

## **INTEGRAL CATHOLICISM**

*Fr. Perozich comments — “Memory is a tricky thing, and historical memory can be trickier.”*

*I was born in 1951. The beauty of the faith in which I was raised formed me in its reverent liturgies and church life, in Catholic school, of living with but being different from non Catholics around me, sharing much in common, but not the same in the spiritual life of my Catholic faith.*

*Certainly Bishop Sheen, “Going My Way”, “The Bells of St. Mary” showed some of the beauty of the church.*

*It still clings to me today which in part is why I do not fit in with the novelties of the current church: ok to divorce/remarry and receive Eucharist, “gay theology”, population and wealth redistribution, socialism, climate theology, and on.*

*These are foreign to the Catholic faith, although they are preached as part of it in 2020.*

*At age 69 the battle of virtues and vices are still part of my life. So is daily adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Mass, the Divine Office, intercessory prayer, the rosary, the sacrament of Penance, Stations of the Cross during Lent, litanies, and the whole spiritual life that formed me to this time.*

*These I tried to share as a pastor to form the lives of the flock as mine was formed by my pastors.*

*It hurts to see them waning. It hurts to see them silenced by church leaders with substitution of worldly values and concepts.*

*“Integral Catholicism” in this article might be another name for the “Benedict Option” that has gained popularity lately.*

*I continue to take my faith seriously, to integrate into my life the timeless faith of Catholicism, and to hold onto the zeal even when the powerful in the government and the church try to snuff it out in order to promote their ideas of one world utopia which requires sacrificing Catholic truth. Utopia never will exist until Jesus Christ comes again in all His glory to judge the living and the dead, to be all in all.*

*Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus.*

# The Fifties: Catholic Paradise Lost?

CHARLES COULOMBE



**Memory is a tricky thing**, and historical memory can be trickier. For example, to many Catholic Americans, the 1950s look like a golden age of innocence, when life—especially church life—looked like a series of Norman Rockwell and Harold Anderson illustrations. As with all such reminiscences, it is not entirely inaccurate. Certainly America's Catholics benefited alongside everyone else from post-War prosperity, and joined the great migration to the suburbs and Southern California. In such favored spots, new

Catholic institutions—churches, schools, and hospitals—bloomed like flowers, as did the numbers of female religious who serviced the latter two. In keeping with the general increase in American church attendance across the board in that era, the numbers of Catholics soared.

In return, Catholicism appeared to have acquired a new respectability on the American scene. Certainly it was so in popular entertainment, where Bing Crosby's Father O'Malley conquered hearts in *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, and Archbishop Sheen was top dog on the nascent medium of television. Every war picture featured an Italian kid from Brooklyn, and Catholic elements were introduced into the quasi-religious cultus of the nation: the veneration of the Four Chaplains lay great stress on their interfaith Americanism, of which the Catholic priest in the quartet was full. Catholics even began to dream of having one of our own in the White House—a dream accomplished at the end of the decade. In such books as Will Herberg's *Catholic, Protestant, Jew*, Catholics taking an integral role in the nation's mosaic was hailed. If a few dissenters like Paul Blanshard looked at papal and foreign Catholic proclamations and saw a threat to American democracy, there were a host of Catholic and non-Catholic commentators keen on refuting them. Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., was busy writing and theorizing in defense of the claim that the Founding Fathers' views were actually the best possible expression of the Church's social teachings. America's Catholics had arrived.

Or had they?

There were a few voices of dissent amongst the Catholic community, who felt that this **acceptance came at too high a price: abandonment of the Church's prophetic mission to evangelize these United States.** Many of

these voices had their roots in pre-War Catholic dissent, such as the Catholic Worker and such Distributist - inspired figures as Monsignor Ligutti's back-to-the-land movement. One of these was Ed Willock, a Catholic Worker veteran with a unique vision of how the Church's social teaching should be applied in America. With Carol Robinson, in 1946 he launched a magazine called *Integrity*, which was intended as a platform for Willock and his collaborators. In their first issue, they explained what they were about:

**Integral Catholicism** is already becoming a popular expression. It does not mean piety so much as wholeness. It means that what we profess to believe is consistent with the assumed principle by which we live out our daily lives. It suggests a consistency of theory and practice; a unity of public life and private morals; a reconciliation of commercial ethics and religious dogma, of individual conscience and statutory law. It means a cessation of the uneasy Sunday - lipservice - to - God - and - 40 - hours - a - week - with - time - and - one half - for - overtime - devotion - to - Mammon by which so many of our lives are compromised.

