

## IS THERE A DISTINCT AMERICAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITURGY?

It is generally agreed, I believe, that Vatican II, theologically speaking, did no more than catch up with, and authoritatively approve, the main thrust of creative scholarship of the time. Perhaps the chief reason why its conclusions seemed so new—and even startling and revolutionary—to the majority of the American clergy, was that our three professional clergy magazines had for years been so cautious and conservative that they actually shielded their readers from true awareness of what was happening in the theological and biblical world. At Vatican II itself, as we know, almost all the original schemas presented were rejected by the Fathers and had to be more or less completely re-done, because the first drafts had, similarly, been drawn up by traditionalists, representative of what was commonly called curial or Roman theology. The preparatory committees, it is charged, were dominated by the Curia.

Be that as it may, and I personally believe the charge is by and large true, the situation was quite otherwise with the preparatory commission that composed the document on the liturgy. As a matter of fact, the Sacred Congregation of Rites was conspicuously *under-*represented, and the committee would only have stood to gain had such a pastorally oriented curial person as the Redemptorist Josef Löw, a disciple of Pius Parsch, been appointed to lend his experienced assistance. The membership of the liturgical preparatory committee was composed, for the most part, and certainly in respect to its leading personalities, of men who had for years been actively engaged in the international liturgical renewal. Their ecclesiology and sacramental theology were not of the accepted textbook variety but reflected their pastoral experience of discovering the Church anew in the local worshipping people gathered around the altar, a people which through their eucharistic experience were eager to become ever more truly *ecclesia*, a community of faith and love. Moreover, those who drew up the liturgy document were convinced, from the ritual problems confronting a living church in process of *feri*, that the

former ideal of universal uniformity simply must be adjusted to allow for flexibility, the variety demanded by living and evolving communities. Hence articles 37-40 of the document entitled "Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Genius and Traditions of Peoples," ranks among the boldest and most far-reaching statements of principle approved by the Council, with major impact also in other fields besides the liturgy. It finds echo most recently in Pope Paul VI's apostolic letter to Cardinal Roy on social justice: "The same Christian faith can lead to different commitments . . . the Church invites all Christians to take up a double task of inspiring and innovating, in order to make structures evolve, so as to adopt them to the real needs of today."

In any event, the schema on the liturgy not only proved acceptable as a working draft, but remained substantially unaltered throughout the lengthy discussions, and further determined, in instance after instance, the ecclesiology of subsequent documents, most especially of *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution of the Church. This happened, above all, because it faithfully reflected nearly fifty years of grassroots experience of *ecclesia*, or, to borrow the famous phrase of Guardini, the lived experience of a church coming to life in the hearts of men.

What was America's distinctive contribution to that experience? Has the United States, in the context of its own culture and traditions, and its ethnological multiformity, a continuing contribution to make, both to the liturgy as celebrated in America, and to the on-going liturgical renewal of the universal Church?

The liturgical movement in the United States was launched nationally, I believe it can be said, with the publication of *Orate Fratres* in 1926, and its supportive literature issuing chiefly, and almost exclusively at that time, from the Liturgical Press. The list of associate editors of volume one of *Orate Fratres*, including such names as Fathers William Busch, Gerald Ellard, Martin Hellriegel, Mrs. Justine Ward, clearly shows, however, that Father Virgil Michel had people he could depend upon, who had themselves already been laboring for some years in this apostolate. All of these, including Father Virgil, had received their inspiration from Europe, more especially Belgium (and its great pioneer Dom Lambert Beau-

duin), Germany (concretely the Abbey of Maria Laach), and Austria and its Pius Parsch. The American liturgical movement, in other words, was frankly derivative, both in its origin and in its continuing development. It is my conviction, nevertheless, that in four respects, at least, it pioneered; America can claim four interpretations and implementations of liturgical reform which later came to be taken for granted and found sanction with greater or lesser explicitness in Vatican II's Liturgy Constitution. All four, moreover, are themselves variations of one basic insight: namely, that liturgical reform is self-defeating if pursued in isolation from the totality of human and Christian values and goals: in sum, things must be kept together to achieve wholeness.

