

Liturgy and Social Justice: Fresh Challenges for Today in Virgil Michel's Legacy

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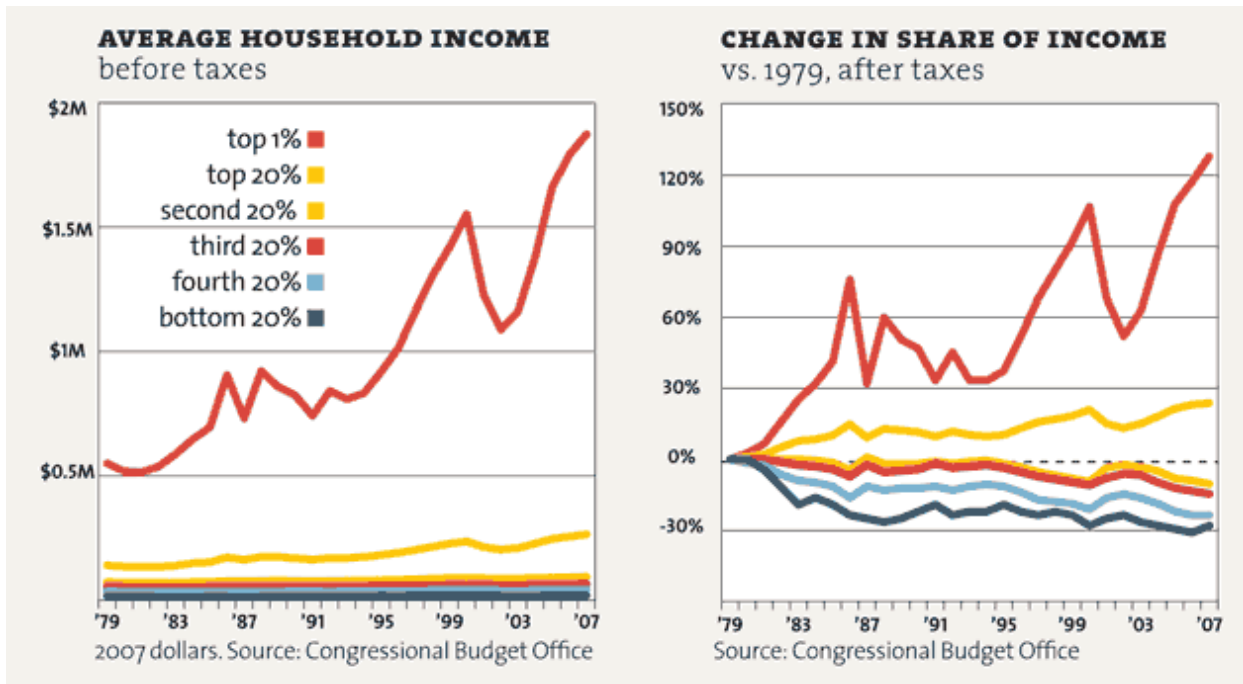
Summary:

Father Virgil Michel, OSB (1890–1939), a monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, was one of the pioneers of the liturgical movement in the U.S. Church of the twentieth century. Although widely influential and accomplished in many areas, he is perhaps best remembered as a strong advocate for the conviction that liturgy commits us to justice. His influence on Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, as well as on other social movements of the time, fostered a synthesis between liturgical participation and the radical commitment to solidarity that the gospel entails. What does Virgil Michel's vision have to say to American Catholics today? How might his insights help us in the twenty-first century to "live from the Eucharist" more profoundly?

We meet at a time of great economic injustice in America and in the world. The poor remain poor, while the rich have become "super-rich." There are, to be sure, many justice issues in our world today: war and peace, immigration, human trafficking and more. I thought we might take just one however, economic injustice, as an instance of the challenges that face us today.

Income inequality in the United States stands at heights only previously known in the Great Depression.

