

"That Word 'Liturgy' is So Unfortunate": Learning the Mystical Body and Practicing Catholic Action in the U.S. Liturgical Movement (c. 1926-1955)

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During the liturgical movement era in the United States (c. 1926-1955), advocates of liturgical renewal relied upon both the Mystical Body of Christ theology and the methods of Catholic Action to describe and legitimize a fundamental re-visioning of how "liturgy" should be taught and interpreted: liturgy was not an object or something to be observed, but a dynamic and ritual event in which the faithful actively participated. The liturgical experience simultaneously taught individual women, men, and children how to act as Christians in the world, and formed these same faithful into a corporate identity through their sacramental and liturgical participation in the Mystical Body of Christ. Intersecting with a renewed Catholic intellectual life and modern social concerns, the liturgical movement, with its goal of advancing a spiritual and social renewal in the modern world, inspired the faithful to adopt and apply the Mystical Body of Christ theology and Catholic Action initiatives in a variety of particular contexts, both private and public.

Introduction

"That word 'liturgy' is so unfortunate," Sr. Mary Francille Thomas, CSJ (1907-1988) observed at the end of her presentation during the 1953 National Liturgical Week in Grand Rapids, Michigan.¹ She continued, "So many people shy away the minute they hear it. We must get it across that it does not mean altars, vestments or the externals of the Mass."² Sr. Francille, Catholic educator and champion of the

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1. Sr. Mary Francille Thomas, "Discussion," *National Liturgical Week Proceedings: St. Pius X and Social Worship* (Elsberry, MO: The Liturgical Conference, 1954): 114. For a helpful history on the National Liturgical Conference (formerly the Benedictine Liturgical Conference), see Godfrey Mullen, "Participation in the Liturgy: the National Liturgical Weeks 1940-1962" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2003).

AMERICAN CATHOLIC STUDIES Vol. 127, No. 1 (2015): 25-44

liturgical apostolate in the Archdiocese of Boston, made this observation at the conclusion of her presentation, in which she had encouraged teachers of religion to train their students to active participation in the priesthood of Christ, working to "reconsecrate our time" and fulfilling "our noble function in the Mystical Body." As she had explained:

As the liturgy was the school into which the early Church led her children, so it is for us the channel through which the life that is divine is to flow from the Head into the members of our immediate apostolate. Our modern Pauls and Paulines, Johns and Joans must be the light of the world today. If Christianity is to shine forth in our age, our pupils and our graduates must become radiant centers of the Christ light, living candlesticks bearing Christ to the social, business, and professional life of today.³

Importantly, activities which promoted the liturgy, likewise, promoted Catholic Action – in Sr. Francille's words, the liturgy served as "the source of life and inspiration" for the efforts of Catholic Action.⁴

For us, Sr. Francille's description of the word "liturgy" as "unfortunate" alerts us to why convincing the faithful to love the liturgy during the era known as the "liturgical movement" in the United States, c. 1926-1955,⁵ was so challenging. Sr. Francille, like many advocates of liturgical renewal during this period, relied on a fundamental re-visioning of what "liturgy" meant: liturgy was not an object or something to be observed, but a dynamic and ritual event which taught the individual faithful (of any age) to live as a Christian in the world and, secondly, formed these same faithful into a corporate identity through sacramental and liturgical participation in the Mystical Body of Christ. Heretofore, and in sharp contrast, to be interested in the "liturgy," for clergy, had meant nursing an interest in the dreaded and

2. Thomas, 114.

3. Ibid., 106. See also "Sr. M. Francille, Liturgist and Teacher Dies Sunday, May 8," *The Pilot* (1988): 8. Courtesy of the Boston CSJ Archives, 637 Cambridge Street, Brighton, Massachusetts.

4. See "Discussion," *National Liturgical Week Proceedings*, 114-115.

5. The usual date for the liturgical movement's beginning in the United States is 1926, the first year the central journal, *Orate Fratres*, began circulation. As early as the 1910s, however, promoters of the liturgical movement, borrowing from European predecessors, were discussing strategies for liturgical renewal and education. One example is Reverend William Busch, of St. Paul, Minnesota, and founding member of the editorial board for *Orate Fratres*. For a comprehensive history of the liturgical movement's origins, see Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America, 1926-1955* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

dry study of "rubrics."⁶ Meanwhile, for the faithful, spiritual reflection on the "liturgy" took the form of devotional practices during the Mass,⁷ and the contemplation of allegorical presentations.⁸ As Sr. Francille indicates, for liturgical movement pioneers, teaching the "liturgy" was not about teaching rubrics or allegory, but about reinterpreting the liturgy as intellectual and sacramental formation of Roman Catholics for leading Christian social renewal in the modern world.⁹ Advocates of the liturgical movement explained the importance of liturgical renewal by teaching the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, and legitimized their activities within the wider church by uniting the liturgical apostolate with the wider work of Catholic Action.

While fundamental to the theology and activities of the era known as the liturgical movement, the theology of the Mystical Body and the strategies of Catholic Action did not remain central in describing liturgical renewal as efforts of the mid-twentieth century came to fruition in the Second Vatican Council. Yet, an examination of the literature pertinent to the liturgical movement period in the United States reveals how liturgical pioneers understood their efforts as

