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## The Future of the Local Church

### The Parish in an Industrial Society

What is the real role and what is the future of the parish in industrial society? A generation or so ago, few people were posing really searching questions concerning the functions of the parish as a contemporary, workable reality. Now, though, many Christians are not content with idealizing definitions or concepts of the parish. Often the explanations of the role of the parish are at stark variance with reality. Frequently it becomes difficult for today's Christians to recognize their parishes as living, active cells of the body of Christ. Modern man finds it hard to view his parish as an »ecclesiola«, the Church in miniature.

In today's complex world many have serious doubts about the parish as a »primarily supernatural entity«. If the parish ever *was* the starting point for the re-making of the community, seemingly it may no longer be so. What has happened? Ecclesiologists, church historians, pastoral theologians and – last but not least – sociologists are deeply concerned with finding the answer. Literature on the topic has become formidable: the remarkable fact is that much of it is of high quality.

Even the most cursory review of the history – more correctly, of the antecedents of the local parish – can leave no doubt in anyone's mind that the parish as a strictly local unit of pastoral concern is hardly more than four hundred years old. Early Christians gathered in homes to pray and to celebrate the Eucharist. The Church was the people meeting in someone's dwelling or place of work. Significantly, when they got together they did so not only for worship and religious instruction. There was no sharp division between the earning and the breaking of the bread: *Ora* and *labora* went hand in hand. *Colin W. Williams* is quite right when he says that the first Christians assembled »wherever their secular life brought them together: in communities of occupation (›in Caesar's household‹), in communities of residence (›the Church of God in Corinth‹, but meeting in houses), in communities of alienation (in the catacombs)«<sup>1</sup>. The primitive Church, thus, was

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Colin W. Williams*, *Where in the World? National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.*, New York 1963, p. 4. See also Phil. 4.22; 2 Cor. 1.2; Rom 16.5; 1 Cor. 16.19; Col. 4.15; and *M. Gibbs – T. R. Morton*, *God's Frozen People*, Collins/Fontana Books, London 1964, p. 27.

indeed an *ekklesia*, an *ad hoc* assembly. Early Christians came together in this manner not merely by force of circumstances but also, to a considerable extent, by design and in the spirit of the Lord's promise: »Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them« (Matt. 18, 20). This was a promise not conditioned by time or space. The promise of Christ's presence was not limited or restricted to any period of history or any geographical place.

As the Church grew, rooms were set apart and, eventually, designed for worship. Then whole buildings were transformed into or erected as places for worship. From the time of the Emperor *Constantine*, the earlier flexibility of ministries and orders, which had been adapted to the uncertainties of existence in hostile and ever-changing environments, began to give way to greater stability. Significantly, the *ekklesia* or public assembly became the *kyriakon*, the Lord's house, the church, and the building seemed to become synonymous with the Church. Area churches (*peculiares ecclesiae*) developed with the successors of the Apostles as their real and sole pastors. Since these regions were often as small as city-states, one might say that at that time, diocese – actually called *parochia* – and parish were identical. However, the rural bases of pastoral care, those in the outlying areas, were the first to develop into »proto-parishes«<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly enough, this was largely due to the fact that the villages and manorial communities had no bishops as the cities had. So it is not surprising that separate city »parishes« did not come into existence until about the tenth century when the establishment of dioceses apparently failed to keep pace with the growth of towns and cities. The rural priests, then, were the first to officiate as pastors do now – in their bishop's name: *ad nutum episcopi*. From the fifth or sixth centuries and following, these priests began to take up permanent residence at their »missions« – possibly urged or pressured by territorial princes and manorial lords, who had begun to exercise an increasing economic and political influence in ecclesiastical matters.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages it became a custom to treat benefices (established to support priests charged with pastoral functions) as profitable assets separable from the duties of their holders<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Max Weber* points out that in Christian antiquity the word *paganus* signified at the same time heathen and village dweller, peasant. Cf. *General Economic History*, Greenberg Publ. Co., New York 1927, p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> The modern state, says *Dom Eligius Dekkens*, a Dutch Benedictine, no longer remunerates his civil servants by ceding land to them as did the barons of yore

Bishops and pastors alike seemed to have felt little compunction in absenting themselves from their flocks and appointing vicars to carry out their duties while they moved to places more to their liking. Such widespread episcopal and pastoral absenteeism aroused more and more earnest and truly religious men to press for reforms. Eventually, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) passed decrees which initiated the rehabilitation and strengthening of orderly pastoral activity. If it were not for the fact that the Council's laws concerning pastors and parishes were long disobeyed – especially by those interested in the *status quo* – one might say that the renewal of the pastoral ministry and the institution of the local parish, as we know it today, date from the Council of Trent. In any case, it was the climax of a centuries-long development during which there eventually accrued to the local pastors the cure and care of souls as *potestas propria et ordinaria*.

The Tridentine type of parish had characteristics which are still carried over in the parish of the current *Codex Juris Canonici*. The parish is a human institution, a creature of canon law, and – as subdivision of a diocese – simply an administrative unit of pastoral care rather than a self-existent social structure<sup>4</sup>. It is neither a congregation formed by agreement and choice of pastor, which admits new members by way of enrollment. Nor is the parish like the diocese, an institution of divine law which, as such, is an integral and constituent part of the Church as a whole. Parish affiliation is, as a rule, simply a matter of residence, and nothing else: *Quisquis est in parochia, est etiam de parochia*. While the plain territorial parish is to be established by the bishop, there are others (adapted to categories of people, such as ethnic or occupational groups), to be set up by special apostolic indult. The existence of such specialized parishes attests to the fact that pastoral care is even now not the monopoly of the urban and rural parish.