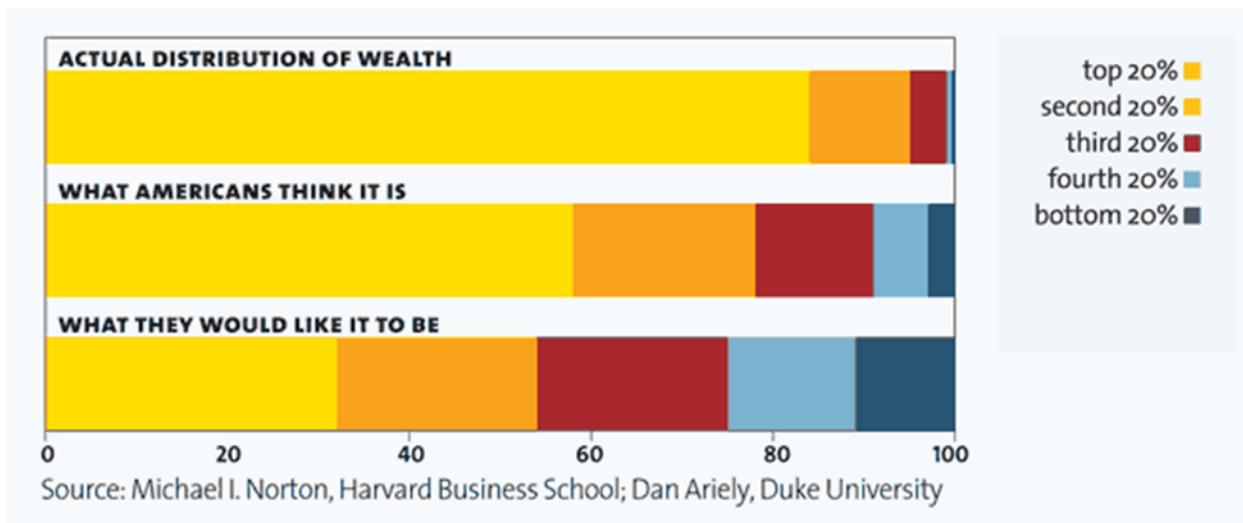
[Wikipedia tells us](#) that, over the past 40 years, "Studies indicate the source of the widening gap (sometimes called the [Great Divergence](#)) has not been [gender inequality](#), which has declined in the US over the last several decades,^[12] nor [inequality between black and white Americans](#), which has stagnated during that time,^[13] nor has the gap between the poor and middle class been the major cause—though it has grown.^[14] Most of the growth has been between the middle class and top earners, with the disparity becoming more extreme the further one goes up in the income distribution.^[15] Upward redistribution of income is responsible for about 43% of the projected [Social Security](#) shortfall over the next 75 years.^[16] The [Brookings Institution](#) said in 2013 that income inequality was increasing and becoming permanent, reducing [social mobility](#) in the US.^[17]



[These two charts and the one below can be found [here](#).]

These facts underlie the [Occupy protest movement](#), first to break out in Occupy Wall Street, 17 Sept 2011. The Occupy protest movement has since erupted in 600 communities across the US, and 81 other countries besides; every continent except Antarctica.

Poll data has shown that most Americans think income is much more evenly distributed than it actually is. Which of course means there is less pressure to change the situation.



[*Mother Jones*, see above]

This past fall, the Catholic Church in America had on full display a clash of expectations regarding what to do, and our varying views regarding social justice could not have been more marked:

September 14, 2012, [National Catholic Reporter](#):

Cardinal Chaput of Philadelphia was quoted, saying:

“Jesus tells us very clearly that if we don’t help the poor, we’re going to go to hell. Period. There’s just no doubt about it. That has to be a foundational concern of Catholics and of all Christians. But Jesus didn’t say the government has to take care of them, or that we have to pay taxes to take care of them. Those are prudential judgments. Anybody who would condemn someone because of their position on taxes is making a leap that I can’t make as a Catholic. ...”

