

Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand: a Reassessment

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Abstract
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Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand, 1904-1979, was a saintly and visionary Chicago seminary rector, pastor, liturgical leader, and “Specialized Catholic Action” chaplain who profoundly influenced generations of clergy and laity involved in such organizations as the Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers, Friendship House, the Cana Conference, the Christian Family Movement, the Catholic Labor Alliance, and the La Leche League. Unlike many of his protégés, Msgr. Hillenbrand publicly supported the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, an act which isolated him from some prominent friends and advisees, leading him after his death to be called a “papalist” by a distinguished former student. But also unlike a number of his protégés, Msgr. Hillenbrand did not so much synthesize differing social action techniques into the Catholic tradition, but approached from different Catholic sources a communion of holiness and action through an integrating and grounding focus on the Sacred Liturgy and upon the Gospel and the Magisterium, which then allowed Catholics to take great initiative in addressing social problems while maintaining their Catholic identity. This essay discusses a number of filters placed upon Msgr. Hillenbrand’s significance by his heirs, and then looks to reassess and reclaim Msgr. Hillenbrand’s approaches to the spiritual direction of lay leadership, families, parishes, clergy, and social action organizations.

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Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand: a Reassessment

The story of Msgr. Reynold Hillenbrand, 1904-1979, the visionary Chicago seminary rector, pastor, liturgical leader, and “Specialized Catholic Action” chaplain has often begun with or emphasized that of his end, with a poignant and oft-told tale of one of the priests he had mentored, Msgr. John J. “Jack” Egan, consoling him on the significance of his contribution to American Catholicism during a moment of doubt shortly before his death (Avella, 1992; Frisbie, 1991; Hill, 2000; McClory, 1979). This paper draws from sources outside the Egan circle, from the perspective of women who experienced Hillenbrand’s spiritual direction, and from documents previously not cited in depth by other scholars to reassess Hillenbrand’s contribution to American and to Chicago Catholicism in particular.

Hillenbrand’s contribution is usually assessed from the five principal and major works he performed after his seminary studies, as--

1. High school seminary teacher (1932-33) and preacher on the Chicago Archdiocesan Mission Band (1933-36).
2. Chicago major seminary rector (1936-1944), beginning at the age of 31.
3. Pastor (1944-1974) of Sacred Heart Church, Hubbard Woods (Winnetka, IL)
4. Liturgical leader (1940-1974), and co-founder of the Vernacular Society (Pecklers, 1998; Tuzik, 1990)
5. “Specialized Catholic Action” chaplain and spiritual director (1935-1974) and consultant to the Vatican II commission that prepared the Decree on the Laity (Tuzik, 1990; Vatican, 1965). In this role, Hillenbrand also arbitrated labor disputes.

The Hillenbrand story has heretofore followed a narrative pattern in which Hillenbrand is first shown as a man considerably ahead of his time, and then, upon the arrival of Vatican II and the 1960s, a man eclipsed and unsuited for his time.

The pre-Vatican II Hillenbrand was called by George Cardinal Mundelein “a man with imagination”(Cantwell, 1979), by one historian “innovative” and “charismatic” with “dynamic character” (Avella, 1990), by a former student “quietly deliberate” with a “winning gift for drawing out the seminarians,” “an obedient son of the Church” with a “patrician style,” who could “brighten life” (Hill, 2000), by his journalist nephew a “decorous scholar” and “rebellious champion of the poor and underprivileged” (B. Hillenbrand, 2000), by a liturgical historian “a scholar, a polished speaker, and a popular leader,” “one of the strongest advocates of the close connection between liturgy and life, liturgy and social justice,” and “respected” (Tuzik, 1989), and by his protégé Msgr. George G. Higgins “one of the greatest priests of his generation in the United States” (G. G. Higgins, 2000).

The post Vatican-II Hillenbrand has been called a “papalist” (G. G. Higgins, 2000), “enigmatic” (B. Hillenbrand, 2000), an “ideologue” who was “increasingly stubborn, authoritarian, and jealous of his prerogatives” (Avella, 1990), who had earlier adopted “an authoritarian approach to pastoral leadership and a theological method unduly influenced by papal teachings,” with a “rigid adherence to Cardijn methodology that eventually led to his demise as a liturgical leader”(Tuzik, 1989). Avella concluded that “His greatest strengths were his greatest weaknesses. . . . The ultimate irony of Hillenbrand ‘s life was that as much as he strived to build community and to restore a sense of corporate solidarity among people, he ended up isolated and alone largely because he was so highly individualistic” (Avella, 1990).

