

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION SEMINARY

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

MAKING SENSE OF AMBIVALENCE: THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC LAITY SINCE VATICAN II

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Recently I gave an informal talk to a group of Catholic graduate students about the relationship between the church and the academic vocation. All of them had experienced the conflict between a church which at times seems to have little use for independent, critical thinkers, and an academic community with little respect for religion or religious people. Several had told me of the ambivalence they felt about the church: Catholic faith was woven into the very fabric of their lives, yet they often felt distanced from the church as they found it, distanced enough to wonder if they were really Catholics.

I tried to explain that their difficulty in integrating their faith with their passionate commitment to their work was a common lay Catholic experience. Perhaps they could find in their family histories the hand of Providence bringing them to the intersection of faith and intellectual life in this historical situation of the church and society. Contemporary pastoral theology encourages people, married people, poor people, people of all sorts, to search for God in their everyday experience. There is no reason why middle class people cannot do the same. And if married people come to think about God as the love they experience, and if poor people come to locate God in the experience of overcoming oppression and injustice, perhaps middle class Christians will find God in their experience of ambivalence, their often unacknowledged care for their Catholic heritage and their often unspoken love for their country and their work.

In perhaps the most widely quoted passage in the literature of African-Americans, the great W.E.B. DuBois once wrote: "One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." Fourteen years later, during World War I, DuBois told his fellow citizens: "This is as much our country as yours, and as much the world's as ours. We Americans, black and white, are the servants of all mankind and minister to a greater, fairer heaven." The American dilemma-and tragedy-is our failure to allow the reconciliation and Americism DuBois, Martin Luther King and other of our African-American prophets dreamed of. For people of serious religious faith in this American land, I believe, "two-ness, two unreconciled strivings" always mark the location of our vocation.

Ambivalence is built in. To be an American middle class Catholic today is to be an insider in an American culture which is surely ours, but by no means Catholic. It is also to be an insider in a Catholic church which is also ours, but by no means American. It is to be part of a society that cares little for serious religion, and often does not respect religious people, especially if they are too religious. It is also to be part of a church that seems to care little for lay experience, and often does not really respect lay people, especially if they are really lay.

But insiders have nowhere else to go. There are no preferable communities of meaning and value, religious communities, that we could join if we wished to do so, and there are no subcultures composed of a people who are our people, as there once were. Ours is what Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago once called a "precarious posture" and it is there that I propose we begin our discussion tonight. It is an appropriate spot, this always bifurcated world of the laity, I think particularly appropriate in this setting and on this occasion. In this setting, on the campus of a Catholic university, because Catholic higher education is about the business of producing middle class lay American Catholics. On this occasion, because I knew Archbishop Gerety through our work on the Call to Action, an event which for me exemplified a church renewed and reformed in ways which affirm and support lay Catholic life.

Accordingly, I will try to do three things tonight. First I will offer a lay centered interpretation of U.S. Catholic history. Then I will examine some aspects of the post-Vatican II church from the perspective of middle class lay Catholics. U.S. Catholics today are at the center and the edge of American society. I speak tonight of those at the center, with full knowledge that many have been left behind and many stand outside. That is another paper. And finally I will offer some suggestions about how a lay perspective might reshape our understanding of some issues in contemporary Catholic life.

I. The Laity in American Catholic History

John Carroll, the first bishop of the United States, once stated that the revolution in his nation's religious affairs was even more remarkable than the revolution in its politics. Long subject to civil disabilities, Catholics were now able to worship in freedom; disestablishment and free exercise made the church a voluntary organization. Roman Catholics may have been heirs to a Church almost eighteen centuries old, but now on western frontiers and the even more

challenging frontiers of commercial, later industrial, cities, they had to create churches where none had previously existed.

At first it was a typical Republican enterprise, marked by lay leadership, considerable non-Catholic support, careful accommodation of clergy to the egalitarian spirit of the age, a piety that stressed human responsibility, and an apologetic aimed at making Catholicism intelligible to an enlightened public. But, with the arrival of increasing numbers of European immigrants, this "republican interlude" ended. What historian Jay Dolan calls a "plain undemonstrative style of religion" gave way to an "emotion packed religion distinguished by its emphasis on the practice of external rituals, communion with a host of heavenly relatives, and devotion to a suffering savior, all mediated through a sacramental system controlled by the clergy." In the aftermath of conflicts over ownership of church property by lay trustees, clerical and lay roles were sharply distinguished, religion was segregated from other areas of life and within the realm of religion the priest was supreme.