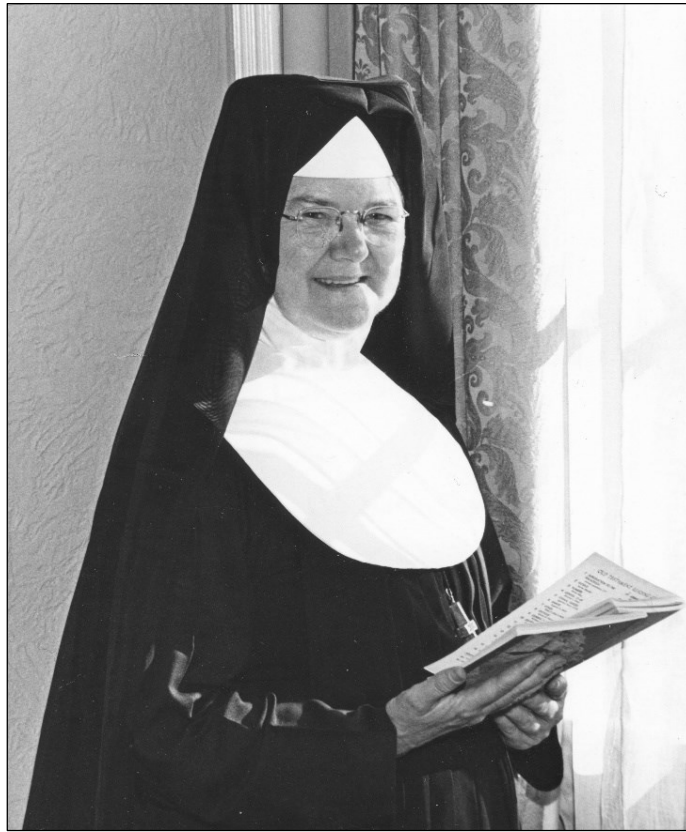
6. For example, a letter from Father L. Broughal, CSC, to The Liturgical Press, dated Sept. 11, 1933, confesses: "You know how difficult it is to get priests away from the notion that 'Liturgy' means 'Rubrics' and what more do they want to know. And, of course, there is always an 'Authority' on rubrics hanging around." Abbot Alcuin Papers 79/23, Saint John's Abbey Archives, Collegeville, Minnesota.

7. See, for example, a discussion of devotions by Donald Attwater, "Two Years Later, and a Query," *Orate Fratres* 4 (1930): 151-155; and Ellen Gates Starr, "The Delights of the Breviary from the Point of View of a Lay Woman," *Orate Fratres* 1 (1927): 263-268. Reverend William Busch describes the particular challenges brought by private devotions, including "excessive individualism" and a neglect of prayers of praise while favoring prayers of petition. See William Busch, "The Hour Prayers of the Breviary," *Orate Fratres* 1 (1927): 231-235.

8. Innocenz Wapelhorst's *Compendium sacrae liturgiae juxta ritum romanum* (Cincinnati: Benzinger Brothers, 1925) was a common text for seminarians' study of the Roman Catholic liturgy and made extensive use of allegorical representations of the Mass (e.g., the offertory reminds us of Jesus blessing the loaves and fishes, and the Gospel brings to mind Jesus teaching the children). Virgil Michel describes Wapelhorst's text as "a bundle of contradictions" and "extravagant." See Virgil Michel, "Casual Comments," *Orate Fratres* 4 (1929): 74. Allegorical devotions were also made accessible for lay people. See, for example, "Method of Assisting at Holy Mass in Union with the Passion and Death of Our Divine Lord," issued by the Holy Name Society, Cleveland, Ohio (n.d.). Private collection of the author.

9. The liturgical movement plays a Roman Catholic counter-part to Protestant initiatives such as the Social Gospel Movement, and the Anglican initiative of the Oxford Movement, to revitalize society through Christian evangelization. See James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 147. For a discussion of mid-century Christian social reform, see David J. O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

illustrating the theology of the Mystical Body, and how they continually identified efforts of the liturgical apostolate, either formally or informally, as advancing the work of Catholic Action.¹⁰ Following a more detailed explanation of the liturgical movement's goals in connecting social worship to social action, this essay will describe how the United States liturgical movement served to advance, teach, and illustrate the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ, and provided a uniquely Catholic response to the social needs of the modern world.



Sr. Mary Francille Thomas, taken at Regis College (now a university) in Weston, Massachusetts, where she taught theology between 1958-1969.

Courtesy of the Boston CSJ Archives,
637 Cambridge Street, Brighton, Massachusetts

10. Catholic Action has a technical definition, but many activities which were seen as advancing Catholic identity and spirituality were described as Catholic Action in the mid-century United States. Study clubs, in particular, as well as efforts of national organizations such as the National Council of Catholic Women, explicitly developed programs of Catholic Action centered on the liturgy. For a helpful contextualization of Catholic Action in the United States, see "The Church of Catholic Action," in O'Toole, 145-198.

Beginning the Liturgical Movement in the United States

Because the liturgical movement in the United States began as a series of print publication initiatives, two examples particularly serve to position this movement as popular, socially-oriented, and invested in spiritual renewal.¹¹ In November of 1926, the first issue of *Orate Fratres*, the central journal for American liturgical renewal, began by identifying the goal of the liturgical movement as fundamentally spiritual:

Our general aim is to develop a better understanding of the spiritual import of the liturgy We are not aiming at a cold scholastic interest in the liturgy of the Church, but at an interest that is more thoroughly intimate, that seizes upon the entire person, . . . affect[s] both the individual spiritual life of the Catholic and the corporate life of the natural social units of the Church, the parishes, so properly called the cells of the corporate organism which is the entire living Church, the mystic body of Christ.¹²

Pairing with the regular appearance of this monthly review, a pamphlet issued by the newly-minted Liturgical Press of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, made a similar claim in 1930:

The false notions in this matter [of liturgical renewal] are due principally to a misunderstanding as to the subject of the proposed change. Many think that what is sought after is a return to older forms of vestments, antique chalices, crucifixes and candlesticks and to the ceremonial practices that have long passed out of usage. But what is really being striven for is a *change in the spiritual orientation* of the faithful, which, it is hoped, will result in a much needed strong, virile Catholicity. . . . [A]ll these [mistaken] notions have one thing in

11. The liturgical movement in the United States is often identified as officially beginning with the publication of *Orate Fratres*, the "organ" of the liturgical movement in the United States and wider English-speaking world. *Orate Fratres*, published by the Benedictine monks of Collegeville, Minnesota, was accompanied by a series of pamphlets, issued under the title, the "Popular Liturgical Library," and was published under the organization, "The Liturgical Press," sponsored by St. John's Abbey. For an account of the development of the Liturgical Press, see Colman J. Barry, *Worship and Work: Saint John's Abbey and University, 1856-1992*, 3rd ed., (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 268-281.