When I served as the Director of the former Reynold Hillenbrand Institute from 1992-4 at the then Niles College Seminary of the Archdiocese of Chicago,¹ I had occasion to meet and interview a wide circle of those who had been taught, directed, or influenced by Hillenbrand, some of whom were outside the Egan circle. Previously, through my work since 1976 with the Catholic interracial apostolate Friendship House, I had met a number of those active in the Friendship House who either had regular contact with Hillenbrand, or who had a formal relationship with him as their spiritual director. The views on Hillenbrand among these many persons varied, as one might imagine, with their theological point of view, with the dividing line in many, but not all, cases being whether these persons sided with Hillenbrand in supporting Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, or with Pat and Patty Crowley, among the first co-founding couples and themselves the most prominent couple to lead the Christian Family Movement (Burns, 1999), in dissenting from it (McClory, 1995). One point on which Hillenbrand affiliates of differing theological factions agreed is that Hillenbrand's 1949 head-on auto accident in Oklahoma, after which he convalesced there for a year (Avella, 1990), had a profound and enduring effect upon his health, mood, and vigor.

But in order to obtain a wider assessment of the impact of Hillenbrand, it is necessary to interview, while the few remaining primary witnesses are still alive, not only those Hillenbrand affiliates who dissented from *Humanae Vitae* or were substantially silent on the matter, as were predominantly interviewed by previous writers on Hillenbrand, but those who publicly agreed with Hillenbrand on the *Humanae Vitae* and on other issues, but whose perspective remains unknown to the literature. Until I have completed the above-mentioned interviews with some of the surviving pro-*Humanae Vitae* Hillenbrand affiliates, (and I have to complete IRB paperwork to formally proceed in my interviews from my University, which is particularly strict in the filing

of forms necessary for these matters—even for the collection of oral histories!) I will present in summary form in this essay some of the themes I have identified by casting a research net beyond the Egan circle.

The Hillenbrand Myth and the Chicago Myth

The biography of Reynold Hillenbrand is so integral with the history of 20th Century Chicago Catholic activism and of the Chicago presbyterate in particular that it has taken on something of the aspect of myth, which I summarize from a number of sources: The Hillenbrand tenure as rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary (1936-44) is spoken of by many Chicago clergy as something of a golden age, where, at Hillenbrand's invitation, Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day became the first woman to formally speak to the seminarians, to be followed by many of the foremost Catholic leaders in the social justice arena. During Hillenbrand's tenure, seminarians were free to travel to Chicago on certain days to engage in apostolic activity such as working the soup line at the Catholic Worker or visiting the interracial apostolate Friendship House. The liturgical innovations of Hillenbrand at St. Mary of the Lake and his emphasis on social justice are often fondly recounted. Hillenbrand's peremptory and never-explained dismissal as rector in 1944 by Samuel Cardinal Stritch, and his replacement as rector by Msgr. Malachy Foley, PA, who re-established a "closed" if not medieval seminary that was maintained until the early 1960s, seen as a dark age in this mythological narrative.

As the myth proceeds, Hillenbrand's 1949 Oklahoma auto accident is seen as planting in him the persistent pain that would make him a rigid person incapable of adjusting to the Vatican II *Zeitgeist*. His insistence on mid-morning daily Mass for his parish school children, on the Cardijn "see-judge-act" method, on the sacrificial aspect of the Mass, and his defense of *Humanae Vitae*, brought him into conflict with his previous supporters, and he, like other older

pre-Vatican II clergy, was pushed out as pastor during the early 1970s, leaving him isolated. Lacking or eschewing political acumen (Greeley, 1967), he had no allies in the new order. At the height of his loneliness and despair, and near death, his former student and protégé Msgr. Jack Egan consoled him, and in a reversal of roles, became his teacher, explaining to him the significance of his life as making Vatican II reforms possible in America, leaving him to die a happy man.

As this story grew in the telling beyond a very personal remembrance of Egan to the recollection of a group, Egan's role as an heir, if not the principal heir of Hillenbrand, became established, despite Egan's lack of public support for Hillenbrand during the *Humanae Vitae* and other controversies. It should be emphasized that, although Egan at the time of this final 1979 meeting worked as Assistant to the President at Notre Dame University, to which Hillenbrand as a university donor had prior to his death (in 1977, before his 1979 meeting with Egan) committed his papers and had not at his death finalized the transmittal of the last portion,² I have found no evidence that Egan's visit to Hillenbrand was anything other than a solely personal one based on love and respect, although the source of the story is undeniably Egan himself. For admirers of Egan, the Hillenbrand story is but a prelude to Egan's, and their final meeting takes on great significance for Egan coming into his own as the Hillenbrand era ended. It is therefore presented in a penultimate chapter in the Frisbie biography of Egan, and recapped as one of his notable accomplishments within the final chapter. Msgr. Daniel Cantwell, another Hillenbrand protégé, also had a final interview with Hillenbrand, but spoke little directly of their conversation.