In the Fall 2012, the [website](#) for **Nuns on the Bus** posted this statement:

“As Catholic Sisters, we must speak out against the current House Republican budget, authored by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI). We do so because it harms people who are already suffering.

The Ryan Budget would:

- Raise taxes on 18 million hardworking low-income families while cutting taxes for millionaires and big corporations.
- Push the families of 2 million children into poverty.
- Kick 8 million people off food stamps and 30 million off health care.”

Into this maelstrom came another announcement: the USCCB announced a unanimous vote to move forward with the cause for Dorothy Day’s canonization.

Nov. 26, 2012; New York Times, [reporting](#):

William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League said:

“It is an opportunity for him [Cardinal Dolan, president of the USCCB] to demonstrate that conservative Catholics are not uncaring, without accepting liberal positions in how you service the poor. ... She [Dorothy Day] was not, like many liberal Catholics today, a welfare state enthusiast.”

Francis Cardinal George of Chicago:

“As we struggle at this opportune moment to try to show how we are losing our freedoms in the name of individual rights, Dorothy Day is a very good woman to have on our side.”

To all of this, **Robert Ellsberg**, a former editor of the Catholic Worker newspaper, and the editor of Day’s letters and diaries said: “I think she would be appalled to have her commitment to voluntary poverty and works of mercy and charity in their deepest sense be used as cover for an agenda that I think she would see as part of a war against the poor.”

“When prophets are honored,” **Eugene McCarragher** wrote in the journal, *Religion and American Culture*, “it’s time to be wary. Placing prophets on pedestals can be a way not only of disarming them but of avoiding the lessons they can teach.” (“The Church Irrelevant: Paul Hanley Furfey and the Fortunes of American Catholic Radicalism,” *Religion and American Culture* 7 (1997), p. 176).

The [website](#) for the cause of canonization for **Dorothy Day** quotes her own words, in this manner:

“Always present for Dorothy Day, was a question expressed in her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, ‘Why was so much done in remedying evil instead of avoiding it in the first place...Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to slaves, but to do away with slavery?’”

Today we remain in a situation where the wealth spent on arms and armaments could lift every human being on the planet out of destitution, if it were spent on human needs, as Pope Benedict reminded us in his post-Synodal Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007, paragraph 90).

Today we hear our new Pope, Francis, [say at his inaugural Mass](#): “How I would like a poor church, a church of the poor!”

We stand at a moment in time when the Catholic Church in America is being challenged to live its social vision.

Where ARE the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to slaves, but to do away with slavery? Dorothy Day’s question comes back to haunt us.

Which brings us to Virgil Michel.

Surely he is one of the saints who tried to change things. He did this by writing, by teaching, by analyzing and critiquing predatory capitalism. Which was, by the way, plenty predatory in the 1920s, long before Ayn Rand and the cult of radical individualism lionized in her novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957).

[By the way, Ayn Rand, as of this writing, ranks #4 in authors of “Literature Classics,” on Amazon.com., ahead of Jane Austen, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, etc. She was beat out by F Scott Fitzgerald, JRR Tolkien, and, improbably by somebody named Stephen Chbosky, who wrote “The Perks of a Wallflower.” (It helps if your book is made into a movie.) It is safe to say, however, that Rand’s popularity is not due to the literary merit of her works but to their ideology of a particular sort of individualistic capitalism.]

Virgil Michel perceived idolatry in the unbridled pursuit of wealth, and he taught that this is an abomination. Following Pius XI’s [encyclical](#), *Quadragesimo anno*, he referred to it as a “pagan” creed.

But what was his solution? Cooperative farms? Workers movements? Labor unions? He applauded and supported all these things. Yet his contribution was not as an economist, not as a union organizer, not as someone who ran a hospitality house or a farm cooperative. Rather, his calling was to deepen the spiritual basis of all of these things, through the Liturgy.