Yet the immigrant church was a people's church, as much as any that Catholicism has known. Hasia Diner's pioneering study of Irish immigrant women, *Erin's Daughters in America*, revealed the extent of drunkenness, desertion, industrial accidents and schizophrenia in Irish immigrant neighborhoods, a portrait of cultural declension repeated among successive immigrant groups. In the midst of fragile communities, lay leaders appeared, usually people with intact families and steady employment. They began to organize, in part to enhance their own life prospects by overcoming the stigma attached to their nationality, in part to preserve the continuity of their families and express national and religious traditions they valued.

Nativism and anti-Catholicism reinforced the conservative impulse of immigrant groups, but ethnic communities and their churches were centers of hope as well as memory. Migration to America, according to Timothy L. Smith, involved a "redefinition of the boundaries of peoplehood as folk memories were brought to bear on new aspirations". Folk memories: from the outside ethnic parishes seemed like ghettos filled with archaic devotions and anti-democratic values, but things are rarely as they first appear. Based on persuasion and commitment, ethnic parishes provided centers of order in a disordered environment, and principles of authority in a world of conflicting voices and multiple temptations. Conservative piety, with its relatively pessimistic understanding of human nature and its less than revolutionary approach to social conditions, was quite functional to the situation in which newcomers found themselves. Preachers stressed again and again that people were free to choose: the possibilities of freedom could be realized, and its dangers to personal integrity and family life avoided, one pastor said, if people would place themselves "willingly under obligation." They should join the church, contribute to its support, receive its sacraments, follow its moral teaching, turn away from drink and boisterous behavior, and fulfill their family responsibilities. To those still close to their pre-industrial, peasant roots, it was no surprise to learn that people were sinful, the world a hard place, and self-control the key to solving life's problems. After generations of study of cultures of poverty, it should not be a shock to learn that conservative theology worked better than liberal, that order, authority, clear moral rules and family stability could help, not hinder, the process of liberation.

Folk memories, but brought to bear on new aspirations, Smith told us. For all their determination to hold on to old world ways, the immigrant Catholic creation of community around churches, schools and devotional and charitable societies was a uniquely modern adventure. Routines of religious practice instilled habits of order and restraint appropriate to the new industrial discipline, but at the same time the experience opened horizons of new possibility, evident in the obvious pride which marked the dedication of a new church or the opening of a new school, the arrival of the first sisters or the celebration of first communion for long lines of scrubbed, well dressed children marching in procession behind the cross and, as often as not, the American flag. The piety, at first glance world denying, in practice was a kind of pastoral theology of liberation, for if it taught anything it taught that what had been needed no longer, that old notions of deference and ascribed status could give way to a new life of personal responsibility and self-making. And evidence for these new ideas was right there, in the progress of this parish of which this person was a part.

Then, as now, on that edge we mentioned, the bottom up process of church formation existed in some tension with the imperatives of the Catholic church as an organization. To survive in the context of pluralism, the hierarchy had to make the immigrants practicing Catholics, eliminate or coopt traditional family and communal devotions, and draw people to the sacraments. They had to persuade people to offer personal and financial support, so they had to clarify the boundaries between the church and competing organizations. Gradually the universalism of faith became focused exclusively on the church itself, pastoral strategies of maintenance gradually replaced those of community formation, missionary and evangelical responsibilities were rendered secondary to organizational considerations.

It is almost impossible to overemphasize the degree to which organizational priorities shaped the ideology of twentieth century American Catholicism. "The teaching of Christ was not left to drift with the centuries" one bishop said. "The Savior promulgated a complete organization." At its center was the hierarchy, which had kept "inviolable the direct revelation that God gave personally to it in the person of his first priests." Another bishop told a lay audience in 1925 that "the church is the happiest and most peaceful society that history records and the most perfect organization the world has ever known. 11 Forty years later the bishop of that diocese told an assembly that the parish, the "church in miniature" needed three things, a school, for teaching was "not the greatest privilege of the priest but his greatest responsibility", an altar, where the Mass could be celebrated by the priest, and, of course, the priest, "the dispenser of the mercy of God (and) the grace of the redeemer." By then the people were not left out, but taken for granted.