12. The Editors, "Foreword," *Orate Fratres* 1 (1926): 1. See also Paul Marx, *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1957), 123-125.

common: they emphasize the outward aspect of the liturgy; they confuse the gem with its setting; the kernel with its shell.¹³

These examples serve as powerful statements of intended identity and mission for the liturgical movement, noting a desire to extend the movement beyond scholarly audiences; a reliance on the image of the Mystical Body of Christ which stressed the corporate nature of public worship; and an express interest in a spiritual reorientation which would shape the faithful into strong or "virile" Catholics in the world. Though American initiatives for liturgical renewal clearly borrowed from and built upon the theology and strategies of its European parents in Belgium, France, and Germany, the liturgical movement in the United States made a more comprehensive effort than its European counterparts to be a truly popular movement, moving from monastic centers to the particular communities formed by dioceses, parishes, and Catholic families.¹⁴

In order to prepare the faithful for such a collective response to the world, liturgical movement advocates asked Roman Catholics to dramatically change their devotional and sacramental practices. Following Pope Pius X, who had reinstated frequent reception of communion (*Sacra Tridentina*, 1905), liturgical movement advocates now asked Catholics not only to participate sacramentally in the ritual of the Mass, but to attend to the *whole* ritual structure of the Mass, and to relinquish well-worn devotions for a little-understood Missal.¹⁵ On the one hand, the plurality of Catholic devotions had great value; as Virgil Michel, OSB (1890-1938) himself noted, "Many methods of devotion at Mass are possible and are tolerated" by Catholics in the pew, and were endorsed and advocated by Catholic leaders and catechists.¹⁶ But this multiplicity of devotional frameworks for explaining the "general nature of the Mass," Michel argued, splintered the Catholic faithful. Offering one's own interpretations of Mass via one's preferred devotional tool was a rejection of a true "*sensus Catholicus*," a collective sense of the Church's mind, and an embracing of "subjectivism and individualism, excusable only on the plea of

13. A Priest, "The Liturgical Movement: Its General Purpose and Its Influence on Priestly Piety," in *The Liturgical Movement*, Popular Liturgical Library, 4th ser., no. 3 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1930): 5-6.

14. Godfrey Diekmann, "Is There a Distinct American Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal?" *Worship* 45 (1971): 578-587.

15. See Joseph Dougherty's comprehensive study, *From Altar-Throne to Table: The Campaign for Frequent Holy Communion in the Catholic Church*, ATLA Monograph Series, no. 50 (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010).

16. Virgil Michel, "Casual Comment II: Mass and the Life of Christ," *Orate Fratres* 4 (1929): 76.

ignorance."¹⁷ Michel and many others would argue that this habit of pursuing personal devotions not only sacrificed the social experience of the liturgy, but belied the two great evils of the twentieth-century world: rampant individualism and self-effacing collectivism.¹⁸ Repeatedly, advocates of liturgical renewal rejected interpretations of liturgical practice which were not socially-oriented. This meant that two traditional ways of understanding the liturgy were rejected as inadequate for a fully liturgical education: the long-practiced format for teaching liturgy in the seminaries which centered on learning rubrics, and, second, the preferences for more individually-oriented allegorical and devotional handbooks for use by the faithful. By 1947, Pius XII's "magna carta" on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, explicitly described the liturgy as more than a "mere catalog of rules and regulations issued by the hierarchy of the Church," and as an experience for the faithful which was more than an "ornamental ceremonial" which could be accompanied by personal prayer.¹⁹ The Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council (1963) would provide a comprehensive outline for the restoration and promotion of the liturgy amongst the faithful, placing the liturgy at the "summit" and "font" of the Christian life (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10), situating devotions in a supporting role (*SC* 13), and stipulating the necessity for teaching liturgy in the seminaries.²⁰

17. Ibid.

18. Virgil Michel would later say that "individualism" and "collectivism" were the two great social evils for the modern world. Virgil Michel, "Liturgy the Basis for Social Reconstruction," *Orate Fratres* 9 (1935): 536-545.

19. Marx, 49. See also Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* [Encyclical Letter on the Sacred Liturgy], 20 November 1947, sec. 25, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20111947_mediator-dei.html.

20. For some discussion of liturgical reform in light of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, see, among others, Kevin W. Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed to Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014); Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012); and Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, rev. ed., translated by Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011). For the importance of teaching the liturgy, see especially Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], 4 December 1963, sec. 15-19, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

Inspiring a Restored Social Order: The Mystical Body of Christ

While the term, "Mystical Body of Christ," gained ready traction amongst liturgical reformers as a hermeneutic for social renewal, greater acceptance of this image by the wider church and by American theological audiences took some time. The term had been an object of retrieval amongst nineteenth-century theologians, both before and after Vatican I, such as Germans Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) and Matthias Scheeben (1835-1888), Italian Jesuit Carlo Passaglia (1812-1887), and Austrian Johann Baptist Franzelin (1816-1886).²¹ No longer pressed to respond to challenges posed to the institutional church by the reformed Christian traditions, theologians drew from Pauline and patristic sources to emphasize the church as a mystery in and of itself, and not simply the keeper of mysteries of faith. The Mystical Body of Christ model suggested a more flexible counterpoint than previous iterations of the church, and employed the image of the church as an inter-dependent and united "organism," a biological metaphor which resonated with the wider cultural movement of Romanticism.²²

The term "Mystical Body" or "mystic body" appears in papal documents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, describing various ecclesiological dimensions. Even the First Vatican Council had drafted the term into its schema on the church, but did not include it in the final draft of the document.²³ Pope Leo XIII did use the "Mystical Body" image in his 1896 encyclical, *Satis Cognitum*, stressing the unity of visible and invisible dimensions of the church.²⁴ Pius X, in his

21. For a treatment of the development of the Mystical Body of Christ motif, see, for example, Edward P. Hahnenberg, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005): 7. See also, Michael J. Himes, "The Development of Ecclesiology: Modernity to the Twentieth Century," in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 45-67.