Much has recently been made of Canon XIII, promulgated at the 24th Session of the Council on November 11, 1563, which enjoins on

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when they invested their vassals with a fief. The territorial parish, with its church firmly attached to the soil on which it stands and with its sphere of action strictly limited to a certain area continued: is a relic of that era. Cf. *Theod. Bogler* O.S.B., ed., *Liturgische Erneuerung in aller Welt*, Verlag Ars Liturgica Maria Laach 1951, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> The parochial system, says *Jos. Fichter* S. J., »cannot claim origin in Christ in the way that the papacy and the episcopacy can. The parish is a man-made institution, developed for practical purposes of administration and maintained as an operative area within the total structure and hierarchy of the Church«. *Dynamics of a City Church*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1951, p. 12.

bishops to assign to each parish a priest »who may know his own parishioners«. In case parishes become too large, bishops may or should divide them – if need be, even against the will of the pastor of the mother parish. Yet, anticipating genuine practical difficulties in some cases, the Council Fathers expressly authorized the local bishops to make other provisions, such as permitting or even compelling pastors to avail themselves of assistants. But whatever the means to be employed, the Council's intention obviously was to provide for as close a relationship between the pastor and his people (*populus paroeciae*) as can be achieved. Nothing was said or done, though, about the congregation and the relationship between the parishioners themselves, possibly because the Council Fathers did not think of them as forming a society – that is, some kind of stable union the members of which consciously unite their efforts to achieve a common end.

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With this we have reached one of the more important issues, more or less hotly debated among Catholics in general and Catholic sociologists in particular. The conflict of opinion about the sociological nature of the parish can perhaps be resolved by distinguishing between the parish as institutional framework and the parochial society as a possible or desirable goal. There can be no question that within the framework of the parish there is a multitude of social action and interaction. The greater the density of associative interaction and inter-human relationships, the greater the chance for group formation. But a society, obviously, is more than a bundle of interrelationships, or a complex of forms or processes. If we can speak at all of a parish as a society, we might call it – with *Jos. Fichter* S. J. – a »superimposed society«, because affiliation – if such it can be called – is not so much a matter of choice as it is one of domicile<sup>5</sup>. What characterizes many of our urban parishes is that they are, as *Gibson Winter* calls it, »client oriented« rather than congregational-minded<sup>6</sup>. It seems that the legal structure of the Catholic parish is not particularly conducive to the development of group-mindedness and a spontaneous sense of solida-

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<sup>5</sup> There is a certain degree of choice in the parishioners' freedom to move in or out of a parish or in his right to attach himself to a national or other canonical parish if such exists in his area. *Jos. Fichter* S. J., *Social Relations in the Urban Parish*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. 1954.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Gibson Winter*, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, N. Y., 1961, p. 50.

city. In addition, there is now the well-known and widely-discussed impediment of size and of population turnover. People are constantly moving in and out of parishes, the spatial-functional areal patterns change and so does the social composition of the neighborhood, but the parishes as administrative units of pastoral care remain more or less fixed within canonical boundaries. Instead of attachment, the average mobile parishioner is prone to seek care, perhaps personal solace and tranquility in the parish. Instead of looking for spiritual strength which he would need to help transform the institutions in which men must live, earn a livelihood, and work out their salvation, he is likely to look for a convenient place to fulfill his religious obligation so-called and in this manner ease his conscience<sup>7</sup>. Many parishioners do not look upon their parish as a place of worship and a source of cooperative action but – as *Jos. Fichter*, on the basis of his long and intensive observation called it – a »service station« to which one has to return at regular intervals<sup>8</sup>. It is doubtful whether the fixity of the parish location is primarily responsible for its client-orientation. Perhaps it is the only position that many a locally fixed parish can take in view of the rising turnover of parishioners.

No proof is needed that this is anything but a satisfactory situation. The solutions proposed here have, in the main, been of two kinds: First, revive the dormant parochial community or inject a community spirit into the parish. Second, look for new ways and means of pastoral care either as a substitute for the parish or as a supplement to parochial care. The first proposition entails a more elementary question: Is there anything that can be revived? If so, is it worth reviving? Anyone discussing the problem of whether or not the parish is a community is by now in all likelihood sorely trying the patience of his readers – especially if they are sociologists. However, since pastors, moral theologians, and reform-minded writers keep on insisting that the parish is a community or should be re-made to be one, there seems to be nothing left but patiently to re-examine the question again and again. Of course, he who insists that the parish is not a society or social group, need go no further, for the primary community is a type of

<sup>7</sup> Some of these ideas were contained in a lecture on »The Church, the Intellectual and the World« by *James O'Gara*, presented April 26, 1966 at the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>8</sup> *Jos. Fichter*, *Social Relations*, loc. cit., p. 188. Rev. *H. A. Reinhold* stated already in 1943 in his booklet *Our Parish*, The Paulist Press, New York, N. Y., p. 59 that many parishioners consider the parish a »spiritual filling and service station« attended to by a priest.

human grouping or social structure. There is no sense in restating (to the sociologists) the meaning of *Tönnies' Gemeinschaft*. It is quite likely that the proto-parishes in the medieval villages and towns not only partook of the prevailing community pattern of interhuman behavior but in turn strengthened these patterns. This, no doubt was an environmentally determined, historical accident, which has nothing to do with the abiding essence of the parish as an instrumentality of the diocese and as local unit of pastoral care. Among the people of a parish there do not, of necessity, exist any established patterns of rational and emotive interaction and social behavior which would set them apart as an entity either in their own mind or in the minds of others. If we assume that a social group requires for its existence such behavior patterns as well as durable contacts between members as a source of continuous interaction, then the congregation simply is no such group. It certainly could and possibly should become one, but it does not require any of these attributes for its existence. Even the absence – regrettable as it may be – of any reflective awareness of common ends establishing a degree of identification of individual parishioners with the parochial congregation, would not necessarily be fatal to the parish. Nor would lack of awareness of common ends deprive parishioners of canonical attachment to a parish. Whether recognized or not by the parishioners, the structure necessary to achieve the continued existence of the parish – as an entity of some sort – is essentially legal, not a social or psychic one. Certainly, the people are not only the *sine qua non* of a parish but their spiritual welfare is the very reason for its being. However, it is never the consent of the individual Catholics of an area which creates a parish – nor a prerequisite of its maintenance. Accordingly, enrollment, registration, admission, a formal conferring of rights and privileges or an informal acceptance by either pastor or congregation never as such determine whether or not a person rightly belongs to a certain parish. Now, if our premise that the parish is not of itself a social group is at all correct then our conclusion must be that the parish is not essentially a community. Again, this is not to deny that the parish can and should be a true community. Father *Emile Pin S. J.*, may be right that some or even many »American parishes have kept the communal elements to a much greater degree than European urban parishes«<sup>9</sup>. Also, a con-