True deepening, in Michel’s vision, could be achieved only through active participation in the liturgy. The idea that the LITURGY is essential to social regeneration, to social justice, was his signal contribution to Catholic liturgical movement in America in the early twentieth century.

Mark Searle, in an essay he wrote in 1980 (“Serving the Lord with Justice,” in *Liturgy and Social Justice*, Liturgical Press, 1980, p. 13–35) clarified that the “justice” we are talking about when we speak of the liturgy as a font of justice is not justice in the limited sense of legal redress. Such justice, Searle said, can do no more than place restraints on evil. But the justice we talk about in liturgy is human flourishing. It is justice that arises from finding and living from who we are together: the Body of Christ in the world. The liturgy is about God’s justice, which brings forth life in abundance.

Michel saw the Liturgy as our lived enactment of the spiritual reality of the Body of Christ, in which no one can say to another, “I don’t need you.” Virgil Michel understood this, and tried mightily to convey it to others.

The connection between liturgy and social justice was also the American liturgical movement’s most distinctive contribution to the international liturgical movement which began with Lambert Beaudoin, in 1909, and reached its apogee in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

And it came through Michel. It came from here, St. John’s. It came through Orate Fratres (which he founded), and Liturgical Press (which he founded), and through the schools that Michel toiled to expand and enrich with pedagogy that would integrate the lived experience of the liturgy with all the disciplines of learning. I feel privileged to stand here and speak about him today.

Father Virgil Michel, OSB—what was he like? Brilliant, yet very practical; a teacher yet also a visionary; German by heredity, yet truly American, with a can-do attitude and positive energy for leaning into the future. He was seriously devout and strictly loyal to the pope as Christ’s

vicar on earth; his view of Catholicism was formed by the Church of the so-called “long nineteenth century.” At the same time, he was well aware of the apathy and appalling failures of the Church (both in Europe and the United States) to educate, to teach, to reform. He was not, as his biographer, Fr. Paul Marx, admitted, a very good economist, but he was good with theological praxis, good with languages, a good educator. Above all, he was a person of indefatigable energy.

A bibliography of his writings during his brief life span of 48 years, ran to 13 pages, tightly spaced (Paul Marx, OSB; *Virgil Michel and the Liturgical Movement*; Liturgical Press, p. 421–434). There was never a day when he didn’t write something, and it was not unusual to find him writing on two or three topics in a single day. Not to mention the time he spent speaking and teaching, in the classroom and in other settings. He organized conventions, he went out to people, he conducted a wide-ranging correspondence.

I’d like to offer 3 images which say something about Michel himself, and are worth reflecting upon as we think about our own challenges regarding liturgy and social justice.

- The first is an image of him talking to the Fr. Alcuin Deutsch, who asked him while he was yet a young student, if he might have a vocation to become a monk. His response was: “Father Alcuin, if monasticism were what it once was, I would enter St. John’s Abbey.” Cheeky? He was a critic! But his response was action. Persuaded by Fr. Deutsch that the Abbey could be, like monasticism of old, “a center for spirituality, learning and scholarship” (Marx, 7) he joined, and added the full measure of his own talents to this community, contributing to a flourishing of spirituality, learning, and scholarship for the whole American Church.

I like this image, because I think the boy is father to the man. He often looked upon his world with a clear-eyed appraisal of what it *lacked*. He judged religious education in America to be abysmal, the state of liturgical participation pitiful. He perceived that “cutthroat capitalism” was destroying our common life.

But, then, he did something about it.

- The second image comes from the Catholic Worker. Fr. Michel was a friend of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and a friend to the Catholic Worker. He sent them books from Liturgical Press, which they devoured, and he taught them to pray the hours and sent them booklets to use. He inspired their movement to join the liturgical movement.

Here’s the image, from Stanley Vishnewski’s book, *Wings of the Dawn*, describing an ordinary day at the Catholic Worker.