1. The first of these four emphases could be entitled "Liturgy and Social Reform." Virgil Michel was not a theologian, nor was he a trained liturgist. His doctoral work had dealt with "The Critical Principles of Orestes Brownson." And for most of his life he taught philosophy, contributing frequently to the magazine *The New Scholasticism*. His consuming life interest, however, lay in the field of social justice. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin were his close friends, and, as Dorothy has said more than once, Father Virgil would give of himself with equal and full generosity whether he spoke to an auditorium full of people, or a mere half dozen persons at Mott Street or on a Catholic Worker farm. It was while he was rector of the college at St. John's that, in close collaboration with Catharine de Hueck of Friendship House, he initiated the deliberate policy of attracting to St. John's black students who in those days, the early thirties, often could not find entry to other Catholic schools of the country. He backed John A. Ryan, found a fellow spirit in Jane Addams of Chicago's Hull House, and lectured on credit unions and cooperatives at St. Francis Xavier University at Antigonish. When he suffered a nervous breakdown some five years before his death in 1938, he spent the two years of recovery with the neglected Indians in northern Minnesota, where the oldsters still speak of him with affection, for he had made their cause his own. And all of this passion for the human rights of his fellow man he integrated with his primary priestly love for his eucharistic apostolate. The liturgy, he felt certain, since it made sacramentally present the death and life

of Christ *for man*, is *the* source of the true Christian spirit; and the true Christian spirit, of absolute necessity involves personal dedication to love and justice for *all*.

We are experiencing in our own day a widespread rejection of a narrowly cultic understanding of the priestly office. The words may be different, but isn't this pretty much what Father Virgil and others like him a generation ago meant when they inveighed against the sacristy priest, or the "Mass-priest"? I know he would have welcomed one of the new translations of the *Ite, Missa est*, underscoring the dynamic of the Eucharist, its open-endedness, its mission role. "The Mass is ended. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord." But he likely would have preferred: "Go in the peace of the Lord, to love and serve the *world*."

Perhaps the most striking instance of this pioneering effort to make liturgical renewal the Christian inspiration of social reform is the magazine, *Liturgy and Sociology*, published with Father Virgil's warm encouragement by two of his friends, Tom and Dorothy Coddington. Perhaps they were not very practical editors, or perhaps both they and Father Virgil were too far ahead of their time. At any rate, it lasted only two years, from February 1936 to January 1938. Every issue of the magazine is now a collector's item. But the very fact that a magazine did exist in the U.S. as early as the thirties with such a title and purpose is something American liturgists can be proud of. This was pioneering indeed.

That the proponents of liturgical renewal were disturbing the people by urging the vernacular, altar facing the people, evening Masses, revision of the eucharistic fast, etc., etc., well, that had to be put up with even though, in the minds of not a few in high places, it somehow entailed at least a suspicion of unorthodoxy. (I well remember a prominent member of the preparatory liturgical commission responsible for drawing up the Council document declaring that the number of bishops earnestly concerned with liturgical renewal could be counted on the fingers and toes of one person. The others present agreed.) But for many a long year liturgy continued to be viewed one-sidedly as a service of God, the public worship of God by the Church (*cultus ecclesiae*); and social reform as service of fellow man. What possible connection, then, could there

be between the Mass and the racial question, or the housing problem? Pioneers are often lonely men.

The state of the question was well summarized by Father Dennis Geaney, O.S.A., in his article "Keeping Things Together," in the January 1951 issue of *Orate Fratres*.

On the 25th anniversary of *Orate Fratres* I am asking myself this question: Is the liturgical movement in this country realistically coming to grips with the problems facing the world and the Church? Is it more concerned with the perfection of its ceremonies than the struggle of the masses for justice? Is it more concerned with pious groups who form a liturgical study club than the many who live as practical atheists? . . .