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. his article: Can the Urban Parish be a Community? in: *Apostolate*, Spring 1961, vol. 8, No. 1, p. 3 f (footnote 3).

gregation (in the restricted sense of those assembled for prayer and the Holy Eucharist) can through an inspiring sermon, through active participation in the liturgy, through joining together in songs, praying together and the like come to approximate a primary group – particularly if the congregation is not too large and comes together in a relatively small place. Such an *ad hoc* congregation would not usually include the whole parish, nor would such experience produce any lasting unity, which is to say, a group capable of continuous action together. Speaking of assisting at the celebration of the holy Eucharist emphasizes another important fact: that all parishioners are through baptism united as members of the Mystical Body of Christ. They are, however, not so united as parishioners *but as Christians*. One might say that a *de facto*, supernatural unity is accomplished as it were *ex opere operato* – insofar as it is essentially independent of the mental and emotional disposition of those so united. All the other sacraments serve in one way or another to strengthen this ontological unity, particularly, of course, the holy Eucharist, through whose reception we come-in-union again and again with Christ and, through Him, with one another. This, no doubt, is a supernatural rather than a natural and empirical phenomenon. It belongs, therefore, to the still much neglected area of social theology, rather than to that of sociology proper. This objective and intrinsic union in the Mystical Body, however, should be supplemented by and find expression in a conscious and affective unity of action and interaction. Only action which follows or originates in such being will endure and be effective. One need not be an environmentalist or determinist to realize that in the realm of time and space conditions may be more or less conducive to such implementation. In discussing the question whether a parish can and should strive to be an integrated community, one big family centered around the pastor as its head, *O. v. Nell-Breuning* S. J., points out that such face-to-face relationship would even in the average sized parish of necessity be restricted to only a portion of the actual parishioners – the inner core if you will – but could not possibly be realized in the main body of the people of a parish, much less penetrate to the outer fringes<sup>10</sup>. Significantly, the father-child relationship has a greater chance of developing, he says, in a small branch church (chapel-at-ease) or in a provisional chapel which may serve a group of

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<sup>10</sup> Pfarrgemeinde, Pfarrfamilie, Pfarrprinzip, *Trierer Theol. Zeitschrift*, 56. vol. of Pastor Bonus, No. 9–10, Sept.–Oct. 1947, pp 257–262.

fellow sufferers, companions in misfortune such as refugees or people made homeless by some catastrophe, in other words a place of worship which has *no* parochial rights of its own.

The 2nd Vatican Council's *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church* says that »in fulfilling the office of shepherd, pastors should first take pains to know their own flock«. This poses an important practical question: How many people can a pastor know sufficiently well to allow him to say »I know mine and mine know me« (Joh. 10, 14)? And how many parishioners can really know one another? Does such mutual acquaintance turn a plurality into a group? Even if it would eventually do so, for instance through the formation of organized sub-groupings, as *Jos. B. Schuyler* S. J., calls the parish societies<sup>11</sup>, this would not necessarily unify the parish socially, much less transform it into an organic group, a social body characterized by unreflective social cohesion. What is more, some such separate clubs and fraternities, especially the ethnically homogeneous societies, are likely to contribute to the further isolation of the parish from the local community. Another question presents itself: namely, whether urban parishioners can always be assumed to favor a close, intimate, filial relationship and whether therefore the communal type of association is inevitably indicated as the only promising means of pastoral care in an urban parish today. *Jos. Pieper* has shown that none of the typical behavior patterns is as such superior to any other. The communal, societal, and organizational type of interaction are each perfectly legitimate under different circumstances<sup>12</sup>. People quite naturally switch to different rules when they switch games. People act differently, and are expected to do so, if they are at home, in the market place, or in the office. It is by no means a matter of course that among parishioners fraternizing and familiarity is the proper pattern of behavior. In 1796 *Edmund Burke* said that »the *situations* in which men relatively stand produce the rules and principles of . . . responsibility, and afford directions to prudence in exacting it«<sup>13</sup>.

The »secular city« in an industrial society obviously presents a profound change of situation compared with the one which prevailed when the Fathers of the Council of Trent laid down law of the local

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<sup>11</sup> *Jos. B. Schuyler* S. J., Northern Parish, Loyola University Press, Chicago, Ill. 1960, p. 247.

<sup>12</sup> *Jos. Pieper*, Grundformen sozialer Spielregeln, Herder & Co., Freiburg i. Br., 1933, pp 96-99.

<sup>13</sup> The Works of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke, vol. V, Boston 1866, p. 321.



parish. Then the local parish was not – and could not possibly have been – designed for ministry in a rapidly changing metropolis (*Gibson Winter*). So it is not surprising that the parish does not now seem to function like a cell, assumed to be planted by God, in society to profoundly affect the surrounding community. The parish today is not only facing but is itself part of a pluralistic society, widely scattered into secular and religious groupings. In earlier, pre-industrial society the sacred and the »profane« were allied and even identical; but now the two realms seem to mutually exclude each other. Modern man feels that he has either to choose between them or to settle for some schizophrenic solution. For many the choosing is provisional or transitional – allowing an escape on Sunday morning from the bewildering inconsistencies of the week-day world until the individual is either no longer bewildered or life in our times has ceased to seem inconsistent to him.