The articles in the magazine's ten-year run covered every aspect of life, from politics to household affairs, and were intended to help the readership develop their lives in an entirely Catholic direction. One by-product of this effort was the founding by Willock and his supporters of Marycrest, a community of lay Catholics who wanted to live in a Catholic community—complete with corporate observance of the Church year, from St. John's fires to Epiphany singers going house to house. Madonna House in Canada, founded by Catherine de Hueck Dougherty, had a similar emphasis, and young ladies of such a bent found a home with the Ladies of the Grail in Ohio.

**Similar ideas spread** through an informal and loose network of Catholic intellectuals who dubbed themselves the Detachers (signifying a desire to “detach” from what they considered an immoral and banal culture), most prominent of whom were such lights as writer J.F. Powers and Senator Eugene McCarthy, most of whom had also done time with the *Catholic Worker*. Authors like Helen McLoughlin and Father Francis X. Weiser, S.J., wrote books explaining calendar customs from all over the Catholic world, thereby assisting modern parents to use them to sanctify their homes and home-life. In that way, it was hoped, the same spirit that dominated Marycrest and Grailville might be brought into ordinary Catholic homes across America.

Thomas Merton, already a convert-celebrity thanks to his literary and monastic status, joined with his college pals and fellow converts Ed Rice and Robert Lax to found *Jubilee* magazine in 1953, with which they hoped to “produce a Catholic literary magazine that would act as a forum for addressing issues confronting the contemporary church.” Even *Jubilee*’s odd financial set-up—a sort of cooperative between the management and the charter subscribers—was described by the former as “worked out after a study of the two great papal social encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI)...” Such names as Robert Lowell (during his transitory Catholic phase) graced its pages, and in its way it was quite as radical as *Integrity*, albeit far glossier.

On a more strictly clerical level, Monsignor Joseph Fenton and Father Francis Connell, CSSR, fought what they considered Father Murray’s accommodationist and indifferentist views in *The American Ecclesiastical Review* and other fora. Their contention was that the American

version of separation of Church and state, so far from being the best possible arrangement as Father Murray asserted, was in fact only the best that Catholic Americans could hope for in the immediate — the Catholic confessional state being the ideal. If their reasoning occasionally came across as a bit more tortured than that of their opponent, it at least did not discount all of the papal encyclicals on such matters up to that time.

Exciting as these and allied currents seemed during the 1950s (and fascinating and useful as many of the writings they left behind are today), with the exception of the Catholic Worker and the Grail (both of which organizations are rather different from what their founders envisaged) the whole thing was not more lasting than a soap bubble. But so, too, with the Catholic Church in America as a whole, which half a century later is woefully sick—at the moment of writing, so far from influencing the United States, it is unable even to celebrate Mass publicly. While it may be hoped this last shall pass swiftly, one wonders what any American of the 1950s would think, were he told that in a future pandemic the churches of all denominations would be closed, while legal abortuaries would be kept open as “essential services.” That reality by itself shows just how little Catholic America really means.

So why did the Catholic radicals fail so signally? Partly because of the aftermath of Vatican II and the loss of Catholic identity. But that loss itself was indicative of a deeper problem. As with the pre-World War II Catholic activists, they had no real following with either the majority of lay Catholics or the hierarchy. Mostly converts or only-partly assimilated ethnics, they made the same mistake Paul Blanshard had made. **They thought that, as a whole, Catholic Americans took their faith seriously. Our history**

**since then shows that, as a whole, we did not. We are paying the price for that lack of zeal today.**



By [Charles Coulombe](#)

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