Of course, there was been another voice, not often speaking of lay participation in church affairs, but pointing the church beyond itself. In the United States it was called Americanism. In the late nineteenth century, Archbishop John Ireland and others argued that the church should expand its agenda and engage the great problems of modern society. It could do so by constructing here in the United States a new Catholicism, an American Catholicism, native to this land, as Irish and German and Italian Catholicism were native to theirs.

How would that be done?

First, by affirming in word and deed the goodness of American society and its institutions. This was good public relations, combating anti-Catholic

propaganda. But it also represented a choice, for participation over separation, assimilation over the preservation beyond a generation of particular ethnic institution. Americanists thought it a good thing for immigrants to learn English, risking the loss of traditional culture but easing access to the newer and larger culture of America. They thought it a good thing to pursue material advancement, a truly new idea for most immigrants, and a good thing to get an education, therefore available only to the few; a good thing, too, to organize for their rights, as if they were as good as any others, and a good thing to love the new nation, to love it strongly enough to kill or die on its behalf. In other words, Americanism, belief in the providential role of the nation, required, and gave meaning to, Americanization, the fuller participation in American life. Without at least a touch of it, it is unlikely that those new aspirations would ever have been fulfilled. And it made the lay experience of work and school and sacrifice and organizing and political action religiously important.

Second, one could also construct an American Catholicism by doing the ordinary work of the church in parishes and schools, empowering immigrants and their descendants to participate in the American experiment. Unions, ethnic associations and bread and butter liberal politics at first seemed to people unfamiliar with pluralist democracy, including some Catholics like Ireland, to represent an ethnocentric separatism at odds with Americanism, but eventually it became clear that these were means of extending and deepening American democracy, enabling outsiders to move inside and claim a place at the tables where decisions were made, and to do so while remaining authentically themselves. Making American democracy work was an authentic Catholic responsibility; citizenship was important.

And, finally, making American Catholicism meant encouraging a missionary apostolate among lay Catholics, especially those Americanized, educated, middle class Catholics who were the product of the church's remarkable pastoral work among the immigrants. What would happen when the children and grandchildren of the immigrants, marrying and working and socializing outside their group, no longer felt the automatic pull to Catholicism that came with their ethnic identity? They would remain Catholic if they could only see their family journey from impoverished immigrant outsiders to educated and affluent insiders as a providential story whose meaning could be found in the promise of American life. They would be the instruments by which God's spirit would renew the ideals and the mission of America. To do so, Catholics would have to learn to speak the truths of their faith in a language Americans could understand. If they could do that, then they might persuade their fellow citizens that their personal hopes and those of the nation could be fulfilled by becoming Catholic.

Paulist founder Isaac Hecker said it best. Although his age had its "martyrs, recluses and monastic communities," Hecker thought these would not be its "prevailing types of Christian perfection. 11 Instead, "our age lives in its busy marts, in counting houses, in workshops, in homes and in the varied relations that form human society This is the field of conquest for the heroic Christian of our day. Out of the cares, toils and duties, afflictions and responsibilities of daily life are to be built the pillars of sanctity of our age". Ireland put it more forcefully: "Let there be no room among us for the lackadaisical piety which lazily awaits a zephyr from the sky, the bearer of efficacious grace, while God's grace is at hand entreating to be made efficacious by our cooperation", Ireland thundered. "We are certain of failure if we are on our knees when we should be fleet of foot, if we are in the sanctuary when we should be in the highways and the marketplaces"

Catholics continued to enter the highways and marketplaces, but their presence was not experienced as an occasion to make God's grace efficacious. In America as in Europe liberal Catholicism like Ireland's and Hecker's lost out. Pope Leo XIII told American Catholics to associate as much as possible with other Catholics, to avoid the suspicion that there were some among them who desired "a church in America different from the church in the rest of the world", and to take steps to preserve "in the multitude a submissive spirit." He worried that the so-called Americanists wished to introduce into the church "a certain liberty" so that "limiting the exercise and vigilance of its powers, each one of the faithful might act more freely in pursuance of his own natural bent or capacity". Leo's idea was quite different: "We ardently desire that this truth should sink day by day more deeply into the minds of Catholics: namely that they can in no better way safeguard their own individual interests and the common good than by yielding a hearty and submissive obedience to the church."