He concludes his article:

We have Friendship Houses, Catholic Worker groups, Young Christian Students, . . . Young Christian Workers, and the Christian Family Movement with the parish as the basic unit, etc. . . . Even before many of these liturgically oriented movements took on American flesh and blood, the late Dom Virgil Michel, first editor of *Orate Fratres*, realized that the liturgy and social problems belonged together, and he had the genius of keeping them together. May he rest in peace! Long live his spirit in *Orate Fratres*!

(This last sentiment was a gentle hint to the second editor, yours truly, who had the *velleitas* and even the *voluntas*, true, but lacked the genius Father Geaney rightly praised in Father Virgil.)

2. A second credit for American pioneering (by keeping things together), was in the field of catechetics. I speak here with some hesitation, for I was unable to make all the necessary comparisons with other countries. But I do remember that when the venture was in the planning stage, Father Virgil and his associates, Sister Jane Marie and Sister Estelle of the Dominican mother house at Grand Rapids, Michigan, were convinced that they were breaking new ground. And everything that I have been able to discover since then about the history of catechetics in the twenties and thirties would seem to bear out their conviction. The pastoral liturgical renewal was just beginning to take root; active, knowl-



edgeable participation in Mass and sacraments was seen as not something peripheral to full Christian life, but central; *the* basic pastoral need, therefore, is instruction and ever more and better catechesis, with emphasis on the Church as Mystical Body, on Christ's presence and saving activity in sacrifice and sacrament. The old style catechism, as well as its variants, was recognized as being highly unsatisfactory, not only in pedagogical method but in doctrinal content and emphasis.

The same conviction, of course, was growing in other countries. But unless I am seriously mistaken, the first really major effort to remedy the situation was the *Christ-Life Series in Religion*, published by Macmillan, in 1934-35: a series of eight books, handsomely illustrated, for the elementary grades, complete with teacher's manuals; and two books for the secondary level by Father Virgil alone: *Our Life in Christ*; and *The Christian in the World* (the latter title suggestive of Schema 13 of Vatican II is itself significant of Father Virgil's preoccupations).

In their case, without doubt, their usefulness was almost fatally curtailed by the general lack of the necessary theological and liturgical training on the part of the teachers—nuns, for the most part, at a time when it was still taken for granted that religious profession (or ordination to the priesthood, for that matter) was equivalent to a charism for the teaching of religion. The problem was: *Quis docet doctores?* A lot of water has flown under the bridge since then. But I am still inclined to think that this pioneer effort was not at all a bad beginning. So far as my own experience in teaching is concerned, I can vouch for the fact that the volume, *The Christian in the World*, though optimistically intended by Father Virgil for high school students, made college students' mind stretch, and in the right direction.

3. A third credit for the American liturgical movement can be chalked up in respect to its national liturgical weeks. In my opinion, two factors in particular contributed to the role they came to play on the American scene. One was the fact that the Benedictine abbots who sponsored their inception in 1940 and continued to sponsor them during the first three years of growth, despite severe criticism for their doing so decided to terminate their official spon-

sorship: they felt, and rightly, that both in the United States and in Europe, the liturgical movement was all too widely and wrongly identified in people's minds with monastic liturgy and ceremonial (one visits monasteries to experience "true liturgy"); whereas liturgy is the life of the Church, which becomes or should become real for Christians normally in their own parishes. I know also that, at least in the case of Abbot Alcuin of St. John's, who in that year was the president of the American Benedictine Liturgical Conference and who therefore took the initiative in the matter, withdrawing official sponsorship, and identifying the weeks with dioceses and parishes meant an opportunity to make belated amends so far as possible for past monastic sins: I mean the process by which, in the course of centuries, the Church's liturgy became ever more monasticized as to complication of its ceremonial—a development which had then become a major obstacle to active liturgical participation by the people of God, both priests and laity.