22. The Mystical Body of Christ as an ecclesiological framework reflects some elements of the Romantic movement in Germany which emphasized organic unity, an appreciation of tradition, and balance between the flourishing of the individual and of the community. See Ernst B. Koenker, *The Liturgical Renaissance in the Roman Catholic Church* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 34-35; and Thomas Franklin O'Meara, "The Origins of the Liturgical Movement and German Romanticism," *Worship* 59 (1985): 326-342.

23. Hahnenberg, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology," 8.

24. "The Church is not something dead: it is the body of Christ endowed with supernatural life. As Christ, the Head and Exemplar ... is one, from and in both natures, visible and invisible; so the mystical body of Christ is the true Church, only because its visible parts draw life and power from the supernatural gifts and other things whence spring their very nature and essence." Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum* [Encyclical Letter on

encyclical on the Immaculate Conception, employed the concept, the "mystical body" of Christ's church, as a metaphor for the church's relationship to Mary (*Ad Diem Illum* 10). Pius XI drew on the Mystical Body as a metaphor for Christian unity in his *Mortalium Animos* in 1928.²⁵ The term would receive its most official recognition when Pius XII used the Mystical Body of Christ explicitly and extensively in his 1943 encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*.

Nonetheless, while the term was widely used in academic and even ecclesial circles, it was not as readily recognized by audiences of the lay faithful, and still was rejected as "new" by some scholars. Even after *Mystici Corporis* (1943), the Archbishop of Freiburg, Germany, Conrad Gröber (1872-1948), dismissed the Mystical Body as a "new conception of the church" which rejected the "perfect society" ruled by Christ in favor of a "species of biological organism."²⁶ Regardless of perspective – lay or cleric – English-speaking United States Catholics had limited contact with the theology of the Mystical Body due to language barriers, as most of the theological work developing the Mystical Body was not done in English. Translations into English, and Catholic publishers and booksellers willing to take on such academic projects, were needed. Fueled by the Catholic intellectual revival, several publication houses served just this purpose, taking "intellectual" theological subjects and translating them not only into English but into articles and pamphlets

the Unity of the Whole Church], 29 June 1896, sec. 3, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_29061896_satis-cognitum.html.

25. "Therefore all we who are united to Christ, and as the Apostle says are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, have issued from the womb of Mary like a body united to its head. Hence, though in a spiritual and mystical fashion, we are all children of Mary, and she is Mother of us all. Mother, spiritually indeed, but truly Mother of the members of Christ, who are we." Pius X, *Ad Diem Illum* [Encyclical Letter on the Immaculate Conception], 2 February 1904, sec. 10, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_02021904_ad-diem-illum-laetissimum.html. Pius XI states: "For since the mystical body of Christ, in the same manner as His physical body, is one, compacted and fitly joined together, it were foolish and out of place to say that the mystical body is made up of members which are disunited and scattered abroad: whosoever therefore is not united with the body is no member of it, neither is he in communion with Christ its head." Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos* [Encyclical Letter on Religious Unity], 6 January 1928, sec. 10, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_02021904_ad-diem-illum-laetissimum.html.

26. See the summary, "Memorandum de S. E. Mgr Groeber, Archeveque de Fribourg," in *La Maison-Dieu* 2 (1946): 99. Author's translation.

more palatable for a less technically-inclined audience.²⁷ Publishers such as Sheed and Ward of New York (formerly of London) and Bruce Publishing Company of Milwaukee began printing and selling the translated words of European theologians. But popularizing the best in Catholic theology occurred more extensively through Catholic journalism, from national examples such as *The Commonweal*, *The Catholic Digest*,²⁸ and *America*, to local diocesan newspapers.

Alongside the best of the increasing flurry of Catholic newsprint and paperbacks, the Liturgical Press of Collegeville, Minnesota also sought to bring Catholic theology, including the Mystical Body, to the Catholic faithful. The Liturgical Press's activity is particularly significant because it published the central organ for the liturgical movement, the journal *Orate Fratres*, the first English-language journal published in the United States devoted to advancing the liturgical movement. The effectiveness of *Orate Fratres'* efforts in bringing the Mystical Body theology to United States audiences receives some witness in a survey of literature conducted by Jesuit Father Joseph J. Bluett, in 1942.²⁹ Bluett compiled a survey of literature on the Mystical Body which had appeared in Catholic periodicals in English, French, and Latin (languages he described as having greater accessibility for American readers) between 1890-1940. Among others, English-language publications included *Theological Studies*, *The Thomist*, *The Catholic World*, *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, *The Clergy Review*, and *Orate Fratres*.³⁰ According to Bluett's survey of journals, articles on the Mystical Body and its relation to Christian life appeared as early as 1914,³¹ but increased significantly in 1926, the same year that *Orate Fratres* began circulation. The amount of literature addressing the Mystical Body which appeared in the 1920s was equivalent to the total amount of literature on the Mystical Body published in the previous twenty years; the 1930s would witness a five-fold increase in volume from the previous decade. A total of twenty-two of the seventy-five

27. For a discussion of the Catholic Intellectual Revival, see Margaret Mary Reher, *Catholic Intellectual Life in America: A Historical Study of Persons and Movements*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989).

28. *The Catholic Digest*, a compendium of abbreviated books and magazine articles, began circulation in November 1936, drawing on more than fifty Catholic magazines and advertising the support of six Catholic publishers: Benziger Brothers, Devin-Adair Co., B. Herder Book Company, Bruce Publishing of Milwaukee, P.J. Kenedy and Sons, and Sheed & Ward.