Leo's directives corresponded quite well with the perceived requirements of the church as an organization in pluralistic America. Gradually, with the help of parochial schools and an ever multiplying set of associations designed to culturally and socially segregate Catholics, the American church became a subculture, powerful in things religious, effective in preserving the church, but draining much of lay life of religious meaning. Bishops and priests took pride in the economic success, social advancement and localized political power of Catholics, but they could give no religious or spiritual meaning to the experience of social mobility. The poor could expect assistance and working people who joined unions could expect at least moral support, but salvation was largely a matter of sacramental practice and personal and family morality.

Even liberal Catholics had little sense that economic betterment was the key to the independence and empowerment essential to a democratic society, much less that such mundane preoccupations had anything to do with the pursuit of sanctity. In politics the immigrant church experience of mutual aid and self-help shaped a style of practical deliberate action aimed at achieving concrete objectives for a particular group. The experience of ethnic community formation was similarly part of an adjustment to the American marketplace in which rewards came to those with the organized power to participate in the give and take of pluralism. This ethos was reflected as well in Samuel Gompers' "business unionism" which Catholic skilled workers embraced so readily. The same hard headed association of organization and economic stability with freedom and dignity informed the machine politics and bread and butter liberalism which attracted Catholic voters. But all this was activity apart from church, necessary, sometimes useful, but devoid of religious meaning, and in fact regarded with some suspicion as perhaps a bit selfish and materialistic by idealistic reformers and conservative churchmen alike.

Nevertheless, as we have noted, the subcultural strategy was empowering, instilling the self-discipline and moral restraint required for success. By the 1950s American Catholicism had become one of the world's great success stories. With the help of the GI Bill, the new unions and the general prosperity of the period, American Catholics began that accelerated movement into the middle and upper classes which Father Greeley has documented so well. By then, however, the self-understanding of the church had deprived that dramatic story of religious significance. Lay success did not enrich Catholic culture and

church teaching had little impact on the lay lives of the laity. Church leaders had confined the church to church, they had defined religion in terms of sacramental practice, organizational unity and group loyalty and settled for a subculture in which the highest responsibilities of church members were to attend Mass, support the parish and school, and denounce the church's enemies.

But, as the Catholic middle class grew in numbers and self-confidence after World War II, the long muffled Americanist voice revived. Priests like Louis Putz, Reynold Hillenbrand and John LaFarge and lay leaders like John Cogley, Pat and Patty Crowley, Joseph and Sally Cunneen and Ed Marciniak saw in the evident progress of Catholics some Ireland-like possibilities. When they read Teilhard de Chardin they glimpsed the possibility of a theology of work; in John Courtney Murray they found at least the beginnings of an American Catholic politics, and in the living rooms where CFM couples gathered, there was hope for an understanding of sex, love and marriage which might overcome the impersonal character of modern bureaucratic life. All were far less Americanist than their nineteenth century predecessors: they rarely challenged clerical authority and most saw lay people as ambassadors from the church to secular society. Even then, though a small minority, they were pushed in most places to the margins of parish and diocesan life.

II. Vatican II and Beyond

Still, this new breed rekindled the dream of an American Catholicism and they came into their own in the age of John Kennedy and John XXIII. Then Vatican II, to everyone's astonishment, all but baptized the vision of an evangelizing laity with its endorsement of religious liberty, its philosophical personalism, and its positive sense of historical destiny. Most of all, it affirmed an almost Americanist vision of the laity:

But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family, and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven.

I was there. For a brief moment from 1958 to, what, 1968, many of us believed that an American Catholicism was finally taking shape, and that it would be good thing for America and a good thing for Catholicism. For that moment the action was in families and neighborhoods, on the campuses and in middle class parishes, and in the lay movements which had flourished in the midwest. Politics was important, but so were liturgy, family life, community organization, reform movements (like the CIC, YCS and YCW, and the NFCCS), all helping to give meaning, religious meaning, to our new status as American insiders. But just at that moment, something happened, to Catholicism, to Americanism, to the laity. And the moment passed. By the 1980s, when a briefly united Americana hierarchy sought a purchase on public life, they spoke the language of lay sanctity in the daily pursuit of justice, but then they pulled back.

Why were Americanist hopes unfulfilled?