A second factor preparing American Catholics for the full functioning of the liturgical weeks was H.A.R., the redoubtable Hans Ansgar Reinhold. For fifteen years, following upon Father Virgil's death, from 1939 to 1953, he wrote his monthly *Timely Tract*. I feel quite sure that very many, if not the majority of *Orate Fratres* or *Worship* readers subscribed to the magazine because they didn't want to miss a single Tract. Riding on that bandwagon was an exhilarating trip. H.A.R. managed not merely to keep liturgy and social justice together, as did Father Virgil. The whole world was his oyster; and, if it's not too much of a mixed metaphor, the liturgy was the pearl. What I mean to say is: H.A.R., sharp-tongued, witty, impatient of pretence whether in high or low places, interested in all that is human, demolishing with a nicely turned bit of sophisticated malice the stupidities of the keepers of the castle, gave one a sense of perspective, made it all so cheerfully common-sensical. He made one realize that it *does* somehow all fit together, for there *is* a hierarchy not only of truths but also of apostolates, and of religious values. Iconoclasm is sometimes necessary in order to discover that hierarchy, to recover essentials.

But the over-all impact of H.A.R. on the American liturgical movement was splendidly positive. It is, even now, twenty to thirty

years later, a stirring experience for one to read the titles of those 150 and more Timely Tracts. *Nihil humani alienum a liturgia Hans Ansgar putavit*. Liturgy is supposed to be the great Amen, Christ's and the Christian people's celebration of their Yes to *all* apostolates, to all genuine value and reality, and to God the Father first of all. Without a doubt, H.A.R. was the prophet of the first two decades of the national liturgical weeks. At first these were merely the gatherings of the more or less professional liturgists, the bold and the not so bold ones, who needed this annual mutual reassurance that they were not really the kooks most Catholics, high and low, thought them to be. By the late fifties and early sixties, however, the national liturgical week had become a uniquely American phenomenon. They were like the German annual *Katholikentag*, insofar as they were de facto *the* Catholic convention of the country. But they were uniquely an American phenomenon, inasmuch as the liturgical renewal was accepted as the heart and center of all apostolic or mission activities. These latter all had their own national conventions: catechetical, press, Catholic Action, C.F.M., etc., etc. But the national liturgical week attracted leaders from *all* these apostolates; these things did come together in a manner and to a degree unparalleled in any other country. The St. Louis Week in 1964 had more than 20,000 participants, so many in fact, that it was thought next to impossible to find another city the coming year capable of accommodating such a crowd. Hence the 1965 Week took place in three cities, spanning the country: Baltimore, Chicago, and Portland, Oregon. Houston in 1966 was perhaps the last of the Weeks with the character which American Catholics had come to expect. Its theme, appropriately, was "Worship in the City of Man," and its papers and workshops ranged from the predictable "The Role of the Commentator and Lector," or "Singing at Parish Masses," to "Problems of the Inner City," "Worship of Spanish-American Catholics," "Money and Property: Threats to Renewal," and "Jews and Christians in the Modern World."

One may be pardoned for looking back with some nostalgia to those heady days, during these post-Vatican II times when the liturgical renewal, together with so many other bouyant hopes, seems to many to have gone stale, or sour, or, a far worse fate, to have be-



come largely irrelevant. As a matter of record, therefore, it is good to recall that the national Liturgical Weeks in America witnessed in *celebration* what Vatican II was to proclaim in article 10 of the Liturgy Constitution: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her powers flows."

4. The fourth credit line for American pioneering in liturgical renewal belongs to another individual, happily still with us, and still fighting the good fight. I speak of Father Frederick McManus—and I am certain he would be sincerely embarrassed were he here to listen to what I have to say of him, and would disclaim my tribute. I think all of us are proud of the new role that the Canon Law Society of America has begun to play in the Church's life. Fred is very much part of that development: from a narrow and often suffocating legalism to a biblical understanding of law as a protector and promoter of burgeoning life. For nearly ten years previous to Vatican II Fred McManus, as the acknowledged American expert in liturgical law, had in the pages of *Worship* interpreted that law, or rubrics, *expansively*, positively, rather than restrictively. I know the liturgical journals, and am reasonably well acquainted with liturgical literature. No other country at that time could boast of such a happy and fruitful combination: a lawyer expertly exploiting the liturgical law to its furthest possible limits (or should I say, bending it a bit when called for) in the interests of healthy spiritual life and growth. And what he did in a pioneering way in America, he continued to do as a member of the Pontifical Preparatory Committee for the Liturgy, of the Liturgy Committee during the Council, and of the Consilium for Implementing the Liturgical Reforms after the Council. In this important respect of liturgical reform, there was not his equal in all three of these groups.