29. Joseph J. Bluett, "The Mystical Body of Christ: 1890-1940," *Theological Studies* 3 (1942): 261-289.

30. A significant amount of literature on the Mystical Body of Christ also appeared in Italian, German, and Spanish journals in this same period, though Bluett does not survey these.

31. Maurice Festugière, "La Liturgie Catholique," *Revue Thomiste* 22 (1914): 48-56.

English-language articles which appeared between 1926-1940 were issued in *Orate Fratres*. Within *Orate Fratres*, topics related to the Mystical Body included discussions of sacraments like marriage,³² a consideration of the saints,³³ issues of ecclesiology,³⁴ and attending to the Catholic family.³⁵ Accompanying specific applications of the Mystical Body, such articles also addressed a recurring theme for the liturgical movement: the Mystical Body provided a theological pivot between active participation learned in the liturgy and active participation of the Catholic faithful in the reconstruction of the social order.³⁶

Arguably, many of the journal articles which Bluett lists in his bibliography, including those within *Orate Fratres*, were more suited to a scholarly audience. Yet, members of the liturgical movement nonetheless sought to connect Mystical Body theology to the ground by emphasizing liturgical participation, social responsibility, and the sacraments; the Mystical Body began in concrete experiences which all Catholics shared, and the first shared experience was baptism. In 1927, Father Paul Bussard (who would become *The Catholic Digest's* first editor) wrote a piece for *Orate Fratres* in which he described how Christians experienced "unity and solidarity" in the "mystic body" because they participated in the "life of the body, sanctifying grace" which took place in the church's sacraments.³⁷ First, Christians began by being "engrafted upon Him in Baptism" like branches to the vine and, continually participated in Christ's perpetual bond of unity by partaking of "the sacrament of unity – the holy Eucharist."³⁸ For Bussard (1904-1983) and for advocates of the liturgical movement at large, the foundation for "active participation" began in baptism; by virtue of one's baptism, one had a responsibility to act as Christ would have one act and adopted membership in the Body of Christ as one's identity.³⁹

32. Karl Adam, "The Sanctification of Marriage," *Orate Fratres* 9 (1935): 171-176, 218-225.

33. Joseph H. Huels, "St. Joseph and the Mystical Body," *Orate Fratres* 9 (1935): 247-261.

34. Basil Stegmann, "Christ in His Church," *Orate Fratres* 7 (1933): 108-115.

35. Virgil Michel, "The Family and the Mystical Body," *Orate Fratres* 11 (1937): 295-299.

36. Ernest F. Kilzer, "Divine Fellowship," *Orate Fratres* 10 (1935): 50-53.

37. Paul C. Bussard, "The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ," *Orate Fratres* 1 (1927): 199-202, here at 201.

38. *Ibid.*

39. See Pecklers, 29-33, and John P. O'Connell, "Grafted in the Vine," *1940 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1941): 45-50; and Mary Perkins Ryan, "Redeeming the Time," *Worship* 27 (1953): 81-88.

Secondly, while baptism initiated entrance to the "supernatural life" in the Mystical Body, liturgical movement advocates repeatedly stressed that regular liturgical participation on the local level provided the means for entering fully into this "universality" of Christ's Mystical Body. Msgr. Martin Hellriegel (1891-1981) from O'Fallon, Missouri, described the "Mystical Body" at the 1940 National Liturgical Week held in Chicago, as a "divine reality spread over the whole world," which took on a "very concrete local form" in the parish.⁴⁰ Parishes or, even further, particular clubs, schools, or families, were described as "cells" which functioned within the Mystical Body. This notion of the church as a living thing, an "organism" with "cells," is used repeatedly by liturgical movement pioneers⁴¹ and offers a poignant image of the church as full of human persons, unique and in need, as well as constructing a great sense of connectedness and inter-dependency. As John E. Kelly, a priest from Sacramento, California, described:

Since the parish is the first cell of this organism, of this vital, vitalizing fructifying organism of the Mystical Body, and since the life of this organism and of every cell in it is the Liturgy, it follows that the Liturgy must be the basis and center of the parish. Otherwise we shall separate the parish from the primary source of the true Christian spirit.⁴²

Directly drawing upon Pope Pius X's language by describing liturgy as a means for promoting a "true Christian spirit,"⁴³ Kelly situated Mystical Body theology in the context of Catholic teaching, while emphasizing how the Mystical Body was always realized at the level of the particular. On-the-ground Catholic educators, who were often religious sisters, frequently taught their students how mundane situations of the everyday offered continual opportunities to practice

40. Martin Hellriegel, "Morning Session – The Parish," *National Liturgical Week 1940* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1941): 31.

41. Bussard, 200. Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* [Encyclical Letter on the Mystical Body of Christ], 29 June 1943, sec. 48, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html; see also Gerald Ellard, *Christian Life and Worship* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1933) and Gerald Ellard, *The Mystical Body and the American Bishops: A Discussion-Club Manual* (St. Louis, MO: The Queen's Work, 1939).

