Collegeville,[3] the movement was not only imported to the United States, but re-created as a uniquely American synthesis of theory and practice.[4] From the beginning, the liturgical movement in the United States had its own particular characteristics and emphases, one of the most important being a concern for social justice.

The link between liturgy and social reform was not completely unknown in the thought of European liturgical thinkers

3 For Michel's life and work, see the very complete biography of Paul B. Marx, O.S.B., *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1957). For the formation and development of the American Liturgical Movement, see Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America, 1926-1955* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998). Chapter Three (81–149) treats "The Liturgical Movement and Social Justice."

4 "Instead of dragging [the liturgical movement] across the border as an exotic museum piece, [Michel] made it as American as only an American mind can make it. He had seen the high sweep of German ecclesiology and sacramentalism; he had admired the Belgians for their clear grasp of a new spirituality and their critical awareness of all that stood in the way of liturgical, ecclesiastical piety from traditional carryovers; he had learned in Austria what the common people could gather from the Church's treasure without fright, but he did not come back to force these foreign and incoherent moulds on the American church. Besides, his clear realism and his burning apostle's heart had one urge none of the great masters in Europe seemed to see: the connection of social justice with a new social spirituality." Hans Ansgar Reinhold, "The Liturgical Movement to Date," in *National Liturgical Week: Proceedings* (Ferdinand, IN: Liturgical Conference, 1947) 9–20, at 11. Quoted in Pecklers, *The Unread Vision*, 22–23.

such as the Belgian monk Dom Lambert Beauduin, but it was in America that the liturgical movement and the social justice movement came to be seen as inseparable.[5] The overlap between the social and liturgical movements would lead to ideas and calls for action that would leave a permanent mark on American sacred architecture.

When speaking of the "American" liturgical movement, we must not forget that what started with a European inspiration quickly began to export its own energy and ideas to other countries. Thus, what is perhaps the handiest guide to its key principles is a slim volume by the Englishman Fr. Clifford Howell, S.J., whose 1952 work *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice* was a collection of articles written for the journal *Orate Fratres* (later *Worship*) at the request of its editor, Godfrey Diekmann.[6] Drawing on the thought of the leaders of the American Liturgical Movement, as well as the works of European writers, Howell produced a popular compendium of the movement's guiding principles.

Howell identified three basic theological ideas inspiring the movement, and three liturgical principles derived therefrom.

Theological ideas:

1) The new life of grace or "Christ-life"
2) The Mystical Body of Christ
3) Correct understanding of sacrifice/offering

Liturgical principles:

1) Active participation
2) True worship is inherently social
3) The end of worship is personal and social transformation

We now briefly resume Howell's presentation of these principles, showing how they lead to a call for change.

In the post-Tridentine church, there could be no discussion

5 "As in Europe, the American liturgical movement was fostered by Benedictines, but unlike its European counterpart, it was not overly academic or theological in nature. Rather, it was fundamentally a pastoral, grassroots development within the Church. The promoters were convinced that liturgy possessed a transformative power for social justice." Pecklers, *The Unread Vision*, 43. See also Godfrey L. Diekmann. "Is There a Distinct American Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal?" *Worship* 45 (1971) 578–587.

6 Clifford Howell, S.J., *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1953); published in England, with additions, as *The Work of Our Redemption* (Oxford: The Catholic Social Guild, 1953).

of the celebration of the Eucharist without a concept of the Mass as sacrifice. The early representatives of the American Liturgical Movement took for granted the statement of Lambert Beauduin: "Sacrifice is the primary act of worship, and the eucharistic Sacrifice is the *center of the worship of the Church*."[7] As they saw it, the greatest problem with the piety of average lay Catholics in their day was a failure to appreciate the Eucharistic sacrifice as an offering of self; i.e., something that we do, not something that we observe. As a result, laypersons attending Mass were missing something essential: "The element of sacrifice inherent in the Eucharist has been lost; or men consider it a ritual act which hardly concerns them, or in which they themselves have nothing to sacrifice."[8]

To help the laity regain a proper understanding of sacrifice, emphasis had to be placed on what they were supposed to *do* at Mass. The image of the Mystical Body would help them understand this correctly:

> On Calvary Christ ... sacrificed in His physical body, but at Mass He sacrifices in His Mystical Body... Whence it follows that you, the laity, offer the Sacrifice of the Mass, because Christ is offering it through you, His members. ...You are not just watching a sacrifice being offered by the priest at the altar. Nor is it merely being offered for you, even at your request or with your approval, in your presence. You yourselves are offering it with and through the priest.[9]

During Mass, the laity should offer themselves along with the gifts of bread and wine on the altar, and they should unite themselves with the action of the priest by praying the words of the liturgy along with him.

> If you are not doing that [offering yourself, praying the words of the liturgy along with the priest], but something else, then you are not doing the right thing. You are distracted from the Mass.[10]

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7 Lambert Beauduin, *Liturgy the Life of the Church*, trans. Virgil Michel, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1929) 65.