First, some internal reasons. Catholic Americanists, bent upon the constructive integration of Catholicism and Americanism, took too much of each for granted. The church was more human and more political, more in need of reform, more disorderly and messy, and certainly more badly managed than anyone had believed. And the American church rested on a whole range of social and cultural assumptions that grew from immigrant outsidership and ultramontane anti-modernism that had lost their credibility. One wanted to be a Catholic pursuing holiness in the world, and trying to offer Catholic angles on contemporary culture, but simply being a Catholic proved problematic. Americanists like John Courtney Murray had not paid much attention to the democratic impulses of American religious culture at the popular level, so Catholics were simply unprepared for the appearance of evangelicalism and pentecostalism in their own ranks, for the radical changes which overcame religious communities, or for the poor leadership of so many church institutions. Finally liberal Catholics underestimated the degree to which a church, any church, needs to emphasize those things that make it distinctive if it is to enjoy warm support. In short, they took too little note of what makes Catholics Catholic. There is more to be said here but let one thing be clear: the church, like other institutions is, under God's providence, made by human beings like us, and we must attend to the politics of its making. Too many have failed to do that.

Second, America too was not the way it was supposed to be. In ways which corresponded almost exactly with the experience of middle-class Protestants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, middle class Catholics of the sixties and seventies found themselves liberated from a self-defined oppressive subculture to participate in a society which it turned out was not at all sure it wanted to be God's instrument for creating the beloved community, as Martin Luther King still thought it should be. America made our own turned out to be filled with all sorts of problems, we were quickly disillusioned, and we were not alone. Catholic activists had long built bridges between their church and American reform movements, from the social gospel through labor, peace and social justice movements. After 1968 it was hard to find movements which needed or wanted them or which Catholics could in conscience join. America needed conversion, too, it seemed, conversion to the vision of its own providential significance and responsibility, but Catholics were no longer sure they could or should help do that. William Halsey entitled his brilliant book on American Catholic culture between the wars *The Survival of American Innocence*. What remained of that innocence died in the sixties.

A third reason for Americanist failure was that Americanist Catholicism lost touch with one of its original and fundamental precepts, the conviction that Catholicism is good for everybody. Isaac Hecker, unlike most of his Americanist disciples, really did envision a Catholic future, a Kingdom, really a Commonwealth, of God composed of free men and women, because he truly believed that Christianity was the way to fulfill human aspirations: the Gospel really was good news. For most Catholics, the rhetoric of Americanism sometimes masked another, more ecclesiastical dream, of a secure, organized subculture, conquering enemies abroad, winning a secure place at home, maybe eventually converting a few people, but not very soon, only occasionally interested in resolving the major problems of the times and always putting the church, the church we were making, first.

Once Americanism as a religious and spiritual enterprise was abandoned, the dramatic Catholic story of liberation from poverty and marginalization, that journey from margins to the center, a story of lay people and their families, lost its meaning, for meaning, real meaning, could only be found in church. That is what the young Father Andrew Greeley was driving at when he said his church had nothing to say to its first lay president. Even the Americanists at their best were reluctant to suggest that their own lay experience, outside of church, was normative. When they tried to do so on birth control, they were sharply corrected; that is why the episode was so damaging. The Chicago Declaration on the Laity in 1976 spoke with anguish of a new, counter cultural radicalism led by priests and nuns, but it betrayed a nostalgia for the old Catholic subculture, in which lay people were sent forth as ambassadors to the world and the Americanist ideal of the holy community was confined to church. So powerful was our sense that God is only really with us in church, that we could hardly imagine our lives without it.

But Pope John restored the vision of a church in service to the human family, and for Vatican II the church was "truly and intimately united with humankind and its history. Indeed, "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties, of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. These words of a worldly faith, of a church bonded in love with all humankind, which begins with no us and them, Christians and the others, but with everybody, that vision shook the church of Latin America, where religion and culture are more integrated, but here in the United States it was hard to penetrate the shell of live and let live toleration, the marginalization of religion to private and family life, and the preoccupation of the voluntary church with its own concerns, with religion, with its specific and distinctive religion. Yet, in the absence of Catholic universality and a sense of mission, that is in the absence of confidence that what the church believes and teaches is authentic good news for everybody, Americanism becomes what its enemies say it is, a way of becoming comfortable in modern society by legitimating our new found wealth and status.