Whatever the »solution«, it often involves functional atrophy on the part of religion in general and of the Church and the parish in particular<sup>14</sup>. In many respects, the parish, especially the urban parish finds itself incapable of responding to and coping with the institutional changes taking place all around it. Wise and knowledgeable men must find the answer to the problem of pastoral care in a dynamic society, of the immovable parish in a mobile, changing civilization. Prudent programming and policy-making presupposes as close a familiarity with the facts as is reasonably attainable. Here is where sociology – especially the sociology of the parish – comes in<sup>15</sup>. Sociologists will be interested in an observation recently made by an Episcopalian priest, truly dedicated to finding an answer to the question of pastoral ministry in our time, *John J. Harmon*. For the Christian of the »secular city«, he says, there is really no secure place where he can achieve detached diagnosing and prescribing; and there is no other world from which – in an archimedian way – he could, as it were, un hinge the inner city with its perplexities and evils. Why? Because the Christian is himself inextricably involved in it. The sickness of the inner city,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Friedr. H. Tenbrude*, Die Kirchengemeinde in der entkirchlichten Gesellschaft, in: *Goldschmidt-Greiner-Schelsky*, Soziologie der Kirchengemeinde, Ferd. Enke Verlag, Stuttgart 1960, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> *John J. Harmon*, Toward a Theology of the City Church, *Cross Currents*, vol. XLV, No. 4, Fall 1964, p. 156. For *Harmon*, empirical research is the vivid and concise recollection of what God has done and what man has attempted to undo. (p. 155).

he says, can never be disconnected from that of the outer one or from the rural areas, the nation, or even the world. Nor can the crisis of the parish ever be understood apart from the crisis of modern civilization and industrial society, of which we are all integral members<sup>16</sup>.

Previously it was stated that there were currently two main suggestions for solving the problem of the local parish: some wish to revitalize the local parish while others feel that entirely new methods of pastoral care are needed. Even so determined a proponent of the parish as a spiritual community as Father *Emile Pin* S. J., agrees with *Jos. Fichter* that the local parish may, it is true, constitute a kind of social system involving interrelations and communications between pastor and flock, but that »it does not make a group in the full meaning of the term nor a community with its two essential features of all-inclusiveness and corporate feeling of solidarity«<sup>17</sup>. It may be possible, he maintains, to distinguish in the center of the parish a sort of »nucleus of parishioners who compose a real group«, but, he thinks, that »the larger the parish the smaller . . . the proportion of these nuclear parishioners« is likely to be<sup>18</sup>. Obviously, one cannot revive what is not there. While Father *Pin* looks for the causes of such a condition in historical changes, the very history of the parish suggests that the parish has never been more than an institutional framework and, as such, cannot be any kind of group – communal or otherwise. A parochial congregation, however, may or may not change or be changed from a plurality or a mere public – whose »members« may pursue identical goals – to a social group of one sort or another, whose members strive in common for common ends. Such distinctions are not merely semantic ones: for it is essential to grasp the fact that the criterion of »membership« in a parish is not of a social but of a legal nature.

For a number of reasons it seems not only desirable but necessary that the people of a parish approximate a real group as closely as possible. There are indications that at one time, when the process of urbanization and industrialization had not as yet gained momentum, group identification was rather the norm than the exception for parochial populations. Where such sense of solidarity continued, although in a

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<sup>16</sup> Loc. cit., pp. 6 f; *Jos. Fichter*, *Social Relations in the Urban Parish*, pp. 9–20.

<sup>17</sup> See, e. g., *Höffner, Jos.*, *Industrielle Revolution und religiöse Krise*, Heft 97, 80. Sitzung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Sektion Geisteswissenschaften, Westdeutscher Verlag, Köln, 1961.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

somewhat dormant fashion, efforts should indeed be made to re-awaken it. Where it is missing, it should be created<sup>19</sup>. Care must be taken, though, in either case, that the common spirit pervading the group be not isolationist but out-going into the larger community. The social role of religion, says *Elizabeth K. Nottingham*, is in the main an integrative and cohesive one<sup>20</sup>. Though she emphasizes that only where there is a conscious and continuous sharing can religious beliefs and practices be kept alive, she stresses the fact that beyond the group of believers and worshippers, religion provides for society a large measure of integration and harmony. Father *Andrew M. Greeley* has drawn attention to the fact that to achieve such ends, it is not even necessary for the parish to promote and realize a high degree of socialization. In a civilization that makes so many demands on everyone, it may be utopian for any organization to count on active participation even of the bare majority of those who formally belong to it. What is needed, he says, is to have enough of its members involved to achieve the purpose in question. How many members are enough? This, I submit, is primarily a pragmatic proposition to be answered either by trial and error or by sociological research. Father *Greeley* warns, however, that cooperative-minded parishioners may be so eager and so satisfied with their immediate achievements as to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of the parish, namely to serve the whole Church and through her mankind. One may add, perhaps, that one of the great issues of our time to which the Church is committed is the preservation of the dignity of the human person, who – now as never before in the history of mankind – is in constant danger of being devoured by collectiva. Instead of adding to the collectivization process, the parish might make it its very special concern to search for fresh and vital ways of spiritual guidance and public worship approximating as far as possible a creative equilibrium between involvement and freedom. The new liturgy, providing not only for greater participation but also for a certain initiative by the laity seems to point in this very direction. When, before the Offertory, the Priest or

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Höffner, Jos.* Um das »Pfarrprinzip«, *Trierer Theol. Zeitschrift*, 56. vol. of *Pastor Bonus*, No. 2, Febr. 1947, pp. 60–62.