8 Ibid., 66.

9 Howell, *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*, 104.

10 Ibid., 110.

Howell further specified that even approved prayers could be a distraction from true participation in the Mass: "If you want to pray to St. Anthony or say 'Hail Mary's' by all means do so—but at some other time, not during the Mass."[11]

By these simple examples, Howell has set up a contrast between liturgical and non-liturgical prayer. The contrast may be tabulated thus:

liturgical	**non-liturgical**
offering	adoring
worship	devotion
public	private
social	individual

This same framework would make it possible to illustrate the relationship between a piety that is truly social, and thus truly liturgical, and the kind of consciousness needed in the social justice apostolate. A commonly held view among the founders of the American Liturgical Movement was that social injustice sprang from individualism, which was also the main obstacle to true liturgical piety. Because both the social movement and the liturgical movement were motivated by a reaction against injustice, they had the same goal, and the same means for reaching it. Because true worship is social, the promotion of true worship would militate against individualism, the root cause of social injustice. Once individualism among Catholics was corrected, the Mystical Body would come to life and correct social injustice.[12]

11 Ibid., 109–110. Pecklers asserts that during the 1920s and 1930s many Catholics "lived with a certain tension in their religious practice between a bodily presence at liturgies which they hardly understood, and the practice of reciting their private prayers which had no connection at all with the public prayer of the Church except that the two were taking place at the same time. Virgil Michel called such a phenomenon a type of 'disassociated personality.'" *The Unread Vision*, 40.

12 "Michel believed that American Catholics had become too materialistic and individualistic ... Liturgy was the solution to individualism, capable of opening the eyes of American worshipers to the possibilities of a truly Christian culture ... Michel believed that the solution to the social problems of his day was the formation of an American culture that was truly Catholic—a culture which would embody the principles of the doctrine of

The spirit of active participation would be "a safeguard against that unchristian individualism and subjectivism in religion that inevitably produces spiritual selfishness."[13]

This line of thought is vividly illustrated in four talks given at the National Liturgical Week, 1943: the "Statement of Principle" (Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand),[14] "The Racial Problem" (Msgr. Joseph P. Morrison),[15] "The Rural Problem" (Msgr. Luigi Ligutti),[16] and "The Labor Problem" (Dom Lambert Dunne, O.S.B.).[17]

Hillenbrand notes that an analysis of what afflicted society and led to injustice in its many forms was first made by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* and later developed by Pius XI:

> The Popes call it individualism … The word is unimportant. The evil itself is tragically important … The fact that it exists is abundantly clear, and unfortunately it has invaded every province of life … We see it in school life where there is no sense of oneness between the teachers and students and among the students themselves; in family life, even among Catholics, where each member goes his individual way; in social life, with its anti-racial bias against Mexican, Negro, Japanese, and Jew; in political life, with its spoils politics, its unquestioned devices, its enrichment from public moneys; in economic life, with its "free enterprise," its "rugged individualism" (the classic, inaccurate phrases), its concentrated lodging of economic control in the hands of a few, its anti-unionism on the part of employers and its non-support of unions on the part of employees; in

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the Mystical Body of Christ." Pecklers, *The Unread Vision*, 128–129. "(A)s Father Virgil [Michel] frequently stressed, a vital understanding of the liturgy as the essential work of the Mystical Body tends to bring with it spiritual awakening and a social outlook." Marx, *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement*, 348.

13 Marx, *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement*, 61.

14 Reynold Hillenbrand, "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society: Statement of Principle," in *National Liturgical Week Held at the Cathedral of the Holy Name, Chicago, October 12–16, 1943* (Ferdinand, IN: The Liturgical Conference, 1944) 100–108.

15 Joseph P. Morrison, "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society: The Racial Problem," in ibid., 109–116.

16 Luigi Ligutti, "Sacrifice and Society: The Rural Problem," in ibid., 122–125.

17 Dom Lambert Dunne, O.S.B., "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society: The Labor Problem," in ibid., 128–139.

> international life, with its tariff barriers, its hoarding of natural resources, its artificial restriction of production, its incredible folly of isolationism and the consequent inability to create international institutions without which we are foredoomed to war. This evil of individualism is disastrously clear.[18]

For Hillenbrand, the remedy was equally clear: the doctrine of the Mystical Body and a correct understanding of the Mass as a corporate action of sacrifice:

> This sense of our oneness and corporateness realized at the supreme moment of life, the moment of Sacrifice, must be brought into every phase of life. We are one at the altar, doing the greatest of actions together; we must sense our oneness at all other times, in all other actions of our lives.[19]

Hillenbrand's talk was followed by Morrison's address on "The Racial Problem." After recalling that there had been three major race riots in the United States that year, the problem of segregation in the armed forces, and the differing attitudes toward race found in the American North and South, Morrison made known his views on how the race problem could be solved:

> I assert then as my thesis, that given time and patience, and a proper understanding of the Church's doctrine of the Mystical Body, and of the spirit of Christian Sacrifice in the liturgy, the problem is certainly not an insoluble one. Or to be more specific, I assert that our current problems arising from the presence in our midst of negroes, Mexicans, Jews, and Japanese, can be solved in a truly Christian way, only by a form of action which is inspired by and resolutely integrated with these principles.[20]

Morrison concluded that if Catholics correctly understood that the Mass was a common act of sacrifice offered by all members of the Mystical Body together, they would understand that they were truly one with everyone who was offering the Mass along with them, of whatever race they might be. The task of the pas-

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18 Hillenbrand, "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society: Statement of Principle," 102.