Finally, there was the failure of organized church reform. I do not want to rehearse here the standard arguments about the laity in the post-Vatican II church. For example, we have witnessed the decline of the priesthood in numbers and morale, the dramatic retreat of shrinking religious orders from pastoral and educational ministries, and the dramatic rise of many forms of lay ministry, volunteer and professional. The latter, so beautifully affirmed by the bishops in their pastoral letter "Called and Gifted," is one sign among many of the steady process of renewal. People remain more religious than anyone would have guessed, movements of spiritual renewal are strong and we have discovered numerous ways to build vibrant Christian communities in and outside parishes.

But the Catholic church, that is the organization and its distinctive culture, is a problem; everywhere we look, there is a huge gap between renewal and reform. Even deeply committed Catholics often seem unsure about what it means to be Catholic, as distinct from Christian, and those that are sure take on an increasingly sectarian tone. Vigorous ministries again and again run up against unreformed church structures, bishops and priests who encourage shared responsibility grow defensive, and conflict seems a chronic feature of what passes for ecclesiastical politics. In terms I have often used elsewhere, popular Catholicism grows more evangelical, that is more scriptural, more centered on personal experiences of God and voluntary communities of the faithful, and neither church officials nor most scholars have figured out how to deal with this altogether American phenomenon.

Richard McBrien once wrote that post-conciliar renewal largely had to do with getting clear on the mission of the church, mobilizing resources for the pursuit of that mission, and opening the doors to wider participation in church decisions because the resources consisted of people who would only be mobilized if they had a voice in deciding what the mission would be. But *Humanae Vitae* damaged lay enthusiasm for church reform, the 1971 synod of bishops demoralized the clergy, and the anticlimactic outcome of civil rights and peace movements and the spread of abortion left many wondering whether social action or even lay life was worthwhile. The 1976 Call to Action conference and the process that preceded it seemed to its participants to signal precisely the kind of consultation and shared responsibility centered on issues of mission required by the new situation of the American church. But those who should have seen its significance were either frightened by Roman reaction, or by popular participation, as many bishops were, or unable to get beyond anxieties created by the messy combination of ecclesiastical insiders and the new outsiders, women, gays, angry minorities and evangelical style radicals. The result was the failure of church reform, and a resulting decline in the quality of personnel in church bureaucracies, the collapse or demoralization of most national organizations, the individuation of ministry, the spread of evangelical forms of piety, leaving almost all Catholics convinced there is nothing they can, or probably should, do about the church beyond their parish.

A century ago Protestant theologian Philip Schaff noted that Catholics were to be found at the top (through converts) and the bottom (through the immigrants) of the American social structure, but they had not as yet penetrated the middle class. When they did, Schaff predicted, they would come to resemble evangelical Protestants. What Schaff anticipated Andrew Greeley now describes as *do it yourself Catholicism*". Human freedom, Gospel faith, voluntary community and personal responsibility are the marks of a free church, and of an evangelical style of religious life. Whether such a church can also be Catholic is the question, a question as old as John Carroll.

Voluntary organizations require choices, and organizations, and the people who love them, usually want the choices to be for themselves. It is obvious that the immigrant church prospered by concentrating on religion, endowing church life alone with religious meaning, and forming its people to a fundamental option (to use contemporary language) for the church. Without intending to, Catholics participated in the process of modernization which, in John Murray Cuddihy's terms, "cruelly sundered what tradition had joined," slicing through primordial ties between church and state, religion and culture, leaving "wholeness hunger in its wake." We seek that wholeness in the church, but I believe we will not find it until we think harder about the question of purpose, our answer to the question of why the church exists. Among immigrant Catholics the question of why had clear answers,, linked to family and group aspirations; among many Catholics, they still do. But for those of us who have become insiders, the why is not so clear.

III. Lay Catholic Action

How does a lay vision influence that question of why?

First, location: for the laity the center where an answer might be found is probably outside church. Pope John, and Vatican II at moments, wanted to decenter our consciousness by moving outside the Catholic subculture that we had learned to call church. So does the option for the poor or reflection on the holocaust. It is out there, in the midst of history, that we should think about faith and church and mission. And if we do so, lay people will no longer be ambassadors from church to world but in their very layness they will be the church. As Archbishop Rembert Weakland once put it, if we are the people of God, the Body of Christ, the very presence of Christ in this particular time and place, we are that all the time, including those times, most of the time, when we are not in church.