“Every evening at seven Margaret or Big Dan would start banging on a dishpan or a handy pot and its clamorous noise resounding throughout the store would summon us to the kitchen where, facing each other in two rows, we would recite the office of

Compline.” (Quoted in “Virgil Michel, Benedictine Co-Worker of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin: Justice Embodied in Christ-life and Liturgy,” by Mark and Louise Zwick, *Houston Catholic Worker*, Vol. XX, No. 1, Jan-Feb. 2000.)

Not only the Hours, but also the Eucharist was part of the routine at the Catholic Worker houses. William Gauchat of the Cleveland Catholic Worker wrote about the appeal of the liturgy to the homeless in his 1940 book, *Helping the Hobo to God*: “The poor who have nothing, and are despised by everyone for having nothing, can offer to God a gift of infinite value in the Mass. At Mass the poor are rich, and the rich are no more than the poorest of the poor.” (Zwick, 4, 5)

The image of people banging pots to summon the homeless to recite compline in the kitchen is piquant to me. There was singing, probably off key. This liturgy is hardly an aesthetic treasure. What it is, however, is a kind of miracle. It’s a miracle because of who’s there, because of its patchwork of ordinariness and grandeur. These lives are placed on the altar and joined together in the Body of Christ to which you and I, by the mercy of God, also belong.

- The third image comes from Canada: Virgil Michel sitting on a broken chair in run-down storefront in Toronto, talking to Catherine de Heuck and a discouraged group of volunteers when their Friendship House movement was nearing collapse, saying “You are discouraged. You need the Mass. You must persevere by all means. You have a vocation. Study the Mass, live the Mass. Between two Masses you can bear everything.” (Keith F. Pecklers, SJ, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926–1955*; Liturgical Press, 1998, p. 116).

They followed his prescription. They had Mass. The movement turned around.

I am struck by Virgil Michel’s faith in the liturgy itself. I am struck by his bedrock confidence that the liturgy was the “one thing needful” to make efforts for justice and peace bear the sweet fruit of the kingdom of God. I am struck by this because it so easy to become discouraged. It’s easy to become disheartened with the weaknesses of how we celebrate or the quality of the music and the preaching or the flaws in translation or the cluelessness with which our rituals are sometimes presented and explained. We’ve all known too many people who haven’t been “held” by our liturgy—good people, often enough—and in a pluralistic world, have simply walked away.

What *in the world* does this Liturgy of ours have to offer, to *heal* the world? Virgil Michel would answer: It has Christ. And through the liturgy we become, in a mystical manner, the Body of Christ in the world.

How many of us can say of the Liturgy, without arrogance but with utter trust and faith: **This will help. This is the answer to the disfigurements of the world. This will make our world whole again, if we let it.** That's what I hear Virgil Michel saying.

His vision was simple: Active participation in the liturgy is integral to social reconstruction. Pope Pius X said that active participation in Liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit *in Tra le solecitudini*. Pope Pius XI said that the true Christian spirit is needed for social reconstruction in *Quadragesimo anno*. And Virgil Michel said that, *therefore*, active participation in Liturgy is indispensable to social reconstruction. It was as simple as that. (*The Social Question: Essays on Capitalism and Christianity by Father Virgil Michel, OSB*, edited by Robert L. Spaeth; Office of Academic Affairs, St. John's University, 1987, p. 8)

He was critical of capitalism. He believed in social movements such as Catholic Action, The Catholic Worker, Champion Propaganda Movement, Friendship House, the Grail, and more. The Church needed social movements. But also, and perhaps more importantly, he believed that social movements needed the liturgy.

Alternatives to capitalism offered without God would never solve social problems, for "without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). He was convinced that both toxic individualism and dehumanizing collectivism are rooted in unbelief.

For Michel's socio-liturgical vision there was a single unifying theological concept: the Mystical Body of Christ. Through the Liturgy we enter that Body, and thus are related to all others in the Body. The challenge was to become conscious of this union through active participation, and then to bring it to action.