Like the story of Thomas Aquinas having a vision near his death after which he pronounced everything he had written as "straw" (Chesterton, 1956), which has been used from

time to time to invalidate Aquinas's work (and has provided a plausible excuse for some students not to read his work!), or the recent story of Mother Teresa's spiritual struggles (Teresa & Kolodiejchuk, 2007), the story of the Egan 1979 visit to the dying Hillenbrand has from time to time taken on undue weight, and should not overshadow Hillenbrand's lifetime contribution.

Examples of Hillenbrand's influence on Catholic women activists

There are at least two other written records, one from the late Friendship House activist Ann Harrigan Makletzoff (1910-1984), the co-founder with Ellen Tarry (1906-2008) (Tarry, 1992) of the Chicago Friendship House in 1942 (Sharum, 1977), another from YCW activist and historian Mary Irene Zotti, of a meeting with Hillenbrand within the years prior to his death (Makletzoff, 1980; Zotti, 1991).

Written as a first person memorial note of gratitude to Hillenbrand, Makletzoff's account is an affectionate expression of her thanks and love:

[After Hillenbrand's 1944 dismissal as seminary rector] You focused on promoting many of the new groups and movements the burgeoning in and around the middle west of the USA. You were a catalyst for some, midwife for others, a mover behind the scenes for many. Will it ever be known how much the priests and laypeople associated with YCW (Young Christian Workers), YCS (Young Christian Students), CFM (Christian Family Movement), owe to your leadership. Not to mention the Catholic Worker, and, of course, Friendship House?

In effect, whole generations influenced by your love of Christ, tried to follow that same call.

The risks you took! In those days everyone – priests or layperson – was treading unknown ground. Do laypeople have as valid a call as priests to work for the reconstruction of the social order? Should priests be chaplains and encourage them? Yet, Father, you knew, and we all knew that Pope Pius XII had said "The laity not only belong to the Church. They ARE the Church," in a consistory of the cardinals in 1946. So it happened that many of us got from you the courage to devote our lives to Catholic Action, instead of opting for safe, well-paid careers. Without blueprints or guidelines, we looked to men like yourself, and to women like Dorothy [Day] and Catherine [de Hueck Doherty], to bishops like Bernard Sheil, for the courage to go on, and to live through

suspicion, ignorance, and name-calling. You were far ahead of the times, Father. Vatican II held no surprises. We were ready when John XXIII called for all those changes, 20 years later.

I remember you best, perhaps, explaining the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. Our small staff listened closely, yes, and hung on your words demonstrating how all of us belong in some way to this living, growing reality, that it is the real basis of our belief in human solidarity. About this same time, the landmark encyclical on the “Mystical Body of Christ” (Pius XII) came out, and this gave us renewed hope to continue our fight against racial discrimination, especially as it existed then in our Catholic schools, hospitals, colleges, seminaries, convents, and yes, in many, many churches.

We needed all the support you gave us, Father.

Makletzoff described Hillenbrand’s physical state and spiritual presence during their meeting in the summer of 1978:

I found you in a wheelchair, much subdued from your former dynamic self. You had never fully recovered from that car accident in 1949. Suffering had indeed changed you. So many of your latter years were shrouded in darkness and ambiguity. But a presence, a sense of something really important was in that little room. On impulse, toward the end, I took your hand in mine, bent over and kissed you, in a rush of grace and gratitude for the trust and tenderness you had always shown me. That was thank you. . . and as it turned out, good-bye.

Makletzoff, a close friend of Patty Crowley, was well aware of Patty Crowley’s particularly deep rift with Hillenbrand over *Humanae Vitae* (Kotre, 1979; McClory, 1995; Tentler, 2004). But this had no effect on Makletzoff’s gratitude and affection for Hillenbrand.

Mary Irene Zotti further documented Hillenbrand’s role and influence among the women in the YCW (Zotti, 1991), and her account of her own last meeting with Hillenbrand in 1976 contains statements by Hillenbrand that are very similar to the Egan accounts reported from 1979:

In 1976 a large group of former YCW leaders gathered at the University of Notre Dame to honor Msgr. Hillenbrand, the great priest who had played such an important role in the development of the specialized movements. The dissolution of the Young Christian Workers had been a great disappointment to him. Until the end, he’d had undiminished faith that Christ had wanted lay people to continue to spread the apostolate of the Church in the world. In the ebbing days of his life, he too wondered what had gone wrong.