42. John E. Kelly, "Discussion," *1940 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1941): 41.

43. Pius X, *Tra Le sollecitudini* [Motu Proprio on Sacred Music], 22 November 1903. An English translation can be found in Pamela Jackson, *An Abundance of Grace: Reflections on Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Chicago/Mundelein: Hillenbrand Books, 2004), 116-123. The Italian original and a Latin translation can be found in *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 36 (1903-1904), 329-339, 387-395.

being the Mystical Body of Christ. As the aforementioned Sr. Mary Francille Thomas had explained, young people proclaimed Christ: "not in church as the priest, but in their lives, on the street, with their companions, at proms, socials, on dates, at dances, at part-time work, at home and in school."⁴⁴

The liturgical experience, and especially the Mass, provided a unique juncture for the intersection of sacramental participation and active involvement of the faithful. But the Mystical Body did not end in the Mass; it extended to the world, and American liturgical advocates found this image of the Mystical Body of Christ completely compelling for explaining the role of liturgy in transforming society. As Reverend Reynold Hillenbrand (1904-1979) of Chicago described, the "doctrine" of the Mystical Body fueled an attentiveness to issues of justice which was interdependent with participation in the Mass:

Bad social relations devastate the Mystical Body because they produce corrupting, degrading, dechristianized environments. Slums, neighborhood race prejudice, widespread farm tenancy, insufficient income, war – all these take a disturbing toll on men's souls. ... Never do we do more to build up the Body than at Mass. But we must carry the redemptive, sanctifying action participated in at Mass, forward into our living, so that Christ Mystic will be vigorous in our time.⁴⁵

Likewise, liturgical leader Virgil Michel would see the Mystical Body of Christ motif as providing the pattern which bridged the gap between the isolation of autonomous individuals and de-personalizing socialist programs:

There is only one answer I know of to the problem of balanced harmony between the individual and the social: *the mystical body of Christ*. There the individual retains his full personal responsibility, the fullest possibility of greater realization of his dignity as a member of Christ; yet he is ever a member in the fellowship of Christ, knit closely with his fellow members into a compact body by the in-dwelling Spirit of Christ. *There* is the pattern of all social life lived by individuals.⁴⁶

44. See M. Francille Thomas, "Corporate Worship Affecting the School," *1953 National Liturgical Week Proceedings: St. Pius X and Social Worship* (Elsbury, MO: The Liturgical Conference, 1954): 110.

45. Reynold Hillenbrand, "The Spirit of Sacrifice in Christian Society," *1943 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Conception, MO: The Liturgical Conference, 1944): 108. See also See Martin B. Hellriegel, *The True Basis of Christian Solidarity: the Liturgy an Aid to the Solution of the Social Question*, Central Bureau Publications "Follow Me!" Brochure (St. Louis, MO: Central Bureau of the Central Verein, 1928).

46. Virgil Michel, "Natural and Supernatural Society: I. The Sacramental Principal as Guide," *Orate Fratres* 10 (1936): 244-245. Here, he quotes from a lecture he had

Reynold Hillenbrand, Virgil Michel, Francille Thomas, and others continually sought to connect the liturgical movement's goal of social regeneration through the Mystical Body to papal initiatives, linking liturgical participation to the modern social encyclicals, most notably, Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and Pius XI's reiteration and expansion of such calls for economic and social reform in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931).⁴⁷ Famously, Michel took the premise offered by these two documents and connected it to liturgical statements made by Pius X, particularly the *motu proprio*, *Tra Le Sollecitudini* (1903), thus developing the thesis for the early liturgical movement:

Pius X tells us that the liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit. Pius XI says that the true Christian spirit is indispensable for social regeneration. Hence the conclusion: The liturgy is the indispensable basis of Christian social regeneration.⁴⁸

The sacramental motif of the Mystical Body of Christ would be seen in all the socially-oriented iterations of the liturgical movement, from the liturgical movement's intersections with the "racial problem," to the fostering of the "little Mystical Body" of Christ in the Catholic family, to eschewing indifference and assuming responsibility for the suffering in wartime Europe.⁴⁹

Realizing a Restored Social Order: Catholic Action

Just as the theology of the Mystical Body originated amongst European scholars, the linking of social action with the liturgical movement also had its beginning in the pre-World War European front, particularly with the work of Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960) of Mont César in Belgium. Beauduin, who was interested in connecting liturgical worship to renewed social order, directly influenced Virgil

previously delivered as part of a series given to Liturgical Arts Society in New York during 1934-1935, on "The Philosophical and Theological Basis of the Liturgical Movement." See also Margaret M. Kelleher, "Liturgy and Social Transformation: Exploring the Relationship," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 16 (1998): 59-60.

47. See also O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform*, 3.

48. Virgil Michel, "The Liturgy as the Basis for Social Transformation," 545.

49. Some examples include: Genevieve M. Casey, "The Liturgy as the Solution of the Negro Problem," *Orate Fratres* 11 (1937): 369-371; Florence Berger, "In the Home," *Orate Fratres* 25 (1951): 76-78; Dietrich von Hildebrand, "Liturgy and the Cultural Problem," *1941 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1942): 190-197.

Michel and, subsequently, the content and scope of the liturgical movement in the United States.⁵⁰

The term "Catholic Action" was used fluidly by mid-century United States Catholics to describe various ways in which the lay Catholic faithful took initiative in learning about, participating in, and teaching their faith to their communities and relevant social spheres. More officially, Catholic Action can be succinctly described according to Pius XI's (*Ubi Arcano*, 1922) formula, "the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy."⁵¹ Initiatives of Catholic Action were recognized and promoted by ecclesial authorities throughout the United States in various "specialized forms."⁵² Without a doubt, liturgical renewal became a central form of Catholic Action, both in venues which were explicitly ecclesially-sponsored, such as the National Council of Catholic Women and National Council of Catholic Men,⁵³ and through independent initiatives which adopted the methods of Catholic Action. Indeed, within the early-twentieth century United States, the activity of the liturgical apostolate and the work of Catholic Action often were understood to be synonymous. The index for *Orate Fratres/Worship*, which addresses the years 1926-1956, includes 185 entries under the term "Catholic Action" alone, with related entries under "social action" and "apostolate."⁵⁴ A particularly good example of the coincidence of the liturgical movement with Catholic Action is provided by Father Louis J. Putz, CSC (1909-1998) during the National Liturgical Week which met in St. Paul, Minnesota in October of 1941. Putz, active chairman of a session focusing on college graduates participating in the liturgical

50. See Marx, 27-28; and Pecklers, 8-16. See also, Sonya A. Quitslund, *Beauduin: A Prophet Vindicated* (New York: Newman Press, 1973), 1-2. For more perspective on Beauduin's involvement within European liturgical renewal, see André Haquin, *Dom Lambert Beauduin et le Renouveau Liturgique*, Recherches et Synthèses Section D'Histoire, Vol. 1 (Gembloux: Éditions J. Duculot, S.A., 1970).