So the layness of lay life is not an arena for interchurch combat or a culture beset with temptations but the very essence of our Christian vocation. That relocates the center and rejuvenates Americanism., but it is also risky for the church as an organization. For if God and God's church are present outside the organized church, and our best energies can be given to our work in the world, why do we need the organized church at all? Our answer will be filled with ambivalence, for it rejects sectarian isolation but also secular surrender which leaves the church a role only in personal life. We takes a stand at the edge of faith and culture, and struggles for wholeness, and looks to our friends and the ministries of our church for help.

2. Bilingualism and biculturalism. In a free and pluralistic society we must simultaneously form the church and participate in the larger society. So we live out two cultural repertoires every day or, as the bishops put it in the nuclear pastoral of 1983, we participate in two forms of teaching and learning. With our fellow Christians we speak the language of discipleship, with others the language of citizenship, in one community the language of Gospel reflection, in other communities the language of technical expertise, or the civil language of social exchange. We need to learn to do both, to speak up in church and to speak up in public, and to resist the tendency to so separate the two conversations that we surrender our integrity; we must become authentically bilingual. That is why we need Catholic colleges and universities and a vigorous Catholic intellectual life. Without it the church will slip either into sectarianism, speaking only to itself, or sentimentality, mouthing pablum and platitudes to a disdainful world.

3. Realism about organization. Institutions and organizations change in response to internal and environmental changes. When and how they change is result of organizational politics. People involved with those organizations are responsible for their conduct. The degree of responsibility varies. In the church, Pop and bishops do bear enormous responsibility, well spelled out at Vatican II. People who work for the church, priests, religious and laity, share responsibility and must find ways to participate. Ministry without commitment to church reform and shared responsibility is a contradiction. And some reforms contribute to enabling Catholic life in the world, others work against it. And choices must be made. To help make those choices we must seek and exercise power in church, as we do elsewhere. That sounds harsh, but it has always been done and it is being done right now.

4. Lay empowerment requires a theology of America.

This land is your land,
This land is my land,
From California to the New York islands,
From the redwood forests to the Gulf Stream waters,
This land was made for you and me.

In 1987 I quoted these Woodie Guthrie words at the start of a keynote address to the Catholic Theological Society of America. That year the theme of its meetings was "Catholic Theology in a North American Context." I argued that we badly needed serious theological reflection on the historical experience of American Catholics. Indeed I went so far as to claim that this history might qualify as an historical example of liberation: millions of poor people, outsiders in a strange land, over the course of several generations won the economic security, education, social status and respect and political participation, which one would take to constitute the specific meanings of what is called liberation.

The theologians were not impressed. Yet I remain convinced that we need to think about the meaning of the experience of European immigrant Catholics, we need to tell ourselves the compelling story of our own history, indeed the telling of that story is essential if we are to find meaning in our own Catholic experience. Someone once said that to visit a people who have no history is like going into the wilderness where there are no maps to direct the traveler. The American church today, and the Catholic colleges and universities where I spend most of my time, seem like that wilderness.

5. Reconsidering the people of God. The people may be the church, but are they really. After all, the people are very secular. Remember the language of Vatican II: "They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family, and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven." Thus lay ministers in the church must remain lay, bringing lay experience to bear on worship and sacraments and education, encouraging persons to find God in their lives at work and in family and society. It suggests the need to revive the old Catholic Action strategies, enriched by new insights into the theological meanings of our common and pluralistic human life.

"The split between the faith which men (and women) profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the most serious errors of our age", the Vatican Council declared. "Let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part and religious duties on the other." Fifteen years later the Synod of Bishops argued that "the Christian's specific contribution to justice lies in the day to day life of the individual believer acting like a leaven in his or her family, work, social and civic life." In the first draft of their pastoral letter on economics, the bishops committee drew on Vatican I to argue that the universal call to holiness is expressed in the struggle to enhance human dignity in daily life: "Men and women in business, on farms and in factories, in government, in scientific and educational institutions, and in every other field of labor can achieve true sanctity when they respond to the call of

discipleship in the midst of their work. The church in its ministry has a responsibility to nurture and sustain this response." Yet, by the third draft, the Vatican II quotes had been eliminated. Three paragraphs on the lay vocation were reduced to two sentences, followed quickly by warnings about a "throw away society". New sections on family life said nothing of nurturing civic engagement or sustaining peacemaking and just work, but instead warned against "self-gratification" and urged witness to counter cultural values. Such countercultural prescriptions consistently frustrate our announced intention to take lay people seriously.