19 Ibid., 103.

20 Morrison, "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society: The Racial Problem," 110–111.

tor, then, was "an incessant preaching of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and the Sacrifice of the Mass."[21]

Msgr. Luigi Ligutti of Des Moines, Iowa, pictured a farmer at Mass in a small, rural church, becoming conscious of his unity with "his fellow farmers in the light of the doctrine of the Mystical Body and the spirit of sacrifice in human society:"

> I am a farmer. I am at Mass. Near and far from me kneel my fellow farmers … the beet worker in Montana … the hop picker in Washington … the vegetable gardener in New Jersey… the wheat harvester in North Dakota … the corn picker in Iowa … the fruit grower in California. … They are brother plowmen and our common Father is a divine husbandman. … They are members of the same Mystical Body.[22]

Lambert Dunne, monk of St. Mary's Abbey in Newark, New Jersey, chaplain of the Catholic Trade Unionists in that city, explained that the solution of the "labor problem" was "a proper infusion of the spirit of Christian sacrifice in the working unit of society." This would happen once Catholics understood the meaning of membership in the Mystical Body through participation in the liturgy:

> Holy Mass, the perfect act of liturgy, stresses the communal activity of the members of the Body … The peculiar grace that comes from the Sacrament of the Eucharist is the growth of

21 Ibid., 116. Responding to Msgr. Morrison's presentation, Abbot Columban Thuis of St. Joseph's Abbey in St. Benedict, Louisiana, affirmed, "The greatest progress in solving the race problem has come through the liturgy … Just as no solution of the social problem can come until mankind is acting out once more its true role in the unity of Christ's Mystical Body (and liturgy is this Body in Action), so too we cannot succeed in the solution of the negro problem, until we have 'also restored all things in Christ' in this matter and manner." Ibid., 118. John LaFarge, S.J., also responded with enthusiastic agreement to Morrison's thesis: "I believe that in the racial question, all the difficulties come from an inadequate concept of our theological and social doctrine. When people are acquainted with the Encyclical [*Mystici Corporis*], when they are thoroughly familiar with the theology regarding the Mystical Body and its relation to justice and charity, then these things will solve themselves." Ibid., 119.

22 Ligutti, "Sacrifice and Society: The Rural Problem," 123.

> the unity of the Mystical Body … This is action, this is sacred action, this is unifying action, this is union. … Individualism is the greatest threat to this unity. … In our day we are having a liturgical movement because of the tremendous growth of an overemphasized individual piety, to the detriment of social spirituality.[23]

Dunne stated that the spirit of individualism manifested itself in human society in the form of "unbridled competition, *laissez faire* in economics, exploitation of the worker in the absence of collective bargaining, rugged individualism."[24]

The unanimity of thought among the four speakers is striking. In sum, social evils were understood to be the symptoms of individualism. Cure that disease, and the symptoms would disappear. The first step would be to eliminate individualism from the Church by making Catholics aware that they were the Mystical Body of Christ, united in a common act of sacrifice. How would this be accomplished? Through the active and conscious participation in the liturgy of Catholics who understood the liturgy as social worship.

To achieve true active and corporate participation in the liturgy, education in the true liturgical spirit was needed. But would education alone suffice? Many said that it would not. In the view of many liturgical pioneers, it was difficult or impossible for the average Catholic to understand the true nature of the Mass as long as the external form of the Mass obscured its true nature. Some began to think that the main problem was not people who did not understand what it is to participate actively in the Mass; rather, the main problem was in the Mass itself; i.e. in its external form.[25]

Howell, for one, brought together a zeal for social justice and a concern for authentic liturgical piety in calling for changes in the form of the Mass. Howell claimed that only the elites could

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23 Dunne, "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society: The Labor Problem," 134–135.

24 Ibid., 135.

25 In support of his view, Howell quotes Donald Attwater: "we offer forms of public worship to people whose mental outlook and life make it almost impossible for them to worship in that way." "A Layman Looks at Liturgy," in *Orate Fratres* 10 (1936) 532. Quoted in *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*, 157–158.

appreciate the Mass in its present form. In our day, we might call this an argument for "equality." By resisting change, the elites were denying the fruits of the Mass to the common people; or, in today's cant, the "ninety-nine percent."[26]

Because the external form of the Mass, as it was then constituted, did not clearly indicate or make possible social worship, the very celebration of the Mass involved a perpetration of injustice: "The external form of the Church's public worship … does not seem to suit the Church as a whole; it suits rather a small cultured minority of the Church. All the rest are restricted to ... passive spectatorship" instead of active participation.[27]

The conclusion was obvious. If the external form of the Mass made it impossible for the Mass to be what it was supposed to be for the overwhelming majority of the faithful, then it had to change. This, too, was stated as a matter of social justice: "the present Mass liturgy ... is not fully functional as the vehicle of community worship of the 'toiling masses.'"[28]

Not surprisingly, the elites were expected to be resistant to any changes: "Many of them so value the aesthetic excellencies of the present Mass-liturgy that they cannot reconcile themselves to any proposals for liturgical reform which would diminish these aesthetic excellences, even if such reforms would bring the liturgy within the reach of those who have a right to understand and participate in it—namely, the common people."[29]

Change to the external forms of Catholic worship was not only possible, but necessary in order to bring about more active and corporate participation in the liturgy. This kind of change was seen as necessary for two reasons; first, because many Catholics were being deprived of full and active participation and, second, because that same full and active participation would help to correct social injustice in society at large. This is why many leaders of the American Liturgical Movement saw liturgical change and, eventually, architectural change, to be a moral imperative. This

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26 The concern to overcome this separation/inequality was sometimes expressed by the phrase "bringing the Mass to the people," which phrase Reinhold took as the title of his 1960 work in which he described impending changes to the form of the Mass: see Hans Ansgar Reinhold, *Bringing the Mass to the People* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960).

27 Howell, *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*, 139.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

same zeal for change opened the door for the discarding of artistic elements that had formerly been seen as part and parcel of Catholic worship. Thus Howell states:

> I love Latin and I love plainsong, but I would prefer that every copy of the Liber Usualis be sunk in the depths of the sea rather than that the Mystical Body of Christ as a whole should be debarred from that "active participation" which is the "primary and indispensable source" of the true Christian spirit. Actually I do not think such an extreme choice would be necessary; my point is that if it were shown to be necessary, we should not shrink from it.[30]

The claim that we should not shrink from "necessary" changes in order to realize the goal of restoring full and active participation to the laity would soon be used to say that it was necessary to make sweeping changes to the architecture and decoration of parish churches throughout the United States.