<sup>20</sup> *Religion and Society*, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, N.Y. 1954, p. 16, 6; for many Christians, the Queens College sociologist says, »the sharing of the sacramental meal both symbolizes and reaffirms the communion of the faithful.« (p. 7) See also *Parsons, Talcott*, *The Social System*, The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1951, p. 369.

lector announces a series of petitions to which the congregation responds with intercession for the needs of the whole people of God, they are made aware of the involvement of their personal selves in the greater issues of the secular city. Over forty years ago, *Romano Guardini* wrote a famous and impressive sentence which is still applicable to our world. »A religious process of incalculable importance has begun . . .«, he wrote, »the Church is coming to life in the souls of men«<sup>21</sup>. *Godfrey Diekmann* O.S.B., recently recalled this statement and stressed the further point that ours is an age in which we are discovering the Church in our local community, a time when we recognize our brothers in the breaking of bread<sup>22</sup>. Here, at the table of the Lord's common meal, is perhaps the most concrete opportunity for the parishioners to experience one another as a community. Of course, the Mass is never the sacrifice merely of the *circumstantes*, but always that of the whole Christian community with those present representing also those *in absentia*. Needless to say, this coming together, listening to the word of God, gathering around the table of sacrifice does not in itself turn the worshippers into brotherhood or an enduring spiritual family. There are many ways and means of inspiring a sense of spiritual fellowship; there are also many ways of killing this sense. Reducing the size of the congregation may foster positive primary group experiences, a genuine warmth of personal contact and interhuman relations. But it may also hinder their development if contacts become too intimate or, more important, if those in contact lose sight of the fact that their union is not accomplished directly among themselves but through and in their common end, God Triune. In the chapters on the fellowship and style of the liturgy in his classic *The Spirit of the Liturgy*<sup>23</sup>, *Guardini* draws attention to the fact that liturgical community in subduing individuality is at the same time safeguarding it<sup>24</sup>.

In an age in which man seems to be constantly and mercilessly exposed to the glaring limelight of publicity, he does indeed need a »sanctuary«,

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<sup>21</sup> *Romano Guardini*, *The Church and the Catholic and The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Sheed & Ward, New York, N. Y. 1935, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> This is an unpublished statement which Father *Diekmann* – Monk of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota and one of the pioneers of the liturgical movement in the United States – made on Febr. 23, 1966 in a discussion on TV Channel 2, station KTCA, St. Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>23</sup> This essay is included in the book referred to in footnote 19; see esp. pp 141–161.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.

which the parish must not deny him by insisting that he be submerged into inflexible community, making no allowance for his needs as an individual person<sup>25</sup>. To stress this need is neither flight from reality nor retreat to individualism, but a plea for mental and emotional stability. In Father *Greeley's* remarks about the parochial community I sense a genuine concern about a possible overemphasis of the communal aspects of parish life. Now more than ever, man needs an inviolable atmosphere in which to grow and freely develop into »confident maturity«. Lacking this maturity, he will not be able to bear witness as a Christian – both in his immediate neighborhood and in other areas of conflict and stress in modern society. The great issue of our time is not simply to save and redeem society, but to save society by saving the human person and his dignity.

Following the footsteps of *Karl Rahner*, *Greeley* stresses the fact that the first concern of the local parish is the worship of God. Everything else will, in a way, follow from that. Hence it is extremely important that man, *modern man* that is, by himself and as member of the parochial congregation, is capable of intelligent and honest participation in this worship. *Guardini*, in an open letter to the Third German Liturgical Congress in 1964, suggests this to be one of the central problems of liturgical renewal. He asks how the demands of genuine liturgical action are related to the make-up of modern man. Many are seriously asking the question, whether it would »not be better to admit that man in this industrial and scientific age is no longer capable of the liturgical act«? *Guardini* feels that we cannot dismiss them as people standing aloof, as individualists. It is not easy, he says, for the co-offering individual to become truly part of the congregation, only a member of a body in which the Church is present and in which his fellow-worshippers are incorporated in his self-expression. *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* is but the beginning of an attempt to find new ways of celebrating the sacred mysteries, so that modern man can grasp their meaning and can perform the liturgical act without being theatrical and dishonest<sup>26</sup>. The liturgical renewal is part and parcel of the renewal of the parish and vice versa.

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<sup>25</sup> *Horst Symanowski*, a German pastor-worker, demonstrates vividly how also in the Protestant Church there is struggle between a wholesome desire to escape anonymity in the congregation and yet to safeguard privacy. See his book: *The Christian Witness in an Industrial Society*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1964, pp 89 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Herder Correspondence, Special issue 1964, vol. I, No. O, pp 24 ff.

In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* the Council Fathers express the conviction that because the bishop cannot always and everywhere preside over his whole flock, lesser groupings, such as parishes, are still indispensable. Therefore, they state (in sect. 42 of the Constitution) that »the liturgical life of the parish and its relationship to the bishop must be fostered in the thinking and practice of both laity and clergy; efforts also must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass«. However, the parish should never be allowed to become an end to itself. In the *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church* (sect. 31) they expressly state that »the parish exists solely for the good of souls«. In the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (sect. 10), they make it quite clear that they regard the parish an obvious example of that apostolate. Yet, laymen should never »limit their cooperation to the parochial or diocesan boundaries but strive to extend it to interparochial, interdiocesan, national, and international fields . . .« Why? »Because the daily increase in population mobility, the growth of mutual bonds, and the ease of communication no longer allow any sector of society to remain closed in upon itself.« Thus the laity of the parish »should be concerned about the needs of the People of God dispersed throughout the world . . . (and) make above all missionary activity their own . . .«