Perhaps some of you have heard the jingle that gained currency during the work of the preparatory committee, and which named the true fighters in that body:

Tres sunt qui testimonium dant in caelo:  
Martin, Hallinan, et Young;<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bishops. The names sometimes varied with the tides of battle.

Et tres sunt qui testimonium dant in terra:  
Martimort, Wagner, et McManus.

Obviously, the fight is not yet won. Some of us, in fact, fearfully suspect that the fight has to be begun all over again, *da capo*, especially after the latest, the third, Instruction on the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy, dated September 5, 1970, and emanating no longer from the Consilium, but solely from the Congregation for Divine Worship.

As to what America's future specific contribution should be to liturgical renewal, in the interests both of America and of the universal Church, I shall limit myself to one point only, but I believe it to be of rather major import. Earlier, I spoke of articles 37-40 of the Liturgy Constitution, dealing in a revolutionary and liberating manner with the principle of adaptation. Vatican II, in the Liturgy document, voiced the far-reaching principle that the most important self-manifestation, the epiphany of the Church, is the local worshiping community, especially if led by its bishop. In the eucharistic celebration, the Church becomes event. Moreover, the liturgy is for man, not man for the liturgy. Hence reasonable adaptation is essential: for people differ and the old philosophical tag is still valid. "*Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur.*" I wonder if there is any other country in which there is such obvious pluralism of *recipientes* as in America. There is the ethnic, cultural pluralism of Chicanos (24 per cent of our Catholic population), of French Canadian Americans in the New England states, of Blacks, of Indians, of Puerto Ricans. There is the regional pluralism: a predominantly urban Catholicism, the suburbs, together with many strictly rural and missionary dioceses. There is the universal generation gap, nowhere perhaps more evident and fateful than in the United States where the pace of change is most dizzying—not to speak of the growing cleavage between liturgical traditionalists of whatever age, and those for whom liturgical changes have been too little and too late.

We have had, largely as a consequence of all this, a rash of underground and above ground congregations and experimental liturgies, sometimes ill-conceived and futile exercises of good will seeking solutions outside what such persons believe to be the red

tape of official rubrics. These are symptoms, and merely to suppress them is often tantamount to a refusal to acknowledge the malaise.

And yet liturgy is too important to be played with. Too much is at stake. A way must be found to combine permanent values and principles with here-and-now needs and rights, structure with spontaneity.

I am pleading that America, because of its special problems of pluralism, take the lead in *applying* nos. 37-40 of the Liturgy Constitution, and where necessary, securing expansion or further flexibility of the principles of liturgical adaptation. I believe this deserves priority, not only in terms of our own present and urgent American needs, but also in view of the assistance this would be to other countries with similar if perhaps less pressing problems or needs.

All of us are grateful, I think, for the sudden explosion of internationally and ecumenically acknowledged biblical expertise in the Catholic community of America within less than a generation of time. We still have quite a way to go before we can match this in the fields of systematic theology and of liturgy. However, I was much encouraged last week, attending an institute sponsored by the Graduate School of Liturgical Studies at Notre Dame. That school has had now, for some years, more than a hundred graduate students in liturgy, and the quality of the school is high, both in its historical and pastoral aspects. Then, too, there is the quite exciting work being done at the Woodstock Center for Experimental Liturgy in New York City, enlisting the aid of experts in other sciences: pastoral ministry, sociology, communications, theatre, music. St. John's too is contributing in a modest way: our graduate school of theology, with some concentration on liturgy, has more than a hundred students. I believe, in other words, that the necessary foundations of liturgical expertise are at long last beginning to be laid in our country to allow for our grappling constructively with the challenge of adaptation. We in America do have an opportunity as well as the responsibility. Now all that is necessary is to convince the powers that be to see things *my* way.

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