I remember sitting with the Monsignor in a parlor at Notre Dame that weekend. There was such a sad look in his eyes as he questioned me about a former leader who had opted to leave the Church that he loved so dearly. He wondered if he had been responsible. Had he done something wrong? Yes, some had apparently lost the faith, I said. Those things happened. But it was not his fault, I assured him. He'd had an immeasurable impact on all of us who knew him. He had opened our eyes to great visions of what we could do, and we were grateful. Followers of the Lord must live with change. That is the way of the world. I squeezed his hand.

That was the last time I spoke to Hillenbrand (Zotti, 1991).

Ann Harrigan Makletzoff and Mary Irene Zotti were not the only Catholic women activists who sought and received Hillenbrand's spiritual direction. Edwina Froehlich (1915-2008), one of the "seven founding mothers" of the La Leche League in 1956 (Ward & La Leche League, 2000), was personally recruited by Hillenbrand to attend a "specialized Catholic Action congress in Paris" in 1946. Thereafter in 1947 Froehlich was elected as US President of YCW (NCL, 2008). Several of the other La Leche League co-founders had Catholic Action and Hillenbrand backgrounds (LLLI). Viola Brennan Lennon, another LLL "founding mother," is listed by Mary Irene Zotti as having strong Hillenbrand and YCW ties. Within the family circle of a third La Leche League "founding mother" Mary White, her physician husband Gregory (d. 2003) and their three physician sons among eleven children, remains a direct continuation of the Hillenbrand communion of the social justice and Catholic teaching on life.

Hillenbrand is moreover listed within the Friendship House oral tradition as having served as a Chicago spiritual director in the 1940s for Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Friendship House and Madonna House founder, herself under study for canonization. The "B," as she was called in Friendship House circles, was known to have consulted several spiritual directors simultaneously.

Just as scripture scholars can teach about the biblical significance of the number 40 as a number of completeness without ever once mentioning that the normal 40 weeks of human gestation in the womb might have something to do with it, the knowledge of women's contributions from the tradition of Catholic Action has often been overlooked when accounts focus on the "great men and battles" approach to Catholic history. Of all the movements—and sometimes the vainglory--inspired by Catholic Action, the non-denominational La Leche League International has had arguably the greatest worldwide impact on the social order by improving public health through the encouragement and teaching of "the womanly art of breastfeeding" (Torgus, Gotsch, & La Leche League International., 2004) to millions of mothers in hundreds of countries. But that several of the founding mothers had a very strong background in Catholic Action and some a deep personal acquaintance with Hillenbrand is often overlooked.

In Hillenbrand's own voice

The Hillenbrand story has been narrated, but he has not often been presented speaking in his own voice. Due to the growth of the Internet and especially due to the arrival of Google Books, a number of documents and resources on Hillenbrand have come to light that were not heretofore cited or cited in depth by other scholars, despite the fact that they may ironically have rested but a few dozen yards away on library shelves from the archives scholars may have inhabited during their research prior to the Internet age. Due to the time and space constraints of a scholarly conference paper, I will single out one in particular, Hillenbrand's 1957 Notre Dame symposium essay entitled, "The Priesthood and the World" (R. Hillenbrand, 1957),³ one of the few of his writings to appear in book form during his lifetime. In this essay-presentation, Hillenbrand drew together his view of the priesthood, of papal teaching, the liturgy, of social justice, and of the formation of lay apostles. Based upon my mid-1990s conversations with

Hillenbrand associates outside of the Egan circle, this essay corresponds very closely with their memory of the man and his approach.

Hillenbrand saw, in this 1957 presentation, “a gap between the popes’ teaching and the people, a gap between the popes’ teaching and the priest’s teaching.” Hillenbrand first put “the papal teaching, embodied notably in the encyclicals, in a different category, as whole, than the theology learned at school.” He second presumed “the actual lack of acquaintance with the papal doctrine,” which lead to “considerable lack of surety in thinking and speaking on current problems, which have, of course, their religious implications. . . . It is surprising how much at variance one’s thinking can be with the papal doctrine until one has read the pope’s pronouncements. The people often do not know that teaching. If we hear them express ideas that cannot be squared with papal doctrine, if we are disappointed with the intransigence of their attitude, it is because they have not heard the voice of their shepherd.” Hillenbrand used social justice examples to illustrate his point about the faithful’s lack of knowledge of papal teaching on first the “maldistribution of income,” and then also on the necessity of democracy according to the natural law—both questions of the social order.