This, certainly, does not sound as if the bishops have given up on the local parish. They are clearly aware, however, of the need for re-animation and the widening of goals, as well as for a much more far-reaching involvement of the laity. Consequently, there must also be a reappraisal of those »pastoral« functions which once were necessitated by the circumstances but have become historically obsolete. Of particular importance is the fact that the bishops nowhere suggest that the local parish is the only or necessarily the most important unit of apostolic and pastoral effort. On the contrary, they feel that »special concern should be shown for those among the faithful who, on account of their way or condition of life, cannot sufficiently use the common and ordinary pastoral services of the parish priests or are quite cut off from them«<sup>27</sup>. They even request that the Code of Canon Law be revised to facilitate »the pastoral care of special groups of the faithful, as the different circumstances . . . require«<sup>28</sup>. They emphasize again

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<sup>27</sup> Decree on Bishops, sect. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. sect. 44.

and again that in many circumstances, »the Church could hardly be present and functioning without the activity of the laity«<sup>29</sup>. Conciliar recognition is given to the special apostolate of priests who engage in manual labor, sharing the lot of the workers themselves, in order to reach the souls of those no longer accessible to regular parish priests<sup>30</sup>. Speculating on the urban parish of tomorrow, tracing the roots of the very term »parish« may give some helpful insights. It has often been stated that the word is derived from the Greek for »dwelling nearby« (para-oikos, beside-house) which seems to make sense particularly if one thinks of the parish as a local or neighborhood organization of pastoral care. *Paroikia*, however, really means sojourning, and the *paroikos* is a sojourner. The sojourner is a sort of stranger or denizen who dwells in a place only as a temporary resident. Significantly, the Greek word *paroikia* is found only in Scriptural and Christian usage. In the New Testament the meaning corresponds to the term in the Old Testament for stranger, viz., *Ger*, referring to the Chosen People, who are pilgrims on the way to the land of promise. St. *Paul* and the early Christians apply it to themselves as wayfarers between two worlds<sup>31</sup>. Father *Godfrey Diekmann* interprets this to mean that a parish, to be what it ought to be according to Scripture, »must realize in its faith and in its activities, its own title of *paroikia*, a community of pilgrims . . .«<sup>32</sup>. Semantically, therefore, there is nothing particularly static about the parish. But popularly, a parish is almost synonymous with *stabilitas loci*. However, in our quasi-nomadic civilization where everything seems to be in a flux, it should be (if such pedestrian comparison may be excused) more like a trailer court or a camp-site, more like a tent than like a central depot or a monumental office building. This is *not* to say that the parish should simply permit itself to be swept along with the current of time. There is indeed need for islands of recollection. What is meant here is rather a need for greater adaptability of the parish to social change, a greater readiness to move and meet rather than just to wait and see. A Protestant writer, who believes in the possibility of redeeming and renewing the local parish and thinks that it is »still the best place from which the Church can make its sorties into the surrounding kingdoms of the world and claim

<sup>29</sup> Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Introduction (No. 1) and sect. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, sect. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Diekmann, Godfrey O.S.B., Come Let Us Worship*, Helicon Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1961, pp. 167 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Loc. cit, p. 169.

them for the kingdom of Christ«, grants that the localizing and focalizing of Christian responsibility does not exhaust the function of the local congregation<sup>33</sup>. *Douglas* quotes *Hans Morgull* who says that we have to change our local churches from »come structures« to »go structures«, to enable them to pursue their prime task: the mission of going forth to redeem the world.

New concepts of the parish will and must in the long run affect even the arts, architecture, and sacred song of our churches. *Robert Grosche* has drawn attention to the fact that, theologically speaking, the parish church – or any Catholic church for that matter – is not primarily and essentially the »house of God«, a »come structure«, to which we make visits, because God lives there<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, a temple was thought of by the pagans of Classical Antiquity as the dwelling place of a deity. In a way, such a god was in the hands of man – a concept totally unacceptable to the Christians, who knew that God »does not dwell in temples that our hands have made« (Acts 17. 24). *Grosche* quotes many Scripture texts which show without doubt that it was not a house of stone but the living assembly of Christ which was considered as the house or Temple of God. Historically it is the *coena*, the Lord's supper, which led to setting aside rooms and finally buildings for divine worship. These structures, because they were dedicated to God and thought of as God's own, were eventually called houses of God. Even then, therefore, they were not so called because the Blessed Sacrament was reserved there. In other words, the church was and is not, as such, primarily a superstructure for the tabernacle, to facilitate adoration and devotion but a shelter for the sacrificial community. To say this is not to detract from the eucharistic presence or from the beauty and value of eucharistic devotion. It is simply an attempt to clarify what churches are or should be built for. The *ekklesia*, the Church, was never a building, but an assembly, a congregation, people elected by and consecrated to God who, as *St. Peter* (1 Peter 2. 5) says, »must be built up on Him as stones that live and breathe, into a spiritual edifice«. Having been called out of the world and brought together to listen to God's message and to be fortified with the Bread of Life for their journey, they are sent forth again to spread God's word abroad, to emulate the Son in the offering of their own selves.

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<sup>33</sup> *Truman B. Douglas*, in: *Christianity and Crisis*, vol. XXIV, No. 10 (June 8, 1964) pp 117–18; similar ideas are to be found in *Paul Virton*, *Enquêtes de sociologie paroissiale*, Paris 1953.

<sup>34</sup> *Robert Grosche*, *Et intra et extra*, Patmos Verlag, Düsseldorf 1958, pp 99–106.



