

FR. HENRY ATWELL
**Toward
Tomorrow**



That remarkable and invariably thought-provoking Dr. Marshall McLuhan, in an article in the current Critic magazine, raises the question about where do we go when we want to be alone.

"One of the unique features of the North American outlook is the involuntary and unconscious habit of going outside to be alone," he writes. "In Tokyo, as in Paris, or Buenos Aires, or in London," McLuhan notes, "people typically and habitually go out, whether to dine or to shows or to church, in order to be with people."

The popular song of a few years ago "Downtown" emphasized this fact — that we Americans go downtown to get away from the people who bug us.

If this is true, McLuhan asks, then do Americans go to church to be alone?

And if we do, then no wonder our new liturgy irritates so many.

With the old, silent Latin Mass, we could indeed be alone in church, just as an individual is very much alone even in a crowded subway car — alone even in a church filled with other people who also want to be alone.

But the new "participation" shatters that aloneness — we are expected to speak or sing when we'd prefer to be quiet, we are expected to turn to a stranger for a "sign of peace" precisely at a moment when we'd much rather pay attention to no one.

This American instinct to be alone at prayer is, I think, rather clearly demonstrated in our parish church in Avon. When the church was recently redecorated, new standard-design confessionals were installed and the two old confessionals along the side aisles near the main altar were turned into little prayer chapels with statues and candles and a kneeling bench for just one person. So often I find someone in one or the other chapel, not just before or after Mass, but even during the afternoon or early evening.

The great churches of Europe are

located on the city square, the piazza or plaza, where people meet — as McLuhan indicated, people there go out to be with people, but in America, we go out, even to church, to be alone.

Why Europeans and Americans are so radically different, McLuhan admits he can't explain, but he said we must face the fact that "these hidden attitudes, are deeply set and also relate to liturgy."

It is not a question of one being right, and the other wrong, but our liturgy — even the old Latin liturgy as it was performed for centuries in Europe, with spectacle and participation, and not as we experienced it in its silent, speeded version — is rooted in the European psyche. All we have today is a translated (and poorly so) version of a European way of worship. We've really never had an American liturgy.

The Vatican Council of ten years ago specifically called for the development of liturgies which would be authentic to the culture and customs of various kinds of people. We too readily assumed that the Council was simply being benign to some simple, primitive people who'd like to use drums rather than pipeorgans, jungle chants rather than Gregorian chant.

McLuhan indicates that the question is much deeper than that.

Perhaps what we need is an all-new liturgical movement, not one that just translates German scholars or French avant-garde theorists, but at last will take a careful look at the way God made Americans tick, and the way they can respond in prayer and worship to him in an authentic and truly American manner.

Once we begin to think in this direction then we can begin to contribute our share of faith and devotion to that vast treasury developed by other generations in other lands long before America ever began to be. We have too long been both the beneficiaries and the captives of a heritage. It is, I think, time we gave to it and were liberated from it.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY
**On The
Right Side**



Excerpts from replies to Dec. 13 query on this column.

From Chris: "About a week ago you wrote in the CJ: 'Frankly I am mystified by the seeming dourness and cheerlessness of so many teenagers.' You also wrote: 'Now I ask teenagers who will write to me . . . 1) Why do you find the Church and the Mass a joy and a support? or 2) Why do you not?'"

"If you had been at Our Lady of Lourdes Church Dec. 17 you would have seen 86 of the happiest teenagers you have ever seen. These teenagers, myself among them, were there for reunion of kids who had made Teen Seminar. The reasons they were happy varied. Some because they were seeing friends again, some because they had been reunited with God through confession and Mass, and some were happy for other reasons. Also, if you have read anything about the Jesus Freaks you know that there are thousands of teenagers very happy to know Jesus. So you see not all teenagers are dour and cheerless."

"Why do I find the Church and the Mass a joy and a support? The reason is I am close to Christ and I feel Him personally in the Mass. I was never really dissatisfied with the Mass but I used to be somewhat apathetic about it. Not now. I want to go every week. God bless you, Father."

Response: Thank you for a good letter. (I wish people, including you, would put return addresses so I can thank them properly. This is one of my pet peeves.) I am not too familiar with the Teen Seminars, but happened to be at Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua, when Father Robert Hammond of Newark was conducting one. I have made some inquiries about them, and think they must be a bit like the Cursillos, adapted for young people.

From Sue: "So it took so long to send this letter. I was going to do a rough draft of this letter first; but first thoughts are the most important . . ."

"I can't say I've always found something in the Mass. There are many times I remember calling it a 'pain in the neck.' But the reason it didn't mean anything to me was because I never put anything into it. I expected it to 'give' me something; but I never

looked beyond my own selfish thoughts and ways to see just what I could give.

"There was a reason why I turned my head. I needed someone very much a few years ago, when everybody and everything was changing around me. I had so little to say, but no one would listen. The next thing I knew I was sitting in our chapel at school — looking for answers. I can't honestly say I found them all that day, but it was a big beginning for me. I learned that only in giving yourself completely that you ever enjoy living. If you expect all the good in the world to drop at your feet — it's just an impossible dream."

"So why does the Mass mean so much to me? It's because I found a part of myself in God and if the Mass is centered around Him, then a part of myself must be on the altar with Him."

Response: I love your spirit and expression, but I think I'll have to ponder over your theology. I thank God that you appreciate the privilege of visiting Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

From Rosemary: ". . . As for why I find the Church a source of joy and support. Most of the priests and deacons I have come to know all seem to be ready to admit they are only human and can make mistakes. When I was little, priests were an awesome people. Maybe the humanness has been emphasized too much especially with the Jesus Christ Superstar bit. If nothing else that record did help me to realize Christ is, a tender, human man who really cares for the welfare of others, while still keeping a channel open for any man and by the by He is God, but not the God, stern, vengeful, powerful figure we often conjure up . . . You'd love one of our folk Masses just so you could feel the unity. Forgive the long-windedness. And I do read your column every week. Peace."

Response: The pity is that there is not room for all your well thought out letter. Many others did write (not thousands, as one boy hoped), and to every one I give sincere thanks not just from me but also from many parents, teachers and friends who are both puzzled and loving. Perhaps others will wish to write to the Letters page in the Courier-Journal.

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