By the second half of the 1950s, those involved in the liturgical movement had reason to believe that change was coming. The writings and reforms of Pius XII heartened them, as they saw many of their ideas and recommendations confirmed by the highest authority in the Church. At the same time, the pontiff made it clear that if change was to come, it needed to mandated from above. The leaders of the American Liturgical Movement are called "pioneers" today precisely because in many contexts they were a creative minority, often with no power apart from that of words. They could argue that reform of the Mass itself was needed, but had not the authority to re-write the missal or breviary. When the Second Vatican Council called for the revision of the Church's liturgical books, what had been a movement was now the mainstream.

2. The Pioneers Become the Mainstream

As it became apparent that the Council was going to address liturgical reform, leaders of liturgical renewal in the United States stood ready to advise church leaders. A lead in this effort was taken by the Liturgical Conference, a body formed in 1943 to take over the organization of the National Liturgical Weeks that had begun in 1940 under the leadership of all the Benedictine

30 Ibid., 140.

abbots in the United States.[31] In 1964, the Liturgical Conference published a comprehensive Parish Worship Program to guide parish leaders in the implementation of the reform in every parish church. Part of the program was a how-to manual called *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship*.[32]

While the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was the immediate occasion for the publication of *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship*, nearly all of its contents could have been written before the opening of the Council, since its recommendations were based on ideas developed and spread by the American Liturgical Movement. In essence, the book spelled out the architectural and artistic ramifications of the movement's principles. While specific reference to the social justice apostolate is largely lacking, the moral imperative to make the liturgy into true, social worship, as opposed to an occasion for individual piety and devotion, is in full force.

In reading *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship*, post-conciliar articles in *Worship*, and the writings of prominent interpreters of the liturgical renewal, we can identify the architectural and artistic consequences of the foundational principles of the American Liturgical Movement: the removal of the "high altar," the removal of communion rails, provision for Mass facing the people, alterations meant to discourage private devotion, moving the tabernacle, and provision for Communion in the hand.

The high altar was considered an obstacle to an appreciation of the true nature of the Mass, both because it was usually far away from the laity, and because it did not look like a table meant as a place of sacrifice.[33] The installation of an altar facing

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31 For a history of the Liturgical Weeks and the Liturgical Conference, see Frank C. Senn, *The People's Work: A Social History of the Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006) 308–311.

32 *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship* (Washington, DC: Liturgical Conference, 1964). References to this document are to page numbers.

33 By the time the *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship* was written, the installation of altars that looked more like tables had already begun to happen in the United States. Gerald Ellard wrote in 1956: "…without any new directives on the matter, a veritable wave of altar renovating has been sweeping across the county. Here, there, almost everywhere, pastors and people are suddenly finding their 'old' altar to be quite 'old-fashioned,' hardly fit any more for its high function at Mass. St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, to mention one well-known instance

the people was proposed as a solution to the problem; this would ultimately lead to the outright removal of the high altar and reredos in most American parish churches.

> The altar is primarily a table. It should look like one ... The recognition that the altar is a table ... obviously presents a problem in the great number of churches ... The high marble backdrop, filled with kneeling angels, high reliefs of various saints, etc., seems to rule out any possibility of showing the altar for what it is. This *dilemma* has been *solved* successfully in many parishes by the installation of an altar facing the people ... The advantages for effective participation involved in such a bringing the Mass to the people are obvious. [In the case of an altar facing the people] it is even more important that the altar be raised sufficiently so as to be clearly visible from the back of the church. Also, it is advisable that the gates of the sanctuary railing and even a portion of the railing itself should be removed where possible, thus creating a very important space in front of the altar."[34]

It is taken for granted that the new free-standing altar must be as close to "the people" (meaning laypeople) as possible. Otherwise "full participation" would be impeded: "...the long Gothic chancel which separates the altar from the people in so many churches in this country can scarcely be considered an asset to full parish participation."[35]

The recommendation of removing the gates or even part of the communion rail is based on an idea found in the American Liturgical Movement long before the calling of the Council. Individualism was seen as the root cause of both liturgical wrongs (private devotion in place of social liturgical prayer) and social in-

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among many, had a new high altar installed in 1942. It is typical of the whole trend to say that the new high altars, as compared with the old, are unmistakably sacrificial tables, simple and clear-cut in design, freed of dominating reredos in heavy wood or marble … Altar transition, so to say, is now rapidly taking place: new installations now reflect much more of the dignity and majesty demanded of an altar. But the liturgical movement is creating a whole 'new' architecture." Gerald Ellard, S.J., *The Mass in Transition* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956) 112.

34 *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship* 65, emphasis added.