One of the ways Hillenbrand saw that the priest could “meet the crisis is to teach, to bring the appropriate truth to bear upon the problems. That truth is embodied in the papal utterances. We have to close the gap between the teaching of the popes and the minds of the people. All the Mystical Body should be enlightened and stirred by the doctrine. We would then have the light of Christ reaching the members of Christ and through them reaching and influencing the world.” Note here a Thomist concept of truth, *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, implying a connection of the mind with the world outside the mind, implicit in Hillenbrand’s concept of “bridging the gap.”

Hillenbrand saw the “second way in which priests can meet the crisis—by creating lay apostles. . . . The crucial fields are the lay fields. We must therefore have lay apostles. Men and women who will ruthlessly eliminate the dual conscience from their lives.” By “dual conscience” Hillenbrand meant:

A Sunday Catholic who is a martinet at home. A Sunday Catholic, an employer, who is antagonistic to labor unions. A Sunday Catholic, a worker, who will not join a union. A Sunday Catholic who will take a job on a padded public pay roll, a job requiring no work. A Sunday Catholic who will not live next to a Negro. A Sunday Catholic who thinks the United Nations is a tragic mistake. We must have lay apostles, men and women, with Christian minds; men and women with a keen and unremitting apostolic sense that will translate the judgment of those minds into practical action.

Apostles in number will not just happen. . . . They must be recruited. These apostles must be formed—spiritually, apostolically formed—by a priest. This will take time, but it is time supremely well spent.

Hillenbrand then described his approach to the spiritual formation of the laity:

The staples of spiritual formation will be there: Mass with Communion, prayer, confession, mortification, devotion to our Lady, spiritual direction, days of recollection, retreats. Towards these we must help them.

In addition to these staples, we must form them in a layman’s way. Their spirituality will not be a priest’s spirituality which deals directly with religious things. Nor will it be a cloistered spirituality. It will not be predicated on isolation or withdrawal from the problems of lay life. It will be a formation based upon an awareness, a scrutiny of these problems and some action upon them. It will be a formation of association—of meeting people, of meeting with people, of working with people—of a great, self-sacrificial charity. It will be a formation through all of the phases of lay life—domestic, parochial, economic, political. Otherwise, the formation will be stunted; the apostolic possibilities cut down. Finally, it will not be a spirituality of mere offering up—a kind of blind resignation to things as they are—but a spirituality dedicated to change and success, God willing.

Hillenbrand, now completely warmed to the topic, eloquently laid out the theological basis for his program based upon connection between the Mass and the Mystical Body of Christ:

We shall have to show them their own irreplaceability in the Mystical Body; show them that what they can do, others (clergy included) cannot do; show them the significance and urgency of their apostolic action. We shall have to give them a sense of other people, of

oneness with people, a sense of community drawn from the Mystical Body and taken into the other fields of life which are crying out for people's acting together out of a conviction of their oneness. That can be done if they are shown, as Pius XII has done, that members of the Mystical Body are closer than the union of flesh and blood between mother and child, closer together than the union of husband and wife, who are two in one flesh, in one spirit.

“The Mass,” wrote Hillenbrand, is the “supreme expression, the supreme action of the Mystical Body,” and is “the other great apostolic reality.” Because the Mass “is their sacrifice,” it is “a complete giving of themselves, a complete dedication of themselves to the apostolate.”

Hillenbrand then targeted formation “through a spirituality which comes from the type of apostle we are helping”:

In other words, a worker will have a “worker’s spirituality,” a married person a “married person’s spirituality.” The worker will be formed on the social doctrine of the Church. He will be formed by a dedication to the critical worker’s problem. He will be formed through a conviction that there must be a reform of institutions—economic institutions, like the enacting of a FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission, a Roosevelt executive order, never enacted by Congress], like the repeal or drastic revision of the Taft-Hartley law, like the introduction of a union in a plant—as well as the reform of individuals. He will be formed through the doctrine and philosophy of work—its nobility, its indispensability, its social content.