In conclusion, the movement of Catholic history and the logic of church teaching suggest that the church turn its pastoral attention to the laity as laity. At the heart of Catholic Christianity is the claim that all men and women are destined for union with God that all of God's creation will be reconciled with its Creator, that the Kingdom will in fact come. Through no particular merit of their own some have been called as Christians to consciously cooperate in forwarding the Kingdom. As a human creation, the church tends always to mistake itself for the Kingdom of God, but the promise of a single human family, living in love and friendship with one another, breaks through particularities, scatters subcultures, and calls forth engagement with the whole movement of human history.

Let me be as direct and concrete as possible. If our worship and prayer features constant harping on the evils of secularism, claiming again and again that we must recognize the dangers and temptations of our lives in "the world," then our church is a place of illusion and irresponsibility. Such language ignores the fact that we have helped to make that world what it is, it almost always ignores the equal danger of self-righteousness contained in such claims to moral superiority, it cuts us off from our fellow citizens with whom we share responsibility for the future of our communities, and it all but insures that we will never come to grips with the cultural symbols, economic structures and political systems which keep millions of people in poverty and threaten the very existence of our planet. If our sermons on ministry suggest we should become more involved in the church and less committed to our jobs, our profession; and community organizations, then we of course devalue those among us who devote their time to politics, civic organizations, and "secular" activity. If our preaching and piety make it more difficult for us to be fully men and women of our age and time, if they make us feel guilty about our work, our cultural activities, our engagement with the problems of our daily lives, then it is, I want to argue, part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Of course our faith and our church should enable us to get some critical distance from our society; of course we need to step back and ask what are we doing and why are we doing it, but the goal is not to build up a church defined by its opposition to the world, nor is it to enable us to stand in righteous judgment on a society we have helped to make; it is to enable us to build a world fit for human habitation, to give us the inspiration and the courage to become more, not less involved in the great struggles of our times. If there was a lesson in our church's tragic complicity in the crimes of war and holocaust in this century, it was that we must learn that we are in the end one people and there is no escape from responsibility. The liberalism of American Catholicism at the time of the Council was undoubtedly naive in its understanding of the nation and its people; surely it needs a "course correction", a more chastened appreciation of the demonic potential of power and deeper concern for the personal, spiritual and organizational dimensions of church life and ministry. But the answer to the Americanist problem is not withdrawal to some mountaintop of biblical prophecy and self righteous desertion of the public arena. Nor is it a new conservatism of Catholic power and doctrinal orthodoxy. Rather it requires recovery of a sense of mission, inspired by contemporary church teaching and rendered operative by close attention to the specifically American character of our own situation. It means probing the depths of our American experience to develop a body of ideas which can give meaning to ministry and work and faith in the day-to-day life of American Catholics. It means a bottom up strategy of pastoral development based upon the experience and the responsibility of the people of the church. It means a theology of mission which gives a central place to the laity, to politics, to work, to neighborhood life.

Our Americanness is the concrete, fleshy human context of our call to be Catholic Christians. Like all contexts, it is, in as well as out, shaping not just the conditions of our public life but our very feelings about God and one another. Let us unpack our Americanness, probe the spiritual meaning of our American adventure, find the words, the symbols, the language that will lead us back to this people, our people, and with them to the people of the world. Authentic prophecy takes place within and on behalf of a specific people; do we think that people is only Catholics, as if we alone are chosen, for God's sake and our own? We desperately need an American standpoint, sufficiently Christian to understand and illuminate human experience, yet not so super-Christian as to claim to be judge and contradiction of all that American means. No more than you do I know the precise character of our relationship with our country, but I do believe that we will discover new meaning in our Catholicity when we make our decision to accept and struggle with the fact that this is our land and these are our people. It is America, as much as Catholicism, which has made us who we are; we will not resolve our problems by making new ghettos but by caring deeply for this new world we have once again entered.

I end with Woodie Guthrie:

One bright sunny morning, in the shadow of the steeple,
By the relief office, I saw my people.
As they stood there waiting, I looked and wondered,
Whether this land was made for you and me