51. For more development of "Catholic Action," see Debra Campbell, "The Heyday of Catholic Action and the Lay Apostolate, 1929-1959," in *Transforming Parish Ministry: The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity, and Women Religious*, ed. by Jay P. Dolan (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990): 222-252.

52. "Specialized Catholic Action" was a common way to describe the various iterations of Catholic Action groups. See, for example, James Guinan, "New Approaches in Lay Organizations," *Thy Kingdom Come: Christian Hope in the Modern World, Twenty Third North American Liturgical Week 1962* (Washington, DC: The Liturgical Conference, 1963), 160.

53. See Katharine E. Harmon, "The Liturgical Movement and Catholic Action: Women Living the Liturgical Life in the Lay Apostolate," in *Empowering the People of God: Catholic Action before and after Vatican II*, ed. Jeremy Bonner, Christopher D. Denny, and Mary Beth Fraser Connolly (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 46-75.

54. "Subject Index," in *Orate Fratres-Worship Cumulative Index, Vols. 1-30* (1956): 35-37.

life, offered a "personal comment about some activity of the Catholic Action students at Notre Dame," who were interested in what they called "the apostolate of the liturgy."⁵⁵ The young men of Notre Dame had been attempting to reinstate the practice of communing during the Communion rite at Mass. Putz recounted the students' efforts to encourage participation and sacramental reception:

The best method they found of reuniting this essential part to the Mass was through the use of the Missal and through the use of the Dialogue Mass. Until recently, Missals were supplied for nothing at the big church at Notre Dame. The result: nobody used them. This year we decided to let everybody buy his own Missal, and the result: they are using them. It just shows that the lay people like to do something actively towards putting Holy Communion into its proper place as part of Holy Mass.⁵⁶



The University of Notre Dame continued to be seat of Catholic Action through the 1950s, with the coordinating efforts of Fr. Louis J. Putz, CSC. These four college students were participating in a Catholic Action meeting in preparation for a workshop on Catholic Action held from December 8-9, 1951, sponsored by the National Catholic Action Study Commission and coordinated by the National Federation of Catholic College Students.
 Courtesy of the Archives of the University of Notre Dame

55. Louis J. Putz, "Discussion," *1941 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1942): 212.

56. *Ibid.*

First, Putz's anecdote about the resourceful Fighting Irish offers an interesting insight into some central concerns for the liturgical movement. He suggests that the liturgical ritual of the Mass is significant. The young men desire to restore the reception of Holy Communion "into its proper place," that is, during the Communion Rite of the Mass. Doing so would emphasize the faithful's response to the sacrifice of the Mass in which they were intelligently participating, rather than expressing Eucharistic devotion by taking Communion at any point before, during, or after the liturgy.⁵⁷ Such attention to the ritual emphasized that the Mass was not a ritual performed by a ministerial priesthood alone but a ritual practiced by the priesthood of all the baptized. Second, in order to inspire such a practice, not only did the tools need to be available – that is, the very use of the Dialogue Mass (a Mass in which responses were spoken out loud by the congregation, in Latin and/or English) and the use of the Missal (usually a Latin-to-English version) – but incentive to use these tools had to be given. For the students at Notre Dame, buying the book seemed to supply the appropriate pressure to make use of it. Putz gently interprets this exercise of Catholic guilt as the lay people liking "to do something actively towards putting Holy Communion into its proper place" during Mass. In other words, lay people who have *actively chosen to understand* the liturgical ritual of the Holy Mass are more invested in *actually participating* in the liturgical ritual. At play then is not only education of the lay people, but volition of the lay people in their faith and, in this case, participation in a central activity of their faith: Eucharistic reception during the Mass. Yet, the manner in which Putz has framed the entire anecdote is equally significant: the students who have promoted all this liturgical activity understand themselves as promoting Catholic Action.

At that same 1941 Liturgical Week which Putz attended, Reverend William Boyd of Chicago also presented a talk titled, "Liturgy and Catholic Action." Boyd began:

By this time all of us know how many misconceptions there are of the liturgical movement. Misunderstandings concerning private devotions, religious sentimentalism, the mistaken identity of the movement with far-flung extremist suggestions, the confusion of liturgy and rubric, the overemphasis of customs which are good, but not liturgical. All these are symptoms of inexactitude and sad illusion. There are just as many misunderstandings of Catholic Action. This is sad and this is strange. It's sad because such misunderstandings hurt both movements. They

57. For a discussion of communion reception, see Virgil Michel, "Communion at Mass: V. The Effect of Communion," *Orate Fratres* 4 (1930): 311-315. See also Pecklers, 52-54.

become subjects of ridicule, not because of what they are, God forbid, but because of what people think they are.⁵⁸

Boyd's point in bringing up the misunderstandings surrounding both the liturgical movement and Catholic Action is to emphasize the inherent "blood connection" between the two. As Boyd describes, the methods of Catholic Action – observing, judging, and acting – are learned most effectively in the context of the corporate worship of the Mystical Body. When one knows the Mass, one cannot be a passive and useless member of the Body; that is, once the layperson "learns to participate in the *prayer* of the Mystical Body," the lay person "automatically learns to *act* with the Mystical Body":

No boy, no girl, no man or woman can be smug and spiritually defunct, lifeless and inanimate in the apostolate once he has learned to act in the pew. He sees the Body with Christ as Head. He sees the same Life pouring through all these other members. He is alive, and life means movement. So he must act – with the Hierarchy, with the Church. He is alive at Mass – at least actively offering himself at the Offertory, if circumstances are such that he cannot participate further.⁵⁹