For many generations the tabernacle as the place of the »real presence« was regarded as more important than the table of sacrifice, the place of the sacred action and the Passover. The *mensa* has now been returned to its rightful place. The *ecclesia*, the assembled congregation, is now again the *circumstantes* in a near-literal sense. This would suggest a *rotunda* as an appropriate style for a church building. It is not accidental that many Roman temples had a circular shape, most impressively demonstrated in Rome's Pantheon. The world-view of the Greeks and Romans was a-historical: one and the same world was assumed to be perpetually resolved into elements and renewed at the conclusion of fixed cycles in which all things come around again to the same order and form as at first<sup>35</sup>. The Christian, however, is always *in via* and the Church is a Church of pilgrims on the way. The people of God form a marching column, one might say, proceeding towards the altar, where they are nourished, to move on again through time towards their real home. Hence, the prevalence of the oblong basilica style, presenting a road rather than a circle, a road which, after it passed the resting place, seems to lead out again into the open, into this world and the world beyond. This procession is a procession of parishioners (*paroikia*) in whom and in whose actions the Church is actualized in time and space. But the local parish, as *Grosche* has stated, is not the only form in which the Church comes to life. The Church is realized or, in *Karl Rahner's* sense, »event-ualized« wherever the Holy Eucharist is celebrated<sup>36</sup>.

But what about this »parish of tomorrow«? It will, in many instances, have to be a »reformed« local parish and in others not a local parish at all. It will always be a »place« where the Christians gather around an altar of sacrifice, even if it is a portable one. It has often been said that the parish must be de-localized because modern life has become a process of perpetual motion. The place where people have their homes and the place where they work are normally far apart. Even recreation seems no longer centered in the home. There is irrefutable evidence of accelerated spacial and social mobility. As *Colin W. Williams*, an Australian Methodist theologian now living in America, expressed it: »... *people no longer live where they live*«<sup>37</sup>. To a great

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<sup>35</sup> *Franz H. Mueller*, *The Church and the Social Question*, in: *Moody-Lawler*, *The Challenge of Mater et Magistra*, Herder and Herder, New York, N. Y., 1963, pp. 14 and 137.

<sup>36</sup> *Loc. cit.*, pp 16 f., 228 ff. – <sup>37</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 7.

extent«, he says, »our decisions are made, our energies expended and our anxieties are formed, away from home«, while the Church is still centered on residence<sup>38</sup>. Fifteen years ago, *Dom Dekkers O. S. B.*, speaking for the situation in the Low Lands said almost literally the same: it is the shop, the office, the factory where most Christians spend most of their lives; their living sphere is no longer and in no wise the street, the neighborhood or even the village where they happen to live just now but may move away from tomorrow. The railroad, the subway, the car are obliterating all boundaries »written into the ground«<sup>39</sup>. This is true; yet it is not the whole story. Even where the breadwinner travels long distances between his home and his place of work, his wife and children often do enjoy a modicum of stability. And as hours of work decrease, time spent at home is likely to increase. *Truman B. Douglas* in discussing *Williams'* propositions, doubts that the modern fragmentation of man's time and occupations has really resulted in a correspondingly radical dismemberment of his personal existence. He feels that in spite of all the disjunctive forces which assail modern man and the variety of roles he is forced to assume, he retains an amazing sameness of character traits. He remains one and the same person: »a man who wants to be taken seriously«, who searches for the meaning of life, which is revealed through its very crises, and who may very well look to his parish as the place where he meets the Living Word of God and where the Church is revealed to him in the solidarity of the parochial congregation<sup>40</sup>. It is for that reason that every parish must ask itself whether it is prepared to give the answers to the questions which modern man is asking. The parish must clarify its true role: is it still a living witness to Christ in a secular world? *Karl Rahner* says that since the parish is of human right it must continually prove itself and its meaningfulness; it is never the measure but always that which is to be measured<sup>41</sup>. Man alone is the measure, he who is the end of all pastoral care. If the pastoral ministry is to meet man wherever he actually lives, then, *Rahner* says, there can be no doubt that the role of the territorial parish is a limited one in the modern world. We must, then, devise supplementary structures along the lines of a personal rather than territorial parish. This term should

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. – <sup>39</sup> Loc. cit., p. 46 f.

<sup>40</sup> Loc. cit., p. 116.

<sup>41</sup> In *Kirchgässner, Alfons, Pfarrgemeinde und Pfarrgottesdienst*, Herder & Co, GmbH., Freiburg i. B. 1949, pp 17 ff.

be taken in a non-judicial sense, that is, as ways and means suited to reach man in areas where the local parish cannot reach him. The prison chaplain, the Newman chaplain, the Army chaplain, the hospital chaplain, the priest-worker have long been engaged in this kind of care and cure of souls. If and insofar the local parish is not able even to reach its own members effectively, it is not necessarily so because the people have lost their faith, but, as Father *Dennis J. Geaney* O.S.A. expressed it, because »the traditional conductors of faith are losing their effectiveness«. »It is change«, he goes on, »or suffer extinction«<sup>42</sup>. A Protestant author, *Peter Berger*, voices a similar concern by saying that the most urgent task of the Church today in its encounter with the world may have to occur in »supra-parochial« settings<sup>43</sup>. *Gayrand S. Wilmore*, following in *Berger's* footsteps, thinks of core groups as outposts in some sectors of the community – while the local congregation is left to do what it has always done and perhaps will always do in the future: liturgy, preaching, the administration of the sacraments and whatever educational activities seem plausible to those concerned<sup>44</sup>. *George D. Younger*, paradoxically enough, suggests *larger* parishes. But what he means is not the bigger parish, but supra-parochial cooperation: the ecumenical parish, where various denominations may even share the same building for worship at different hours and where, through sharing in the various active tasks of social engagement, Christians come closer together than they would in the area of faith and order<sup>45</sup>. Sociologists, *Younger* thinks, will probably frown upon such attempts at deliberate social changes. But he thinks such changes not only economically feasible, but mandatory if parishes are to be freed from constant concern for their physical plants and from their financial worries. *Gibson Winter* speaks of the »organization church« as »an attempt to maintain a community of

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<sup>42</sup> *Geaney, Dennis J.*, *Christians in a Changing World*, Fides Publishers Ass., Chicago, Ill., 1959, p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> *Berger, Peter L.*, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N. Y., 1961, p. 167.

