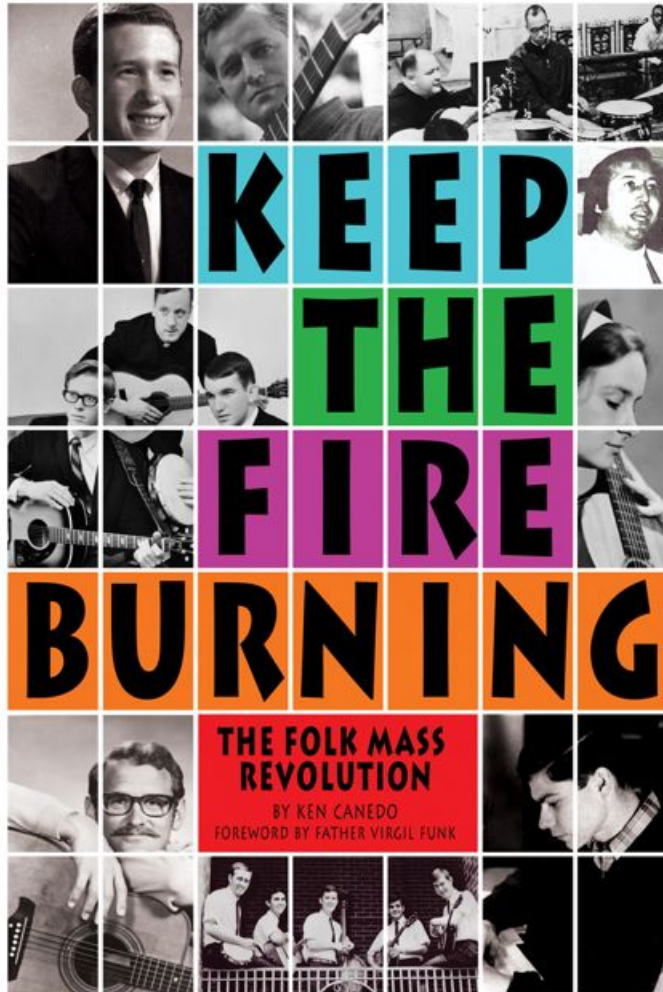


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# The Fire is Out

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For years I've search for the missing link to explain what became of Catholic liturgy by the time I came to know it. One finds old Missals in bookstores or attends the Extraordinary Form or looks back at old instructional books in music or catechesis and it is overwhelming to consider the lost knowledge, the immense chasm that separates what was from what is today.

I've gathered that we've been through the worst of it and Pope Benedict is taking many steps to heal the great pre- and postconciliar divide. But the mystery remains, at least in my mind, as to what happened and why. The answer is not found in the documents of Vatican II where we find ringing endorsements of Gregorian chant and stern warnings not to change the liturgy in unnecessary ways. I've long examined the world of the 1970s and

found interesting clues about what drove that lost generation.

But with Ken Canedo's wonderful book, *Keep The Fire Burning* (Oregon: Pastoral Press, 2009), I feel as if I've found the missing link. This is the only book I know of that looks in depth at the Catholic music of the 1960s to provide an excellent empirical account of the rise of the folk music movement in the Church, a movement that was about much more than music actually.

In here we find a fascinating if deeply harrowing look at the dismantling of Catholic liturgy that occurred not so much at the hands of the hierarchy but rather at the instigation of a handful of activists and publishers that shoved contemporary styles down everyone's throat in the name of keeping up with the times, as a cowed and fearful clerical class did its best to imagine that they were onto something.

As a historical narrative it is highly competent. Rather than providing a history of official statements and decisions, the author looks at the real-life praxis around the country, describing in detail the large gatherings and campus liturgies and goings on in the publishing houses – all the material that deeply affected the lives of Catholics at the time and provide a much richer look than a history of documents and pronouncements ever could.