Hillenbrand, in addition, saw married apostles “formed in a spirituality growing out of married life,” needing “the wonderful teaching of the Church about married life and about family life.” The married lay apostle will also need “a sense of the neighborhood, the parish, the local community, because these are all compounded of families.” Hillenbrand envisioned this “most readily done in the specialized movements of the apostolate—the Christian Family Movement, the Young Christian Workers, the Young Christian Students, and the rural counterpart, still unstarted. These have the advantages of definite objectives of formation and certain mechanical helps like weekly meetings and weekly contact with the priest.” And for Hillenbrand, “The task of forming either an individual apostle or a group apostle—any apostle—is not usually

accomplished except with the persistent help of a priest” who must be “unafraid of the laity. He must trust them. He has to have the courage to begin.”

For Hillenbrand, the third and final contribution of the priest to the lay apostolate is through the what is “the priest’s very own. . . the sanctuary, the altar. . . . If the Christian, the lay apostle, is to be formed well, he must be formed by the liturgy.” Hillenbrand saw the priest as working to increase participation in the liturgy by “Not driving our people, not forcing them, but leading them.” Hillenbrand cited as positive steps the leaflet missal, the sung Mass, and the dialogue Mass, and saw as impediments “the invariable black Mass” which “hinders the formative effect of the Mass, of the Church’s feasts. It does not nourish the priest either.” Hillenbrand also listed “too rapid” Masses, the “occasional wretched singing of an organist,” truncated singing of parts of the Mass, and “lengthy Sunday announcements” as detractions from the Mass. “In dealing with our problems,” Hillenbrand stated, “much must be left to the laymen—with our spiritual help and under their bishops. But one thing rests squarely with us [clergy]: the altar, the liturgy.”

For Hillenbrand, the unity, or if you will, communion of the liturgy brought together all of the elements of his approach as a priest to the laity:

So our direct relation to the world crisis is to effect a change in our parishes (in schools and convents, too) so that Christ through the liturgy will have the most complete response of His people; so they will have participation, the primary and indispensable source of Christ’s spirit—Pius X’s thought; so that they will have their finest teacher, bar none, the feasts of the liturgical year, and really be molded by them into the image of Christ—Pius XI’s thought; so that the Mass and all that it means will be the center and source of their spiritual lives—Pius XII’s thought.

So there it is. These are three great opportunities to meet the crisis. To bring the light of the papal teaching to minds of the people. To create lay apostles. To do our particular tasks—to make the altar effective.

With God’s help we shall make a start. Or, a start made, we shall carry on. (R. Hillenbrand, 1957)

The Hillenbrand communion

Above I used the phrase “communion of social justice and Catholic teaching on life.” My use of the word “communion” when speaking of Hillenbrand, instead of Fr. Tuzik’s reference to a Hillenbrand “synthesis” (Tuzik, 1989) is intentional. In some philosophical usages, a synthesis implies a partial destruction and fusion into a new composite. I interpret Hillenbrand’s approach not so much as a synthesis as a *methexis*, a term from the ancient Greek drama, which some have translated as “group sharing” or even, “communion,” in which voices coexist and speak without necessarily undergoing reduction or reassembly (Grossman, 2009). Msgr. Daniel Cantwell’s May 25, 1979 funeral homily/eulogy for Hillenbrand, perhaps one of the most notable homilies on record in Chicago Catholicism, illustrates how those closest to Hillenbrand found in him what I term a communion of commitments:

I remember what Cardinal Mundelein said when he introduced him as our rector: “I’ve brought you a man with imagination.”

Reiny (may I call him that?) was – maybe above all – a poet and lover of the stories of humans. It freed him from being coldly intellectual.

A poet faces his own dreams, hopes, feelings. He is open to the “grandeur deep down things.” He faces pain, anguish, joy. He know how real is the invisible, how real the untouchable. He plunges to the depth of the human spirit and finds there a place for Jesus.

It is the poems and songs of a people which measure a culture. Reiny loved what is greatest about the Bible—its songs, its poetry, its psalms, its love canticles. They nourished his spirit, his humanity.

He cried out in the name of the poor; he cried out in his own name. There were few moments in the years I knew him when he didn’t face pain. Long before the violent auto accident in the South and the many ensuing hospitalizations, there were, remember, the migraine headaches.

There was pain to be faced, a mysterious price to be paid to unite man with his God, a price which called for the emptying of the human spirit, and for a consuming trust in Goodness Unseen.

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” was not just a dying prayer. It was a life lived.

But Reiny was not a stoic; he didn't like pain. Every honest man cries out: My God, why me? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Reiny was an honest man. From Jesus he drew the strength both to cry out and to trust.