Although the liturgical movement ultimately resulted in reform of the liturgy, Virgil Michel, like so many of the early leaders of the liturgical movement, was not so concerned about "doing things" to the liturgy. He was concerned about the liturgy "doing things" to us. It would form us and make us whole, once we by our willing cooperation with God's grace, allowed the "true Christian spirit" to flow through the liturgy and into us and our world.

He understood this vision of participation in the liturgy as arising from the experience of the early church: "What the early Christians thus did at the altar of God, in the central act of Christian worship, they also lived out in their daily lives. They understood fully that the common action of worship was to be the inspiration of all their actions. They knew well that their common giving of themselves to God and to the brethren of Christ was in fact a solemn promise made to God that they would live their lives in this same love of God and of God's children, their brethren in Christ, throughout all the day. Unless they did that, their action before God would be at best lip-service, a lie before God." ("The Cooperative Movement and the Liturgical Movement," *Orate Fratres* Vol. XIV, Feb. 1940, p. 156)

His connection with Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin was particularly interesting. A small book I read while preparing for this talk was entitled *Kenotic Revolution, Revolutionary Descent: The Spiritual Politics of Dorothy Day* (Daniel Izuzquiza, SJ. *Kenotic Revolution*,

Revolutionary Descent: The Spiritual Politics of Dorothy Day. Translated by Gerarda Walsh. Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia Booklets, 2009). Kenosis – the Greek word for self-emptying, which was the movement of Christ in the incarnation -- was key to the revolutionary politics of the Catholic Worker.

Dorothy Day discovered her calling in prison. Peter Maurin often mistaken for a bum. Their calling was to live with the poor, and in solidarity with the poor. As a way to avoid paying taxes for war costs, they earned too little to be taxed. They experienced the downward pull of kenosis. The paradox of kenosis is that, rather than erasing the individual, it makes individuals stronger.

Some seek out kenosis, others have it thrust upon them. For all his dynamo-like energy (or perhaps resulting from of it) Virgil Michel suffered a crisis of nervous exhaustion, a breakdown, in 1930. He experienced sleeplessness, headaches, the inability to work or even to pray the hours, and emptiness. To aid his recovery, he was sent to the Chippewa in northern Minnesota. There, among the poor, he found life and solidarity and health again. This movement was repeated twice, whereupon he finally returned to St. John's in 1933 (Pecklers, 127).

His “self-emptying” through this breakdown and through his immersion into the community of people who helped him recover, was instrumental in arriving at a deeper level of insight and passion, a fuller grasp of the truths to which he had committed his life.

Virgil Michel died in 1938. Did his vision of liturgy and justice die with him? By the late 1950s, the notion of a fundamental connection between liturgy and social justice had faded in the United States (Margaret Mary Kelleher, “Liturgy and Social Transformation: Exploring the Relationship,” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Fall 1998, p. 58–70). Periodic attempts to revive the connection between these two spheres produced some literature in the 1980s (during the era of the great peace and economic pastorals of the US bishops) and again another wave of interest in the 1990s. But by that time the literature tended to be either forensic or speculative. Why had this connection died? Was there any hope of its revival?

Catholic Social Teaching has continued to offer a strong critique of economic and social life. The themes of solidarity, participation, human dignity, and more continue to emerge in the writings of popes and of the Council. Catholic social ethics has developed apace. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “The Eucharist commits us to the poor” (CCC 1397). And liturgy has continued to be “about” the reign of God. But for the mainstream of American Catholics, the two arenas—justice and liturgy—have been living separate lives.

Back in the 1970s the music composer Tom Conry had a small spoken text inserted in one of his songs for Eucharist that said: “Anyone who comes to this table is saying: I believe in a new world. A world where bread is for everyone, the poor as much as for the rich.”