<sup>44</sup> *Wilmore Gayrand S.*, *The Secular Relevance of the Church*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Penn., 1957, pp. 66 and 75.

<sup>45</sup> *Younger, George D.*, *The Church and Urban Power Structure*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Penn., 1963 pp 167 ff.; see also *John J. Harmon*, *The Parish: When is it Alive? – When should it Die?* *Cross Currents*, vol. XV, No. 4, Fall 1965: »The possibilities of interconnecting parochial structures and life are endless – all the while obeying the dictum not to do anything together that conscience forbids.« p. 391.

religious identity in the midst of residential mobility«, but one can only guess what he means by it: it is neither a congregation nor a parish, but a supra-parochial substitute form of community, which attempts to integrate organizationally those who can no longer be held together in locally confined parishes<sup>46</sup>.

Msgr. *John Egan*, Director of Chicago's Archdiocesan Conservation Council, believes that the urban parish can be transformed into a »working parish«, a moral personality dedicated to charity and justice in the community. He is confident that this can be achieved by having parish-centered lay organizations transmit the traditions and habits of concern of the parish through the changing population. In other words, parishioners will come and go, but the parish organization will stay and – what is more – stay committed to the physical and moral conservation of the neighborhood. Parish organizations are supposed to assure the continuity of the parish as a »moral personality«. Msgr. *Egan* accepts the ceaseless change in membership as a fact, but he does not raise the question of whether this fact does not contradict the very purpose which he expects these organizations to serve – viz., conservation of the neighborhood community. Population turnover, obviously, is a symptom. It indicates that the neighborhood in question cannot, for whatever reasons, hold its inhabitants long enough to permit the development and continuity of something like a common spirit pervading the people of that neighborhood. Thus, to assign to parish societies the function of transforming the urban parish into a moral personality does not seem to be realistic and convincing<sup>47</sup>.

The proposition to decentralize the parish and to build much smaller churches is, of course, an old one. *Adé de Bethune*, a Belgian artist living in America, some thirty years ago argued that distributive justice demands to give to the people of God their fair share even in regard to pastoral care. Being a church artist in her own right, she felt she had enough experience to be justified in saying that a number of chapel-like churches would not be more expensive than our modern mammoth pseudo-basilicas. These little churches should be administered by pastors, not vicars. Young priests, she thought, should not need many years of experience in a large parish in order to be able to take care of a small one: »no man becomes responsible unless he be given responsibility.« Besides, »every priest is much *better* able to

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<sup>46</sup> *The Suburban Captivity (loc. cit.)*, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Schiltz, The Parish of the Future, Today*, vol. 17, No. 7, p. 13.

know and care well for his small community than five priests can for a diffuse, five-times larger group<sup>48</sup>. Of course, the building of more churches does not make people more religious, but it provides the natural base upon which grace can grow. »*Construire des églises, c'est planter l'Église*« says *Winninger* in his admirable little book on the dimensions of the parishes and the contradictions of the urban apostolate<sup>49</sup>. Msgr. *Ronald A. Knox* some years ago, when giving a sermon on »the good parishioner«, complained that »in most London churches we don't know our fellow worshippers even by sight, and our only chance of edifying them is by our behavior in church. It may be doubted whether we are always successful in this«<sup>50</sup>. Now, we cannot very well demolish our larger churches; but the older ones (with paid up debt!) should aid the smaller and poorer ones. And within the larger parishes, there might some day be the possibility of occasionally having Holy Mass celebrated in a home for the parishioners of a block. Interestingly enough in one American diocese the bishop provided for a mission to be broadcast on television. It is reported that this was very successful, and it provides another example of the out-going possibility of the church<sup>51</sup>. The mobile parish, the church or chapel on wheels has long been known as an effective means in the home missions.

There are numerous other means of solving the problem of a »stable« parish in a mobile society. But one of the most important means is the greater and more immediate involvement of the laity. Not only in order to assist the parish priest but also and primarily to relieve him of burdens that properly belong to the shoulders of the lay people. More than fifty years ago, the pastors in immigrant churches in the United States had to be not only priests but also educators, social workers, football coaches, parish credit union managers and what have you. They must now rid themselves of most of these functions since their parishioners have become quite capable of handling these matters themselves. Strangely enough, not every pastor is happy to relinquish his role as the universal protector and leader of his flock. I believe it was Cardinal *Cushing* who once said that some priests take the simile of the shepherd and his flock just a bit too literally, treating their parishioners as a »people of sheep«. Now, says Rev.

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<sup>48</sup> *Orate Fratres* (now: *Worship*), vol. XII, No. 11, Oct. 2, 1938, p. 487 f.

<sup>49</sup> *Winninger, Paul*, *Construire des Églises*, Edition du Cerf, Paris 1957.

<sup>50</sup> *The Tablet*, London, July 9, 1955, vol. 206, No. 6007, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> *Werner Hannan O.F.M. Cap.*, *The First TV-Mission*, *The Priest*, vol. 16, No. 6, pp. 554-558.

*John Foster* in his marvellous book *Requiem for a Parish*<sup>52</sup>, of the parishioners, it is »time to ensure that through the normal process of maturation, they fulfill themselves as living stones of the Temple«, that they develop from practicing to witnessing members of the Church. »A ›kept‹ laity«, *Foster* says, »can no longer be the norm of parish life. The more mature the laity becomes, the more a parish becomes truly present in its local society«.

As the spirit of Pentecost, then, becomes real in the hearts of men, the trials and travails of the parish will vanish in tongues of fire.

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<sup>52</sup> The Newmann Press, Westminster, Md., 1962, p. 123, 26.