His departure from the seminary was painful for him and for those of us who loved him. He had brought to it what Pope John would later try to bring to the Church: openness and fresh air. He had the vision of Vatican II long before it happened:

--that liturgy is the service of God, but so is the struggle for social justice;

--that priests and bishops are called to Christ's work, but so are lay men and women, and just as indispensably;

--that the sanctuary is a sacred place, but so is every factory, every workshop, every bus station, every cradle, every bed;

--that a living wage is every person's birthright, but so is music, literature, beauty. (Witness the Mestrovic carvings in this enchanting place [Sacred Heart Church] where we celebrate today.)

The seminary became a Jerusalem place; there was much coming and going. His own weekly trips to teach in the Labor School in Waukegan! Speakers of a vast variety brought in -- lay men, and even women -- to expand our vision and our hearts! Summer Schools of Liturgy and Worship! Summer Schools of Social Action.

The vision he shared with us is the vision by which we still live -- priests, lay men, lay women, here and across the land.

His departure from the seminary -- which history must judge a colossal mistake -- made him a greater man.

Quaintly, in leaving, he explained his departure to the seminarians: this is what every every diocesan priest wants, to become a parish priest. He did not let bitterness destroy him. He made his own words come true. He became a great parish priest and by his indomitable spirit, gave more, not less of himself to the organizations of his heart, the Christian Family Movement, the Young Christian Workers, the Young Christian Students, and to the spots where unit and prayer were nourished, Friendship House, Childerly, National Liturgical Weeks (Cantwell, 1979).⁴

Hillenbrand and the rift in American Catholicism

Missing in Cantwell's touching homily is the pain that Hillenbrand felt when the Chicago Catholic Action circle, already in dispersal due to family-formation and life-cycle tasks as the Catholic Action and the "New Breed" (Greeley, 1964) generation matured, split over the *Humanae Vitae* issue. Hillenbrand's archives at Notre Dame University contain an October 4, 1968 letter to Chicago Archbishop John Cardinal Cody reporting on Hillenbrand's conversation with Patrick Crowley after the July 25, 1968 promulgation of *Humanae Vitae*, but apparently do not contain direct correspondence with the Crowleys on this matter, which some Hillenbrand associates believed existed. Either I was in error in positing the existence of a letter of rebuke from Hillenbrand to the Crowleys in my 1990 account (Schorsch, 1990),⁵ or extant 1968 Hillenbrand-Crowley correspondence may have found its way to the Crowley archives, also at Notre Dame, may be elsewhere, or may be lost. Since I have not yet applied for the Notre Dame Archivist's permission to directly quote from the Hillenbrand 10/8/68 letter to Cardinal Cody (R. Hillenbrand, 1979), I must summarize the letter's contents, which state that Patrick Crowley let Hillenbrand know that, while he did not think the 1968 encyclical had the force of infallibility, he had decided not to speak of the matter. Hillenbrand stated that the encyclical should be accepted using an argument similar to what has come to be called the acceptance of a teaching through the "ordinary magisterium" of the Church. Before they parted, Crowley asked for and received Hillenbrand's blessing.

If there ever is a schism—there is already quite a rift—in the Catholic Church in America over *Humanae Vitae*, one of the original fault lines can be traced back to the old Hillenbrand circle, and to the above exchange. Several of Hillenbrand's protégés took Patrick Crowley's

lead, and publicly avoided the subject of *Humanae Vitae*, a silence that had consequences in the abortion debates in the years following.

Points and Summary for the Hillenbrand reassessment

- Hillenbrand's story can be told in his own voice, without undue emphasis on the 1979 story of his meeting with Egan. Neither man's candle needs to be extinguished: each burns brightly. At the same time, a simultaneous study of Egan and Hillenbrand would make an interesting work.
- Among some oral histories, Hillenbrand is seen as great because he made "us" – the post-Vatican II generations--possible. There is much more to him, and to "us," than that.
- Hillenbrand merits a biography, especially since a growing number biographies of his protégés have been published: on Saul Alinsky friend and associate Msgr. John J. Egan (Frisbie, 1991), on labor priest Msgr. George G. Higgins (G. Higgins & Bole, 1993; O'Brien, 2005), and on Catholic Campaign for Human Development co-founder Bishop Michael Dempsey (Burke, 1978). Among other Hillenbrand protégés meriting study are Msgr. Daniel Cantwell, especially for his work in interracial justice and liturgy, Msgr. William J. Quinn, for his work in Catholic Action, with migrants, and as a Vatican II peritus, and Bishop Alfred Abramowicz, for his behind-the-scenes role in liberating Poland. It is not widely known that all of these above men, including also lay activist Ed Marciniak and *Commonweal* editor James O'Gara, went to the same Quigley high school seminary in Chicago during the same era (Wikipedia, 2009). Karen Fricke Johnson, a UIC PhD student in history, has been researching the life of Dorothy

Day and Catherine de Hueck Doherty associate, Hillenbrand disciple Ann Harrigan Makletzoff. The “seven founding mothers” of the La Leche League also have important stories worth the preservation and the telling.