When we come to the table, *are* we saying: “I believe in a new world”? For what might be called “movement people” -- Catholic Worker, Sant’ Egidio, Pax Christi: highly committed groups, small in numbers -- I think that the answer is: Yes.

For another group, those who are committed to works of justice and mercy, outreach and social ministry, human concerns, often in parishes and dioceses, the answer is: Maybe. As devoted as these Catholics are to action, there is often enough a return to an individualistic “me and Jesus” spirituality when we come to the table.

But for the majority of Catholics, sadly, the answer is: No. They are *not* coming to the table filled with the conviction that *by so doing* they are saying “I believe in a new world, where bread is for everyone.” For the mainstream, Virgil Michel’s vision didn’t catch fire.

Why not? There have been a lot of answers. The structuring of disciplines such that liturgy and social concern are separate, a failure to adapt to the New Deal, the radically Catholic nature of Michel’s claims, which seem ill-suited to an age of pluralism, and also a lacuna in the Council document on the liturgy, which doesn’t say much about justice. I’d like to look at just one of these: the last.

Did Vatican II drop the ball? Sr. Mary Margaret Kelleher, a professor of liturgy at Catholic University, in an article in the journal, *U.S. Catholic Historian*, voiced the opinion that at least part of the reason why Virgil Michel’s vision of the close link between liturgy and social justice did not become universal is that the reform of the liturgy at Vatican II did not make that link explicit.

There is no question that she has a point. One looks in vain for a forceful and clear statement that the liturgy commits us to justice, or refashions society in such a way that toxic individualism is ruled out, or that any economic narcissism is likewise forbidden. The link between liturgy and building a just society does not “jump off the page” of the Liturgy Constitution.

Yet consider the following:

- The mission of Jesus is explicitly stated in the words of Luke’s gospel, chapter 4: “to preach the gospel to the poor.” (article 5)
- Liturgy flows into the apostolate, and works of charity lead us back to the liturgy, which is the “summit and source” of the Church’s life . (10)
- The perfect union with God and with one another is what the Eucharist draws us to. (article 48)
- The social consequences of sin are to be given attention, and the social dimensions of reconciliation recovered. (109b, 110)
- It is not only the recovery of the Prayer of the Faithful or the encouragement to preaching that opens the gates to social justice; it is also the overall ecclesiology of the Constitution, which raises up the Eucharist as the model of communion and of life together.

Social concern was not lacking in the liturgy debate on the floor of the Council, as Kelleher acknowledges. But she cites only a couple of interventions which were noted in Alberigo's *History of Vatican II*. In fact, there were more.

Consider the intervention of Bishop Manuel Larraín Errázuriz of Tacla Chile, who, speaking on behalf of several Chilean bishops, spoke passionately in support of simplicity and evangelical sobriety in the liturgy. Recalling that Jesus announced the good news to the poor, and that in salvation history the poor are “crowned with light,” he inveighed against “secular vanities” in the Church’s liturgy. “Liturgical celebration ought to be beautiful... Genuine beauty however is in no way the splendor of riches or the splendor of pomps, but is, as the great Augustine said, ‘the splendor of truth.’” (*Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Vaticani II*, II/1, 622.)

Concerned for the apostasy of the people of the proletariat, he urged that the Mystical Body of Christ might be revered throughout the earth, and that the Church might become, not in word but in action the “Church of the poor” (a term used by Pope John) (AS II/1, 623). (One can just imagine Virgil Michel smiling at this!) And indeed, in the Constitution itself, noble simplicity, rather than “sumptuous display,” is presented as the norm of liturgical art and artifacts (SC, 124).

That the church and the liturgy itself might be purged of inequalities arising from wealth and class was the subject of another passionate intervention in the liturgy debate, this one by Bishop Antonio Victor Pildáin Y Zapiáin, of the Canary Islands, Spain. He called for the abolition of different “classes” in the church, and the fees and donations which determined how a baptism or wedding or a funeral might in fact be celebrated (AS I/1, 527–530). One could have a first class celebration... or a seventh class celebration, depending on the fee! Money, quite simply, was getting in the way of God’s reign of justice, in the Church.