35 Ibid., 63.

justice. One cure for this disease would be the use of communion stations in place of communion railings. So argued the authors of *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship*:

> The faithful advance...and receive standing, without genuflection before or after. Such a procedure does much to encourage the idea that communion is a meal being shared, rather than the private devotion of individuals who happen to be attending the same Mass.[36]

The relation between the removal of the communion rail and social justice may not be immediately obvious. In the Mystical Body concept, the Church herself is an extension of Christ in time and space. Thus, the apostolate of the laity could be understood as an extension of the altar.[37] Architectural features that distanced the altar from the laity (or vice versa) went against this idea, since they implied that the laity were not an extension of the altar, given that they were prevented from getting near it.[38]

This separation between priest and laity, usually called "people" or "the people," needed to be broken down, lest the laity forget that they were offering the Mass together with the priest, and be reduced to passive spectatorship. This thinking was visible in the justification given for the communion stations in the new abbey church in Collegeville, Minnesota (designed 1953–1958, constructed 1958–1961), dedicated before *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was written.[39] Godfrey Diekmann explained that the communion rail had "come to denote in people's minds not merely the distinction between sanctuary and nave, that is between

36 Ibid., 66–67.

37 See Reynold Hillenbrand, "The Mass as the Source and Center of the Lay Apostolate," in *Proceedings of the National Liturgical Week 1955: Proceedings* (Elsberry, MO: Liturgical Conference, 1956) 175–185, at 176.

38 Howell claims that the social movement and the liturgical movement "are the same thing under different aspects, namely, the activity in work and in worship of the Mystical Body of Christ." *The Work of Our Redemption* (Oxford: Catholic Social Guild, 1955) 182.

39 For an account of the design and construction processes of the abbey church, see Victoria Young, "The Design and Construction of Saint John's Abbey Church," in *Saint John's at 150: A Portrait of this Place Called Collegeville, 1856–2006*, ed. Hilary Thimmesh, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: Saint John's University Press, 2006) 117–127.

priest and people, but actually separation. And we feel this is most undesirable, particularly because Communion itself is the sacrament of union, and for it to be distributed as a symbol of separation seems most inappropriate."[40]

The same desire to break down the separation between priest-celebrant and laity assisting at Mass lay behind the call for Mass facing the people. Articles in *Orate Fratres* and *Worship* presumed that Mass facing the people was the common practice of the early Church. Yet, this was not the most frequently encountered argument for restoring the practice. The main motive was to teach the laity that they were actively offering the sacrifice along with the priest. In an article published in 1959, Frederick McManus argued that Mass facing the people would make the laity more conscious of their unity with the priest, and thus the unity of Christ with His members in the act of worship would be better expressed. It would help the laity understand that the Mass is the sacrifice of the whole Church, to be involved in the sacred action, and to participate more fully.[41] In this matter, it appears that the desire to realize the core goals of the American Liturgical Movement outweighed the desire to revive historical practice.

Replacing high altars with altars closer to the people, providing altars that allowed for Mass facing the people, and the replacement of communion rails with communion stations required obvious architectural changes to the most central feature of church buildings: the altar and sanctuary. Changes to other features of church buildings, such as statues, side altars, and Stations of the Cross, were experienced as equally important (and sometimes disruptive) by the worshipping layperson. While parishioners were often told that these alterations were being undertaken to fulfill the wishes of the Second Vatican Council, it is more accurate to link them to principles and goals developed and expressed well before the opening of the Council. The leaders of the American Liturgical Movement assumed that private devotion, as opposed to liturgical piety, was inimical to the goal of true social worship. One way to realize a true liturgical piety in the average Catholic was to make private devotion during Mass

40 Kathleen Hughes, R.S.C.J., *The Monk's Tale: A Biography of Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B.* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) 170.

41 Frederick R. McManus, "Mass Facing the People," in *Worship* 33 (1959) 123–125.

difficult or impossible. This would be accomplished by removing or relocating architectural features or artworks that encouraged or enabled private devotion. The biography of the liturgical pioneer Reynold Hillenbrand shows this strategy in action. In 1957, Hillenbrand renovated Sacred Heart Church in Winnetka, Illinois. His biographer relates that he "believed in eliminating shrines, stations, and other items that appeal to private devotion from the main worship space. And so, the Stations of the Cross were removed from the nave and placed along a side aisle of the church."[42] Wittingly or unwittingly, many pastors were to follow Hillenbrand's lead in the next two decades.

Priest's Guide to Parish Worship recommended a similar approach, advising pastors to take care with architectural and decorative features that did not reinforce the message that liturgical worship was social worship:

> ...the communal nature of public worship is such that the interior of the church should not be confused and cluttered. Nothing should be allowed to compete seriously with the central altar for attention—not side altar shrines, nor a profusion of statues, nor a mass of flickering votive lights, nor anything else.[43]

Clearly these pastors and authors did not see images, votive lights, statues, etc. as bad in themselves. Nor did they argue for their total elimination from church interiors. Insofar as they could distract one's attention from the altar during Mass, however, they were considered undesirable. To the extent that they encouraged private devotion, they militated against social piety, and might even encourage the evil of individualism.

Removing or relocating images was only part of the solution to that evil. Seating habits must be controlled as well. Thus, *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship* opined: "Since community is an experience, not an idea, the back pews should be roped off for the parish Mass in such a way that the front ones will fill up first"[44] (Reynold Hillenbrand had done just that as pastor of a parish in the 1950s).

One widespread change that deeply affected Catholic piety was the relocation of tabernacles. To someone steeped in the

42 Robert Tuzik, *Reynold Hillenbrand: The Reform of the Catholic Liturgy and the Call to Social Action* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2010) 71.

43 *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship*, 63.

44 Ibid., 64.

principles of the American Liturgical Movement, a prominent tabernacle on the main altar, often the focal point toward which the whole church and its decoration was oriented, presented a double problem. It was not a locus of action, and it was a focus of devotion. This could encourage both passive spectatorship and individual piety, which would make the lay worshiper, by definition, distracted at Mass.[45] The obvious solution was to change the placement of the tabernacle as to make devotion to the reserved Sacrament during Mass impossible. This is not very different from the strategy behind the relocation and removal of statues, votive candles, etc.