One reason that this period has long been shrouded in mystery is that most all of the folk music of the period is long gone. None of it remains in the Missalettes. Nearly all—in fact, all but one—of the guitar strummers of the period who were the darlings of the new ethos left the Church in a huff and never returned. The strong fashion for folk music (phony folk music, to be sure) was a flash in the pan (1963-1969). What they left was a wasteland of confusion and disorientation just as the *Novus Ordo Missa* was promulgated. The damage had been done and how.

In his introduction, Virgil Funk of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians recommends that everyone read this book, including musicians who have no affection for the folk, genre. I think he is right about this. The author has done incredible research here, and the whole story comes across like a Film Noir plot of a rise and catastrophic fall. To be sure, Canedo had no intention of writing an indictment. In fact, he attempts but ultimately fails to make the case that the Folk music revolution in the Catholic Church made great contributions to Catholic life, such as getting people in the pews to sing and making Mass more lively etc.

Despite his spin, he provides enough information for most any reader to be shocked and astounded at the sheer arrogance and ignorance of a generation that believed they could reinvent Catholicism with guitars, bongos, and extremely bad music.

Now, I'm probably not the best reader of this book, since I've never really understand what this phony folk music thing was all about anyway. It seemed to begin in 1963 and

end a year or so after the Beatles came to the U.S., a shorter period of time than even Disco lasted a decade later.

I've heard some of the music, and it strikes me as strangely naïve and simple, with childlike lyrics that somehow secretly mask a kind of revolutionary proletarian movement of some sort, like workers and peasants struggling for something or other. It's not rock really and it isn't genuine folk but for some reason it caught on among a certain subset. I once tried to watch a movie about the subject ("A Mighty Wind") but I had to turn it off because I didn't even understand the jokes.

In any case, it was gravely unfortunate that permission for vernacular in the liturgy came about just as this music was temporarily popular, just after the Council closed. As the author points out, the composers and performers of this material didn't care a flying fig about the actual documents of the Council and what they intended. All they knew was that these were new times; old forms had to be thrown out and new forms come into being. So we went through some five years of experimental liturgies around the country that the "youth" were just crazy for, though the "youth" are often nuts for all sorts of things and civilization is usually wiser than to pay any attention. This time, however, it stuck.

And so we are treated to a painful and detailed narrative of the new fashion for the Kingston Trio, Ray Repp, Sister Germain Habjan, The Dameans, Joe Wise, Jack Miffleton, John Fischer, Paul Quinlan, and others who wrote and performed reduced and vaguely religious knock-offs of the music of Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Joan Baez, and others – and let me tell you, the secular material sounds like Bach and Brahms by comparison with what the poor Catholics had to endure in their parishes. I know this only because of the extremely interesting [podcasts](#) that have been released alongside the book. It is painful to listen but essential if you wanted understand the backdrop to the struggles of our time.

Central to the entire success of the movement was its promotion of compositional freedom and learning, and sharing. The author writes:

"Folk artists also had a way of taking old song everyone knew from childhood and re-shaping them as their own... Clearly, there was a common repertory of folk music that reach beyond the Tim Pan Alley school of commercial songwriting. The folk song, like the Bible, grew from an oral tradition, pre-dating radio and recording technology. A singer observe a slice of life, turned the observation into a song and, with guitar or banjo, presented it to anyone who would hear, perhaps on a front porch, at the town square, or down in the mine. If people liked it they would sing along and bring the new song home to share with a new audience. Those audience members would in turn grow to love the song and take it to their homes to share with their family and friends. Sometimes the lyrics would change, sometimes the tune was modified, and no thought was ever given to composer credits or copyright protection. A song was song, something free and sweet for the entire world to sing."

(Some of the above actually applies to the chant, by the way, which was never copyright protected until the 20th century.)

In practice, this was all about the technology of the time, which was the primitive ditto machine. It permitted groups and parishes to make copies of the music. It was widely understood that this practice was part of the joy and freedom associated with the genre, and no one thought a thing about it.

So the author here makes a point I've long emphasized: it was the absence of copyright protection that assisted in making this music ubiquitous. It was the key to its success. While the world of actual Catholic music – chant and polyphony and organ works and good hymnody – were increasingly tied up with the world of "intellectual property," Folk music tossed all restrictions aside and thereby seemed to embody the spirit of the time.

