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RECLAIMING CATHOLICISM

Treasures Old and New

Edited by
THOMAS H. GROOME
and
MICHAEL J. DALEY

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Preface

THOMAS H. GROOME

This book mines the treasury of pre-Vatican II American Catholicism for the spiritual riches to be gleaned from its perspectives, personalities, and popular practices. The American Catholic community prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) can be numbered among the most vital expressions of Catholicism in the history of the church. It was a vast network of vibrant parishes, with myriad associations, organizations, and impressive plants as well as overflowing Sunday Mass attendance; it boasted as many as eight million students enrolled in Catholic schools, the largest independent educational system in the history of the world; it sponsored a huge coalition of hospitals and social services, fraternities and sororities; it had priests, sisters, and brothers galore, enough to export thousands as missionaries, while its seminaries and novitiates were bulging at the seams. “They” must have been doing something very right back then. Of course, that *was* then, and this is now; yet, it is surely true that *reclaimed* spiritual wisdom from that era can enrich the faith lives of Catholics today.

Reclaiming—Not Regressing

I grew up on an Irish farm that had a bog across the way. For hundreds of years, that bog provided good turf to heat the homes of the local people; the sweet smell of a turf fire on a winter’s night was as pleasing as any apple pie in the oven. But gradually the bog got cut away, and then went into disuse, left lying fallow, soggy and overgrown. During my childhood, however, the government launched what it called a “*reclamation* project” of the bog. Gradually it was cleared of underbrush and drained. When *reclaimed*, it proved to be