How, then, might one explain this change to Catholics brought up to revere the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle? One could explain that adoration of the Blessed Sacrament during Mass was misguided, because doing so made the adorer distracted at Mass, when he should be participating in social, liturgical worship, not private devotion. One could also explain that it was during the Middle Ages that liturgical piety became largely a matter of individual piety. Writing many years after the heyday of the American Liturgical Movement, the liturgical consultant Richard Vosko did both:

> Many Catholics still perceive the Mass as the ideal time for their individual acts of piety. The buildings, they state, should honor their personal devotion to the saints and, above all, the reserved sacrament ...
>
> In the Middle Ages ... (t)he liturgy was thought to be the work of the priests and not of the entire church. The clergy administered it for the benefit of the laity, who carried out their own private devotions ... Eventually, gazing at the sacrament became more important than actually eating and drinking it in communion. The placement of the tabernacle in the center of

45 "...when the Divine Victim has been placed upon the altar it is your business to offer it. Your minds and your wills, as soon as the Consecration is effected, should be occupied with this activity–offering the Victim to God. You should not be engaged in any other activity, *not even* (except as a kind of secondary advertence) *in adoring Christ really present.* You are not at Mass primarily to adore Christ, but to offer Him. It is to Benediction that you come to adore Him; at Mass you offer Him, in order to adore the Father." Howell, *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*, 112, emphasis added.

> the main altar ... perpetuated the primacy of gazing. The altars were moved away from the assembly and became artistic and architectural settings for monumental tabernacles.[46]

Note that Vosko's explanation resumes the main principles and assumptions of the American Liturgical Movement, minus any reference to the social apostolate. The separation between clergy and laity during the celebration of the Mass is duly deplored, as is the distance between the altar and assembly, and private devotion on the part of the laity is opposed to the common worship of the assembly.

While receiving Communion in the hand may not seem directly related to the question of architectural change, I include it here because of the arguments that were made for the practice while it was still forbidden in the United States. On a popular level, receiving Communion in the hand was and sometimes still is explained as a return to a more ancient and therefore more excellent manner of communing. As happened with the call for Mass facing the people, it does not appear that return to earlier practice was really the primary motivation or goal of those who pushed for Communion in the hand. For example, in the November 1966 issue of *Worship*,[47] John F. Mahoney argued for the practice partly on the basis of a renewed ecclesiology, and partly out of concern for active participation:

> [Communion in the hand would] remind us that bishop, priest, and congregation together form the living body of Christ, and that together they express this Christic union by their one proclamation and their one breaking of bread. Priests and laity should not only communicate at the same time, they should also communicate in the same manner. The actual Eucharistic command of Christ was: "Take, eat, this is my body." The twofold directive should be noted; we are told both to take and to

46 Richard S. Vosko, *Designing Future Worship Spaces*, Meeting House Essays, 8 (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996) 6.

47 John F. Mahoney, "On Receiving Holy Communion," in *Worship* 40 (1966) 559–564. The editor of *Worship* at the time also understood communion in the hand to be self-communication: "In the November 1966 issue of *Worship* we advocated a revival of the ancient practice of having communicants receive the eucharistic bread in their hands and communicate themselves." Aelred Tegels, "Chronicle," in *Worship* 43 (1969) 440.

> eat ... eating is primarily an *activity* which involves feeding one's self, rather than the *passive* condition of being fed by another.[48]

It is evident that what Mahoney called for was, in fact, self-communication. His argument was based on key principles of the American Liturgical Movement: active participation, sacrifice understood as self-offering, the Mystical Body. Nor was a reference to the social apostolate lacking, since self-communication would also speak to the mission of the laity in the world:

> Liturgically, a restoration of the early Christian tradition of reaching out and taking the body of Christ in our hands could have a profound significance ...it would emphasize the solemn "response-ability" of the laity. It would, indeed, be a poignant reminder that the mass is the sacrifice of Christ, and that a man cannot simply receive the supper passively in order to enjoy its benefits, but must reach out actively to embrace Christ crucified.[49]

The unity of priest and laity in the Mystical Body would also be promoted by Communion in the hand, which

> would help to heal the separation between the "true" body of Christ in the eucharist and the "mystical" body of Christ in the church ... A restoration of self-communication for the laity would make credible this baptismal bond of unity within the total worshiping community; and, certainly, it would strengthen the sacramental union between celebrant and congregation.[50]

Mahoney envisioned that the priest would hold out a ciborium from which the laity would take a host, or, in churches where the altar was close to the congregation, that they would reach out and take hosts from the ciborium placed on the corporal.[51] In this view, the practice of Communion in the hand was not passive reception, but active taking. The advantage of the practice was not that it returned the Church to the practice of early centuries; rather, it was seen as an apt development of the principle of *ac-*

48 Mahoney, "On Receiving Holy Communion," 560, emphasis added.
49 Ibid., 560–561.
50 Ibid., 561.
51 Ibid., 562.

tuosa participatio, and a salutary reminder of the role of the laity actively to carry out their mission in the world.

Once Communion in the hand became an officially approved practice in the United States, the editor of *Worship* voiced his approval, also on the basis of supporting active participation:

> It is good that Catholics in this country finally have the option of receiving communion in their hands, for this mode of receiving is clearly better sacramental practice than receiving communion on the tongue, which is much too *passive* a stance for baptized Christians invited to *participate actively* in the eucharistic mystery. Reaching out is a gesture expressive of wanting and receiving, of *active* response to Christ's invitation: 'Take and eat."[52]

The approval and promotion of communion in the hand provided one more reason for the elimination of altar rails and the provision of altars close to the seating areas of churches.