His lengthy intervention—based on article 32—was applauded (p. 530). That article of SC seems simple enough on the surface: “In the liturgy, apart from distinctions arising from liturgical function or sacred orders and apart from the honors due to civil authorities in accordance with liturgical law, no special exception is to be made for any private persons of classes of persons, whether in the ceremonies or in external display.” Yet this was the subject of passionate exhortation. Listen to Bishop Pildáin, speaking on behalf of the poor:

“All will feel not only deeply humiliated but also deceived and mocked by us, Council Fathers, if we leave untouched this question, which is an exceedingly grave question of social justice, not the social justice of the world, but that which is more serious still, it seems to me, the social justice of the church and the social justice of the liturgy.” (p. 528).

Bishop Kemmerer of Posadas Argentina, speaking on behalf of a group of twenty bishops who undersigned his intervention, included additions undersigned by Wilhelm van Bekkum and Antoine Hubert Thyssen, both of Indonesia, and Enrique José Mühn of Argentina (AS I/1, 522–523), which advocated the suppression of stipends and urged communal celebrations of baptism, confirmation, communion, even weddings. In a separate intervention, Bishop

Devoto of Goya Argentina likewise argued that the Church should put an end to fees for Mass and the sacraments and put an end to public distinctions of wealth and class (AS I/1, 523).

The amendment Bishop Pildain proposed to expand article 32 was more fully incorporated into the first instruction on the right implementation of the Constitution, *Inter Oecumenici* 34–35, which ends as follows: “Pastors should, with prudence and charity, see to it that the equality of all the faithful is expressed, even externally, and that any appearance of money-making is avoided.”

Fifty years from the promulgation of Sacrosanctum Concilium, it is perhaps important to rediscover these elements of the Constitution. It is perhaps worthwhile to make what is subtle more clear; to allow the call to solidarity that stands in the background of Sacrosanctum Concilium to emerge more fully.

In the ongoing task of boldly relating justice to liturgy, and the needs of the poor, I think Pope Francis will help us. He has the heart for this, and has already led by example.

Overall, in appropriating Virgil Michel’s legacy what we are up against, I think, is amnesia. We’ve forgotten that the Constitution *did* have justice concerns. We’ve forgotten that the liturgy is our greatest statement of “who we are” as the Church, and that this reality is inescapably social.

In today’s welter of identity politics and other forms of tribalism or what I would call “corporate individualism” in our world and our church, we’ve forgotten what makes for peace: Self-emptying, humility, non-violence. This is the Christ whom we worship in the liturgy, and who must also be the template of our common life: He is the one who emptied himself (Philippians 2), becoming a slave, even as we are, and so was raised up.

So much easier to argue for self-interest, for me and mine. So much easier to build our little kingdoms than to build the kingdom of God.

In today’s world, it is more than ever necessary, therefore, to listen again to what Virgil Michel was saying, almost a century ago, and what his legacy says to us still.

Finally, it seems to me that we have to recover the courage to believe of the Liturgy: ***This will help. This is the answer to the disfigurements of the world. This will make our world whole again, if we let it.***

The books, the teaching, the pamphlets, the movements -- and, today, even the blogs! -- can be tools for social regeneration. The ferment of politics, the clash of expectations in the public sphere, is rightly a place where believers take their stand and make their case. But it’s only through the liturgy that our efforts on behalf of justice will bear their sweet fruit, by joining them to the work of Christ in the paschal mystery.

I would like to give the last word to Virgil Michel himself, that indefatigable yet also human and fragile “saint” of the liturgical movement and social justice.

Michel once wrote an article, summarizing a decade of liturgical progress, that ended with these words: "Much has been accomplished under God; yet almost everything needs yet to be done." (Marx, 499)

Thank you.

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