



# B BOOKS

**Ken Canedo, *Keep the Fire Burning: The Folk Mass Revolution.***

(Portland, Oregon: Pastoral Press, 2009) 140 pp

by Michael Fitz-Patrick

I was standing in the kitchen with my wife and, without any warning, I launched into singing. *The Lord is my true shepherd: no want nor fear I know. He leads me by safe paths, and I will follow.* Sure enough, as if she'd been singing it yesterday, she continued. *Fresh and green are the pastures, where my new home will be...* It had been over thirty years since either of us had sung that song, but the words and melody rolled out from somewhere deep in our memories.

*Keep the Fire Burning* traces the evolution of what became known as the Folk Mass, when Catholics embraced congregational singing after the Second Vatican Council. The music of this period is deeply ingrained. As I read this book, I only had to see the title of a song or the name of a composer and the tune and lyric would come straight into my head.

Ken Canedo is probably best known in Australia for his *Mass of Glory* co-written with Bob Hurd. He worked for *Friends of the English Liturgy* in the 1970s and now is managing editor of [spiritandsong.com](http://spiritandsong.com), a website focusing on contemporary Catholic music. Canedo summarises his aim towards the end of the book:

*In these pages I have tried to place the Folk Mass within the historical context of the liturgical reform movement, the social and political forces of the 1960s, the secular folk music of the day, and the way American Catholics reacted to the Second Vatican Council* (p. 139).

In the late 1950s, secular folk music in the USA was having a resurgence. *It was within this liberal milieu that the folksong movement flourished. Vibrant troubadours caught the fancy of a growing left-wing movement, their singing of the traditional folk repertoire was placed within the context of the burning issues of the day: rights for the workers, social equality, and the struggle for civil rights* (p. 19). While this socio-

political basis was significant, above all, folk music was easy to sing and easy to play – usually with one guitar.

The early 1960's was a time of great upheaval and great promise. Canedo talks of the 'two Johns': President John F Kennedy in the White House and Pope John XXIII in Rome. Kennedy encouraged a new hope and a vision of change; John XXIII called the church to *aggiornamento* – an up-dating. The secular folk music of the 50s and 60s embraced change and challenged structures and mindsets that seemed to be outdated. Is it any wonder that this style of music crossed over into the post-conciliar Catholic Church?

*The stage was set for Catholic composers such as Ray Repp, Paul Quinlan, Germaine Habjan, Carey Landry, Gary Ault, Jack Miffleton and a host of other future Folk Mass composers who embraced the new, clean, folk music as their own* (p. 20). This book is a great 'Who's Who?' of the 60s and 70s folk composers. It was wonderful to read the stories of Ray Repp (*Hear O Lord, Of My Hands, And I Will Follow*), Peter Scholtes (*They'll Know We Are Christians*), Miriam Therese Winter (*Joy is Like the Rain*), Suzanne Toolan (*I Am the Bread of Life*), Joe Wise (*Take Our Bread, Here is My Life*), Sebastian Temple (*Make Me a Channel of Your Peace, All That I Am*).

While some criticise this folk church music as unsophisticated, lacking beauty or even simplistic, these composers took seriously the call of the Council to *full, conscious and active participation*. Up until this time, Catholics did not really sing in church. Rather, the Mass was usually sung by the professional schola or choir. In 1963 with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the assembly reclaimed their role and new music had to be found for them to sing. In many parishes, the folk style was adopted swiftly.

Canedo quotes a 1967 interview with Paul Quinlan: *Folk singing and the Folk Mass involve everyone in the church. No one is locked up inside his own shell, silently praying. The Mass can adapt to many forms of music, but the Folk Mass and folk music is easier to sing, is an integral part of the American culture, and is joyous* (p. 82).

Canedo charts the rise and fall of the folk music phenomenon not only through its composers but also through its publishers. It was fascinating to read the story of Dennis Fitzpatrick, his *Demonstration*

*English Mass* of 1963 and the formation of FEL (Friends of the English Liturgy). We owe much to those who published the first 'Hymn Books' as we know them.

The author incorporates all sides of the Folk Mass experience. His interview transcripts contain quotes from the composers themselves, the official church liturgists and reactions from opponents – especially some of the archbishops and cardinals at the time. From initial hesitancy and sometimes ecclesial banishment, the Folk Mass grew to become mainstream music in many parishes in USA and, of course, here in Australia.

While the book is centred on North American, many of the events had an impact in Australia and much of the music made its way here. We have our own stories to tell of local composers such as Leo Watt, Janet Meade and Peter Kearney.

The book devotes two chapters to the gloomiest period of the folk music era – litigation. The first lawsuit for breach of copyright was launched against the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1976. It was a painful process as the official church realised that publishers and composers were entitled to recognition and payment. Gone were the days of making multiple copies of whatever was needed for Mass this weekend! If my memory is correct, Australia had to deal with the same issue soon after.

*Was the music of the Folk Mass liturgical?* Canedo is right when he insists that it must be evaluated in its immediate post-conciliar context. *This music served its time well, but faded as the experimentation of the 1960s gave way to more standardised liturgical forms. Catholic songwriting would grow and mature as contemporary liturgical music became mainstream* (111).

While this book traces the development of the Folk Mass and its music, it does much more than that! It is an important contribution to the history of the liturgical reform in the 1960s. The Folk Mass is deeply symbolic. This music contains the collective yearnings, hopes and desires of the people of God as they re-imagined the Church through Catholic liturgy. I wonder what they would say to us today? The book comes back to the eternal question: What is liturgical music and what is its function in the liturgy?

*(Ken Canedo's website provides podcasts accompanying each chapter which contain rare recordings of some of the music: [www.kencanedo.com](http://www.kencanedo.com)).*