We can now see that when the principles of the American Liturgical Movement were put into practice, the architectural and artistic consequences for the average parish church were nothing short of revolutionary. The same features that hitherto defined what a Catholic church looked like were now viewed as inimical to true Catholic worship, the authentic Christian spirit, and social justice. Zeal for the *iustum* had redefined the *dignum*.

3. A Tentative Assessment

Enough time has now elapsed that we can begin to pose some rather difficult questions: how did it happen that the desire to make the liturgy a living reality for all the members of God's holy people and so transform society did not produce a restoration of all things in Christ? How did it happen that the drive to eliminate the separation between priest and laity in the one action of offering corporate worship often provoked conflict between priest and people when the clergy imposed radical changes on church buildings that "the people" loved just as they were?[53]

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52 Aelred Tegels, "Chronicle," in *Worship* 51 (1977) 446, emphasis added.

53 The highly organized resistance of some members of St. Francis Xavier Church in Petoskey, Michigan, was a particularly striking example of this sort of conflict. In 1999 those opposed to remodeling plans sur-

Why was the Second Vatican Council invoked to authorize architectural changes, such as the removal of altar rails, which were never mentioned in any conciliar text?

In my view, the answer to these questions lies in an analysis of the foundational principles of the American Liturgical Movement. The passage of time allows us to perceive certain weaknesses present in its pre-suppositions from the beginning.

One such weakness was, paradoxically, related to one of the greatest strengths of the movement: its promotion of the theology of the Mystical Body. The glory of years of the movement coincided with a rediscovery of the theology of the Mystical Body on the part of theologians and the official Church. When one reads the works of leaders of the American Liturgical Movement written between 1926 and 1955, one finds the absolute dominance of the Mystical Body concept. Surely these leaders were right to claim that the theology of the Mystical Body would help the laity to understand the liturgy as a social, corporate act of worship. An awareness of one's union with all the members of the Mystical Body in worship would also go far in helping the Christian understand his union with all members of natural society as well. When this theological concept was applied to sacred architecture, however, the results were more debatable. The Mystical Body ecclesiology assumes a distinction between Christ the Head, and the baptized, the members. Christ, the Head, is the source of the graces that flow down to the members. When this image was applied to church architecture in a rather mechanistic way, it seemed desirable to eliminate distance or obstacles between the Head, represented by the priest at the altar, and the members, represented by the laity or "people." This made it more likely that architectural features or structures that enhanced the distinction between the sanctuary and seating area of a church building would be seen as undesirable and worthy of elimination.

The understanding of the word "people" also proved problematic in the post-conciliar period. Prior to Vatican II, when

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veyed all the registered parishioners of the parish and found that the overwhelming majority opposed moving the tabernacle, removing the communion rail, and removing the reredos. The remodeling went ahead as planned. See Michael S. Rose, "Church Renovation, Re-Renovation, and the Third Millennium," in *Sacred Architecture* 3 (2000) 17–20.

priests said "the people" or "people," they meant "the laity." Then, when theologians began to call the Church the new People of God, and especially after that title was sanctified by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the word "people" retained its old meaning of "laity" in popular ecclesial use. Even though the conciliar expression "People of God" included all members of the Church, lay, religious, and clergy,[54] the meaning of the phrase in common parlance did not change. Thus, after the Council, when a Catholic, especially a cleric, said "the people of God," in nearly every case he really meant "only the laity," even though that was not what Vatican II meant by the phrase. Consequently, many read the Council's embrace of the "People of God" concept as an affirmation of the active role of the laity in the liturgy, just as they had done before. For example, *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship* (written shortly before *Lumen Gentium*), in enumerating the various actors in the liturgy, lists: priest celebrant, deacon, servers, lectors, commentator, choir members, and "people," meaning the laity. "Gathered in their parish church for the Eucharist, the people of God are the Church of this time and place. They greet Christ in their priest with prayer and song, listen to God's Word, and respond by making their own the eucharistic prayer offered in their name by their priest-president, and by sharing together in the supper of the Lord."[55] This widespread understanding of the word "people" to mean "the laity", combined with the Council's definition of the Church as "People of God," was turned into one more incentive to alter church interiors so as to remove the distinction between the priest's place (the altar and presbyterium) and the place of the laity.

Another weakness of the American Liturgical Movement was its concern to correct. Its pioneers had a consistent message: Catholic worship, as presently constituted and practiced, had to change if it was not promoting the true Christian spirit. Most of the laity, even when attending Mass, were not praying the Mass. This understanding of the pastoral situation put many of the liturgical pioneers into a corrective mindset. When the pioneers found themselves no longer a creative minority but "the establishment," their hermeneutic of correction remained in force.

54 See Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964) no. 30.

55 *Priest's Guide to Parish Worship*, 70–71.

They corrected everything they wanted to correct, and then they could not stop. Reinhold had warned against such a risk in 1960:

> There is a serious danger of overshooting the aim, once one embarks on the exhilarating task of putting things in order. Room must be left for "solemnity," to avoid triteness, a romantically conceived "evangelical simplicity," formless individualism, or the victimizing of the congregation by a tasteless and uninspired mystagogue. All that is noble and dignified, all that rises above ephemeral inspiration, must be preserved.[56]

Some did not heed the warning. The highest authorities in the Church gave them a reformed liturgy, permission for Mass facing the people, and Mass wholly in the vernacular, and they wanted still more. The push for Communion in the hand is just one example. I argue, above, that this was agitated for, not primarily because it was a return to ancient practice, but as another way to realize the principle of "active participation."