The liturgy was the school for Catholic Action, and, as Boyd describes, truly corporate worship brought "a realization of the organism of the Church."⁶⁰

Just as the theology of the Mystical Body emphasized a corporate understanding of the church, Catholic Action also had a profound social premise. Liturgy no longer was described by means of rubric and allegory, but with insights borrowed from sociology.⁶¹ Liturgical movement advocates argued that the human condition was social and humans had a responsibility for the welfare of those around them, and that this social premise found its theological and spiritual formation in the person of Jesus Christ. Active participation in Christ's Mystical Body on earth, or Catholic Action, was most radically realized in the corporate worship of the church, especially the Mass. As a somewhat exasperated note in the editorial section of *Orate Fratres*, labeled "The Apostolate," explained in 1933:

58. William Boyd, "Liturgy and Catholic Action," *1941 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Newark: Benedictine Liturgical Conference, 1942): 218.

59. Boyd, "Liturgy and Catholic Action," 224.

60. *Ibid.*, 225.

61. An interest in questions of sociology and social work can be evidenced, in part, by the development of programs in sociology and social work in Catholic institutions. The Catholic University of America founded what is now known as the National Catholic School of Social Service as early as 1918; the University of St. John's in Collegeville, Minnesota began an Institute of Social Study in 1935.

Too often has Catholic Action been made a label for the strangest of antics. It is indeed a handy shibboleth to attain results. We know of one parish of about a thousand souls, in which the daily Mass usually finds no more than five in attendance Yet this same parish features wonderful chicken-dinners and bazaars, sodality dances and what not, and all are conveniently labeled with "another manifestation of Catholic Action." Picnics and chicken-dinners are not yet Catholic Action. Let us get down to fundamentals again! Catholic Action presupposes corporate Catholic life, a life of which the Holy Ghost is the vivifying soul. And only after such a life has become an actuality with all of us can the Holy Father's call to Catholic Action bear results.⁶²

Like that word, "liturgy," Catholic Action was easily mis-defined, and misunderstood. Catholic Action was not descriptive of Catholics "acting" in any particular social setting, but a way of describing the Catholic faithful's application of corporate identity in Christ, inscribed on them in worship by virtue of their baptism, to their lives in the modern world. The Catholic faithful accessed both the fundamentals of Catholic Action and the Mystical Body of Christ theology through their active and intelligent participation in the corporate worship of the church. Educating and empowering the priesthood of the baptized to realize Christ's presence in the world was the goal of the liturgical movement.

Conclusion

As the liturgical movement intersected with Catholic intellectual life and modern social renewal, it not only adopted but became a primary means of teaching and transmitting both the theology of the Mystical Body and the philosophy of Catholic Action to the Roman Catholic faithful in the twentieth century. Certainly, the ecclesiological model suggested by the language of Catholic Action describes a lay apostolate which plays an important albeit secondary role in the church, assisting the church's hierarchy.⁶³ The theology of the Mystical Body also reflects a visible hierarchical order of "head" and "members."⁶⁴ At the same time, adopting Mystical Body theology and participating in Catholic Action demanded a significant amount of

62. "The Apostolate," *Orate Fratres* 7 (1933): 558.

63. For some background on the volition of the lay faithful and Catholic Action initiatives, see James M. O'Toole, "The Church of Catholic Action," in *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008): 149-198.

64. For use of this language early during the liturgical movement, see, for example, Paul C. Bussard, "The Mystical Body of Christ," *Orate Fratres* 1 (1927): 199-202.

initiative and agency on the part of the lay faithful. For liturgical movement advocates, the members of the lay apostolate could not rely passively on their presider to conduct worship for them; rather, the members of the lay apostolate were challenged to abandon privatized worship which was anonymous and autonomous, and instead actively and intelligently participate in the Mystical Body of Christ through the sacramental experience of worship. In turn, the faithful's awareness of particular responsibility and corporate identity learned in the liturgy would prompt them to respond to social needs in the modern world, and to do so by drawing on methods of Catholic Action.⁶⁵ This attentiveness to renewing the social order characterized the American liturgical movement,⁶⁶ and the dynamic relationship between liturgical formation and response to the modern world would anticipate ecclesiological developments of the Second Vatican Council.⁶⁷

In conclusion, considering the intellectual and theological context of twentieth-century liturgical renewal helps to elucidate why liturgical movement advocates held such strong hope that a rejuvenated liturgical spirit would spark widespread social transformation. For mid-century advocates of the liturgical apostolate, "liturgy," was not about acting out rubrics, but about Catholics taking action: learning, assuming responsibility, and living out the Mystical Body in the modern world.

65. Timothy R. Gabrielli provides a useful narrative of the lay apostolate and corporate responsibility by focusing on the sacrament of confirmation, tracing the intersection of Catholic Action and the liturgical movement, and the evolving understanding of the laity in the context of the Second Vatican Council. See Gabrielli, *Confirmation: How a Sacrament of God's Grace Became All about Us* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013).

66. For example, see Michael Marx, OSB, who observed during the 1955 National Liturgical Week: "Very early [in the United States], the liturgy was made part of the lives of the people As far as I can figure out, the leaders of the liturgical movement in this country through the years, have not been sanctuary people. They have always tried to relate the liturgy to life, the Christian life." Michael Marx, "Discussion," *1955 National Liturgical Week Proceedings* (Elsberry, MO: The Liturgical Conference, 1956): 139.

67. An understanding of the laity's participation in Christ would be nuanced by the Second Vatican Council's *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, which describes the laity as "assigned to the apostolate by the Lord himself" by incorporation in the Mystical Body through baptism (Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* [Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity], 18 November 1965, sec. 3, English trans. from the Vatican website, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html). A theological development of the lay faithful, taking into account the Second Vatican Council's documents, can be found in Paul Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful: Key to a Living Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).