All was fine until the publishers got involved. The man at the center of this story is Dennis Fitzpatrick, originally a proponent of a somewhat dignified English chant Mass who became converted to the cause of folk music. One gets the impression that for him it was all about its commercial viability. The publishing company he founded was called the Friends of the English Liturgy or FEL. It absorbed unto itself all the performing energy of the period, putting out and selling song sets and new hymnals of all sorts and making an extraordinary go of it.

With this institutionalization of the folk genre came a new concern over copyright. Initially it was not about enforcement so much as encouraging people to buy more music and then trying to come up with techniques to foil the new technologies. Of course if history tells us anything it is that those who fight against new technology always lose, and Fitzpatrick was no exception. The ethos of free copying, the very heart of the distribution method that made the folk genre successful, continued but it also annoyed the publishers to the point of madness.

In time, Fitzpatrick's ambitions reeled out of control and he moved his company to Los Angeles and attempted to mainstream Catholic folk music in the Hollywood fashion, complete with whiz-bang recording technology and modernized contracts that pretty well robbed composers of both their music and their royalties. His gamble did not pay off, and his company sunk into a financial crisis. Rather than try a new model, he turned to the age-old strategy of many business losers in history: intellectual property litigation.

He hired bounty-hunting seminarians to snoop around parishes in Los Angeles and Chicago to see how much pirated music was in the pews. He found plenty of course. In 1976, he filed a suit against the Archdiocese of Chicago, claiming a loss of \$29 million to his company nationwide and the Chicago-area losses of \$300,000. The Archdiocese retaliated and ordered the collection of all FEL material from the pews. Fitzpatrick claimed restraint of trade and got a district judge to order all the material back into the pews.

As astonishing as this whole scene was, it is only the beginning. He then sued the USCCB, for \$8.6 million, targeting the whole of the American Church through the courts in an analogous way that he had done with folk music – adding injury to insult, one might say. Obviously he had turned his attention away from music and toward lawyers and courts – a disastrous choice for any entrepreneur.

But you live by the sword and you die by it: a group called the Dameans sued Fitzpatrick himself for lost royalties. In their view (rightly in my view), they felt they had lost all the rights to their music but hadn't received any royalties and didn't expect to. All the folk musicians lined up with the Dameans and eventually beat him in court, even as Fitzpatrick won the suit against Chicago, with the final judgment being issued in 1990.

Neither the publisher nor the artists saw a dime of the settlement money. It all went to the lawyers. FEL went belly up. And where is Fitzpatrick today? He is a licensed drug counselor in Nevada. That's right: the man who turned the whole American church upside down, then sued everyone following his initial success and bad financial moves, ended up skipping town in the end. Riches to rags, from the soaring heights to the depths. I tell you, if this weren't true, you would surely believe it was pulp fiction.

But he was hardly the only one. "Interestingly," the author writes, "most, if not all, of the original class of ordained or professed Folk Mass composers eventually left the religious life." The non-religious left the Catholic Church altogether. Relaying this fact isn't about a personal attack; I have no doubt of the sincerity of their music efforts or the sincerity about the decision to leave Catholicism. It does become relevant as to the success of this genre in terms of securing people's attachments to the actual Catholic faith. The critics said that the folk music movement was deeply dangerous to Catholicism; it was apparently exactly that to the very people who composed, sang, and pushed this music. The rest of us are left to pick up the pieces.

I really can't recommend this book highly enough. It is the essential tableau for understanding where we've been and where we are going. I put the book down so deeply thankful that I wasn't around in those days to see the wreckage taking place. Even reading about it I found to be a great challenge but absolutely necessary. Regardless of Canedo's own attempted positive spin, he has written a very important documentary history of 1960s Catholicism that I'm quite certain will earn a place in the history of our times. The book is titled *Keep the Fire Burning* but the reality is that his narrative is the movement's tombstone.