When one looks back at the process that led to the drastic remodeling of many churches, one notes the insistence of planners and consultants that this or that change simply must be made. I believe this is a kind of relic of the zeal for social justice that animated the pioneers of the American Liturgical Movement. Even as overt references to correcting social injustice began to fade from the foreground of liturgical discourse, the absolutist impulse remained: *fiat justitia ruat caelum* ("Let justice be done though the heavens fall"). This sense of moral superiority or moral imperative may, at least in part, explain the willingness of some liturgical planners and consultants to disregard what the piety of "the people" was telling them.

Another weakness present in the thinking of the American Liturgical Movement, but not made manifest in most parish churches until after the Council, was a belief that changing the liturgical environment would change the behavior of the worshipper. We may call this approach, in an extended sense of the word, behaviorism. If you are a behaviorist psychologist, how do you study human behavior? The same way you would study the behavior any other animal; e.g., a mouse in a maze. Control the environmental setting and the stimuli, then observe the responses. Change the setting and stimuli, then observe the changed re-

56 Reinhold, *Bringing the Mass to the People*, 37.

sponses. Now, extend this to the liturgy and the place where it is celebrated. If most Catholics had an individualistic piety, then change the liturgy and church buildings in such a way as to produce Catholics with a social and liturgical piety, who would go out into the world and correct social wrongs.

One socially involved Lutheran pastor demonstrated keen insight into the weakness of this approach in 1967. In his article, "Has the Liturgical Movement Failed?" he calls out the

> naive notion that liturgical reform is the magical formula for renewal ... Liturgical reform has to do with changes in rite and ceremony. Reform can be achieved by edict. Renewal is the total enterprise of reshaping the Church's practice and understanding ... As for renewal, who ever suggested that putting a middle-aged immobilist Irish priest on the other side of the altar is going to transform him into a socially conscious and theologically alert progressive? ... No doubt there are liturgical enthusiasts who generated unreasonable expectations about the power of liturgical reform. [This] is truly ironic, for one of the great emphases of liturgical literature in the past half century is the criticism of a magical and superstitious attitude toward the sacraments. It would be strange indeed if ... some of the movement's proselytes simply transferred their expectations of magic to the mechanics of revising rites and ceremonies. Reform serves renewal; it does not guarantee renewal.[57]

The same critique may be applied to the attempt to reform the false consciousness of laypersons suffering from "individualism in worship" by removing altar rails and moving altars closer to the pews. If liturgical reform does not guarantee renewal, neither does remodeling.

The itch to change the liturgy to correct perceived deficiencies in the church (usually understood to lie chiefly in the laity) has not died down entirely. In 2005, the Synod of Bishops asked for new formularies for the dismissal at the end of Mass, "to express the missionary spirit that should follow from the celebration of Mass." Three years later, in response to this petition, Pope Benedict XVI approved three alternatives to "Ite, missa est."[58] What is this if not changing a stimulus in order to change a re-

57 Richard John Neuhaus, "Has the Liturgical Movement Failed?" in *Una Sancta* 24/3 (1967) 49–58, at 53.

58 "New Endings of Dismissal at Mass," in *Origins* 38 (2008) 340.

sponse? If the deacon or priest, instead of simply telling the laity to leave, tells them to leave and preach the Gospel, or to leave and glorify the Lord by the way they live, this is supposed to increase the probability that they will comply. This strategy is in direct continuity with the assumption of the American Liturgical Movement that changing the liturgy would change society. It is also a continuation of the kind of post-Tridentine pastoral theology that envisions an active clergy managing, acting upon, instructing, molding, commanding, and directing a passive laity.

Conclusion

The leaders of the American Liturgical Movement are now acclaimed as "pioneers," which is at once laudatory and an indication that the movement has become part of history. As such it can now be studied with a more critical and objective eye. Pioneers can cultivate arid plains and make them flower; they can also unwittingly cause lasting environmental damage, not discovered until years later. It is time for an honest appraisal of the movement's role in the widespread architectural and artistic alterations made to parish churches, cathedrals, and chapels in the United States. This should spur us to a deeper understanding of the purpose of Christian worship itself, and challenge us to define what we mean by "reform" and "renewal." This needs to be done with more caution than confidence.

The special characteristics of the Liturgical Movement in the United States have left their mark to the present day. There is much to admire in its zeal for social justice and its understanding that we cannot authentically worship the God we cannot see if we do not have a sense of solidarity with the neighbor we can see. This sense of solidarity with the oppressed and call to social responsibility, while not absent from today's liturgical discussions, hardly looms large. The matter is complicated by the split between social justice advocates and orthodox Christians in today's America. In 1965, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference appealed for clergy to join a march from Selma to Montgomery to support the voting rights of African-Americans. Hundreds of Catholic priests and religious joined Protestant and Jewish clergy to march for justice. Fifty years later, when the politicians who speak the most about "social justice" are likely to be advocates for same-sex marriage and an unlimited abortion license, it is dif-

ficult for faithful Catholics to link their liturgical concerns with social activism as the American Liturgical Movement could.

It would be good to try, though, keeping in mind that, this side of the veil, the liturgy is the only place on earth where we can hope to find a perfect coincidence of the *dignum* and the *iustum*. Those who wish to participate in such an effort may learn much from both the successes and the failures of the twentieth-century American Liturgical Movement.

Rev. Thomas Buffer, S.T.D. is Pastor of St. Mary Church in Marion, Ohio and Sacred Hearts Church in Cardington, Ohio. He lectures at the International Marian Research Institute, University of Dayton.