- Fr. Tuzik’s dissertation on Hillenbrand’s contribution to the liturgical movement (Tuzik, 1989) is a significant scholarly achievement as it opened the Hillenbrand archives to study, but it evaluates Hillenbrand based upon the liturgical thinking and theology of its day, in which some of Hillenbrand’s theology was out of favor. Much has happened since 1989, especially since the issuance of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Catholic Church., 2000), to vindicate a number of Hillenbrand’s positions, especially that of the Mass as a sacrifice, and his theological method, which Fr. Tuzik noted had been criticized during his day as “unduly influenced by papal teachings.” By his 1990 book chapter on Hillenbrand, Fr. Tuzik had moderated his account (Tuzik, 1990). Moreover, the Internet has unearthed a number of Hillenbrand documents and perhaps even recordings that should be incorporated into a biography, to expand on the voluminous 1989 bibliography assembled by Fr. Tuzik. I understand that Fr. Tuzik’s updated study of the liturgical contribution of Hillenbrand may appear in the USML’s Liturgical Institute’s “Hillenbrand Books” series. It would be a very welcome addition.
- Hillenbrand’s work with women lay apostles was significant, and merits further exploration. The La Leche League has not been widely recognized as a movement originating from within Catholic Action.

- Hillenbrand's work with labor also merits study. Hillenbrand remained a more radical labor activist than many in our own day.
- Hillenbrand's work as a spiritual director to form lay apostles, evidenced by the Ann Harrigan Makletzoff article cited, has something to teach us.
- Hillenbrand has a place as something of a fountain-head among the Chicago clergy, even serving as the first editor of the high school Quigley Seminary newspaper, the Candle, in the 1920s. His influence on the culture of the Chicago presbyterate is immense, and one must turn to his history when one considers the Chicago clergy's history.
- Hillenbrand was one of the few of the Chicago tradition of Catholic social justice who publicly supported *Humanae Vitae*. While he has heretofore been viewed as a sometimes discordant figure, he can also be viewed as a unifying one, since each side of the aisle can, as it were, find in him something admirable, especially his integration of liturgy and social action. I have publicly stated more than once that this saintly man should be formally "raised to the altar," that is, considered for canonization. Time will tell.

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Footnotes

1. In 1992, the Hillenbrand Institute was founded at Niles College Seminary, the then Chicago Archdiocesan college seminary, which was renamed St. Joseph Seminary and moved to the Loyola University, Chicago, Lake Shore campus in 1994, with the Hillenbrand Institute moving that same year to Chicago's major seminary to become part of the Center for Development in Ministry at the University of St. Mary of the Lake (USML) in Mundelein, Illinois. The Hillenbrand Institute eventually closed by 2000, coinciding roughly with the founding of USML's Liturgical Institute, which now publishes a book series under the Hillenbrand name, and maintains an online Hillenbrand history exhibit, <http://www.usml.edu/liturgicalinstitute/exhibits/hillenbrand/exhibit/HB/Introduction.html>

2. I was informed during my visit to the Archives of the University of Notre Dame on 11/7/08 that Hillenbrand made his initial gift of archival material in 1977, and the final deposit of archival material was not made by his executors until 1981.

3. "The Priesthood in the World" was apparently a talk given and published by Hillenbrand on several occasions and in at least two versions until it found its way into the book chapter cited. Fr. Tuzik cites it on page 285 of his dissertation as originally a talk given at the National Liturgical Week on August 21, 1951. It thereafter appeared in *Worship*, and in the *YCW Bulletin for Priests* in 1952. Fr. Tuzik notes a longer version of the talk in the Hillenbrand papers at Notre Dame (Tuzik, 1989).

4. Cantwell's homily was also published in *Liturgy* 70 (10), 1979, pp. 2-4, and if memory serves, in the *National Catholic Reporter*, accompanying McClory's 1979 "American Moses" article. Cantwell and Hillenbrand are buried near each other on the grounds of the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL.

5. Patty Crowley read my 1990 article and discussed it with me that year, but made no mention of my reference to Hillenbrand's exchanges with her family over *Humanae Vitae*, nor did she object to my reference to correspondence from Hillenbrand to the Crowleys.